

Alaska State Library
Historical Collections

Guide to Collection

Keen, James William, 1842 - 1933

Papers of James William Keen, 1858- 1933

MS 152

1 box
5 items

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Provenance: Purchase; no further information available. Accession #96-17

Access: The collection in unrestricted

Copyright: Request for permission to publish materials from the collection must be discussed with the Librarian.

Processing: No original order was apparent in these records. They are grouped by type of material and creator of records, if known.

Biographical Note

Captain James W. Keen was born in Devonshire, England on April 1, 1842, and lived until age 91, dying at his home in Seattle. His father, Colonel Thomas E. Keen was a native of Scotland. James Keen was born at sea while his father was returning from the war in Egypt. His mother was Mary Ann Fischer, also a native of Scotland. James Keen was prominent in the history of Alaska's shipping and trading for three quarters of a century. He first sailed across the Atlantic from London at age sixteen on the Hudson's Bay Company's bark-rigged steamer, Labouchere, arriving at Victoria, British Columbia, February 2, 1859. During his apprenticeship, which

expired in 1863, he traded with the native people through the inland waters of B.C. and Alaska. Because of his trading experiences, he was asked to testify in court on the Alaska-Canada boundary issue. Keen continued to sail throughout his life, shipping in Washington and Alaska on various types of vessels. transporting missionaries to Alaska ports on the steamer *Leo* in 1886. [Paraphrased from the introduction to Captain James W. Keen's journal, and a Sept. 20, 1933 Obit. In the Seattle Star.]

Scope and Content Note

The papers include one book *Foul Play* with annotated end pages, one three-ring binder of typescript, one folder of photographs and clippings, one logbook of the steamer *James J. Healy* on the Yukon River, 1898-1899, and one ledger containing the diary of Arthur George Adams, 1942-1946, an hourly-wage worker in Yakima.

The typescript biography of Captain James W. Keen is a series of short accounts of Keen's seafaring years plus typed copies of letters and notes pertaining to his other contracts and activities in piloting in Alaska waters. Among the many accounts is his service on the *Labouchere* with Hudson's Bay Company (1859-1863) and includes one encounter with Hoonah Indians of Cross Sound in 1862. It also notes that this experience led to his testimony concerning the boundary dispute between the United States and Canada forty years later. In 1869 he served temporarily as interpreter and pilot for the steamer *Active* with William H. Seward aboard for the visit to the Chilcat Indians at the time of the solar eclipse on August 7, 1869. He served as pilot on the *U.S. Revenue Cutter Reliance* in 1874 with H. W. Elliott aboard on its expedition to St. Matthew, St. Lawrence, St. George and St. Paul. He includes a list of "names of vessels and dates commanded, owned, piloted and employed on," notes on service with the Revenue Cutter Service. In 1886 a log relates his trip as master of the Schooner *Leo* chartered to Sheldon Jackson to deliver missionary teachers to various places in Alaska. The accompanying photographs and clippings include several obituaries, photographs from the 1900s, with a few from his earlier days.

The logbook of the steamer *James J. Healy*, kept by Keen's son-in-law, A.E. LeBallister, reveals the trials and tribulations of navigation on the Yukon River during the Gold Rush.

Inventory

Item 1: vol. (7 1/2" x 5 1/4"): book entitled *Foul Play* by Charles Reade (New York : John W. Lovell Company, n.d. [1893?]). Following p. 302, some additional pages are tipped in among the end pages of the book (total of 18 pages handwritten). The first list begins, "Names of vessels and dates commanded, owned, piloted and employed on," (unnumbered [12 p.]) and is followed by "Seattle General Hospital, Dec. 2-1918. Statement from Capt. James W. Keen. Pioneer Pilot of Washington and Alaska" (pages numbered 1-6).

Item 1 PDF: http://www.library.alaska.gov/hist/hist_docs/docs/asl_ms152_item1.pdf

Item 2: one vol. (letter size) in 3-ring binder: typed manuscript (40 leaves). The first page reads: "This book is the property of Capt. James W. Keen, 4617 West Englewood St., Seattle, Washington."

Biographical notes by and about on James W. Keen. Typescript of original documents that were not received with this acquisition. The volume is a series of short accounts of Keen's seafaring years plus many letters and notes pertaining to his other contracts and activities in piloting in Alaska waters. The first page delineates his background and service on the *Labouchere* with Hudson's Bay Company (1859-1863) and includes one encounter with Hoonah Indians of Cross Sound in 1862. In 1869 he served temporarily as interpreter and pilot for the steamer *Active* with William H. Seward aboard for the visit to the Chilcat Indians at the time of the solar eclipse on August 7, 1869. He served as pilot on the *U.S. Revenue Cutter Reliance* in 1874 with H. W. Elliott aboard on its expedition to St. Matthew, St. Lawrence, St. George and St. Paul. He includes a list of "names of vessels and dates commanded, owned, piloted and employed on," notes on service with the Revenue Cutter Service. In 1886 he was master of the Schooner *Leo* chartered to Sheldon Jackson. Delivered missionary teachers to various places in Alaska, including St. Paul, Avonack Village, Unga Island. Married twice, three children.

Item 2 PDF: http://www.library.alaska.gov/hist/hist_docs/docs/asl_ms152_item2.pdf

Item 3: One folder of photographs and postcards (25 images, a few identified; family photographs, mostly not Alaskan) and newspaper clippings, dated September 20, 1933.

Item 3 PDF: http://www.library.alaska.gov/hist/hist_docs/docs/asl_ms152_item3.pdf

Item 4: 1 logbook (14" x 8 5/8"): Cover title: *Capt. A.E. LeBallister. Yukon. Log 1898-9.* Logbook for steamer *John J. Healy*, Yukon River, September 3, 1898 - September 11, 1899. Captain A.E. LeBallister (son-in-law of James W. Keen) began the trip in St. Michaels, arrived Fort Yukon Sept. 27, and decided to overwinter there. He arrived at Dawson on June 1, 1899. On his return trip, two hours down river from Dawson, he became stuck for over a month, and finally, he arrived back at St. Michaels September 11, 1899.

Item 5 1 ledger (12 1/2" x 7 3/4"): on cover: "Record." Diary of Arthur George Adams, July 15, 1942 - December 31, 1946. He was an agricultural worker near Yakima, Washington, during and after World War II; he worked in the fields and for Washington Dehydrated Food Co. in Yakima. Daily notations on activities and person relationships. Unrelated to the rest of the collection in content.