



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

United States Fish Commission Records

NMAH.AC.0256

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	United States Fish Commission Records
Date:	1871-1892
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0256
Source:	National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Transportation (Collector)
Creator:	United States Fish Commission (Collector)
Extent:	4.66 Cubic feet (20 boxes, 1 map folder)
Language:	English .
Summary:	This collection documents materials from 1871 to 1892, the majority of which are drawings, photographs, and blueprints.

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Collection donated by the Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Interior, circa 1940.

About 1940 when the Bureau of Fisheries became part of the Department of the Interior and was renamed the Fish and Wildlife Service, most of these photographs were given to Mr. Frank Taylor of the U. S. National Museum, Department of the Interior. The collection was transferred to the Division of Transportation of the NMAH in 19 __. The collection was transferred to the Archives Center from the Division of Transportation on April 10, 1987.

Many of the photographs, particularly those identified in Bulletin No. 27 of the U. S. National Museum were taken by Thomas W. Smillie on the staff of the Smithsonian and also of the U.S. National Museum.

Provenance

Collection transferred to the Archives Center from the Division of Transportation (now Division of Work and Industry).

Processing Information

Collection processed by Robert Harding and Grace Angle, 1988

Preferred Citation

United States Fish Commission Records, 1871-1892, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Historical Note

The United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, established in 1871, launched and carried out the first sustained study of marine biology in the United States. It was instrumental in the artificial propagation of fish, thus increasing the country's fish resources and in concentrating attention on the preservation of natural resources. In 1877 the Commission initiated the collection of detailed and reliable data on American commercial fisheries, their modernization and improvement.

The immediate origin of the Fish Commission lay in a dispute in southern New England between the owners of traps (nets, weirs, or other means of capturing large quantities of fish) and a much larger group of fishermen who fished from small boats or the shore with single lines. Accusations that traps were responsible for the diminution in the supply of coastal fish raged. Spencer Fullerton Baird, Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, with a keen interest in marine biology had followed the dispute closely. He recognized that the practical work related to its solution would contribute to proving the utilitarian value of science and provide excellent opportunities for basic marine biological research. Backed by prominent friends and his own knowledge of the political dynamics of Washington he sought a congressional appropriation for an extended investigation of coastal fisheries.

At the request of Henry L. Dawes, chairman of the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives to whom Baird had turned for help, he outlined in a letter of January 3, 1871 the dispute in southern New England, including a proposal for a commission charged with determining the scientific reason for the decrease in coastal species and headed by a mediator empowered to consult with the states and seek a fair solution. As it shortly emerged from Congress the resolution established the U.S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries. This created a body with no time limits, and without restriction as to area, thus opening the way to a national investigation. The head of this new agency was to be appointed by the President, to be an officer of the government and to serve without additional pay. With its basic authorization assured, a \$5,000 appropriation was quickly approved and Spencer Baird, Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, was appointed Commissioner by President Grant. He took the oath of office on March 8, 1871.

While its appropriations for the propagation of fish far exceeded those for research, the Commission on Fish and Fisheries was influential in promoting scientific development in the federal government. In 1881 the Congress at Commissioner Baird's request, appropriated \$190,000 for a sea going vessel, the Albatross, especially equipped for marine biology. He settled on Wood's Hole in Massachusetts as the site for a permanent scientific station and arranged for the purchase of the land by private subscribers such as the Johns Hopkins University, Princeton University and Williams College. Such institutions had a right to send a specialist to the station to do research. The marine biological laboratory at Wood's Hole developed into a world famous research institution.

In 1903 the independent commission became the Bureau of Fisheries in the Department of Commerce and Labor. The Bureau was transferred to the Department of the Interior in 1939 and in 1940 was merged with another bureau to become the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Scope and Contents

Most of the collection consists of drawings, both pen and ink and pencil, photoengravings and photographs and blueprints of fish, fishermen, fishing gear, nets, traps, seines, fishing vessels both small and large, and fish processing. Some are identified by type, some by location; others lack specific identification. Many carry comments and directions for reduction. These may have been illustrations for annual or other reports and publications. Many of

the photographs were taken in the 1880's and 90's. The key to a number of them is in U.S. National Museum Bulletin No. 27, which consists of descriptive catalogues of the collections sent by the United States to the International Fisheries Exhibition held in London in 1883.2 Where a photograph has been identified in Bulletin No. 27, a notation of the appropriate page number has been made on the back of the photo.

Also included is a bound, handwritten journal of the Commission with entries that relate to official actions such as its establishment, its appropriations, and Congressional authorizations for specific activities. These identify the statute or House or Senate journal entry that is applicable. The entries run from February 9, 1871 to December 24, 1892. There is an index by subject. There are some handwritten notes about fishing vessels made by Captain J. W. Collins and his partial draft manuscript describing fishing vessels. A draft of his annual report for 1884 is also included. A small amount of correspondence relates to descriptions of fishing vessels as well.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Fish and fisheries
- Fishes
- Fishing

Types of Materials:

- Cyanotypes
- Drawings -- 1870-1910
- Photoengravings

Names:

- National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Transportation

Container Listing

Box 1, Folder 1	Actions Relating to the United States Fish Commission-Appropriations, Authorizations, Appointments, etc.
Box 1, Folder 2	J. W. Collins Annual Report, 1884
Box 1, Folder 3	J. W. Collins Miscellaneous Memoranda
Box 1, Folder 4	J. W. Collins Notes on Fishing Vessels
Box 1, Folder 5	Correspondence, September 15, 1881-October 13, 1892 and undated
Box 1, Folder 6	Correspondence, June 20, 1906-June 22, 1906; February 4, 1915
Box 1, Folder 7	Description of Fishing Vessels, handwritten
Box 1, Folder 8	Description of Fishing Vessels, draft manuscript
Box 1, Folder 9	Fishing Vessels, pencil sketches
Box 1, Folder 10	Fishing Vessels, photoengravings
Box 1, Folder 11	Guide to Photographs
Box 1, Folder 12	Miscellaneous
Box 1, Folder 13	Negative Numbers, Negative Catalogue
Box 1, Folder 14	Note Regarding Unidentified Photograph
Box 1, Folder 15	Fishing Trap Patent, H. Webb, May 6, 1877
Box 1, Folder 16	U. S. Department of Agriculture Bulletins, Personnel Administration,, April 15, 1938; June 20, 1938; February 28, 1939
Box 2, Folder 1	Fish Processing Pen and Inks
Box 2, Folder 1	<p>Brown, the champion fish skinner, Shute & Merchant, Gloucester, Massachusetts [drawing], September 1882</p> <p>1 Item (Ink on paper.; 9.9" x 15.9")</p> <p>Collector: United States Fish Commission</p> <p>Language: English.</p> <p>Notes: AC0256-0000006 (AC scan no.)</p> <p>Artist H. Elliott.</p> <p>Topic: Fishing</p>

Fishing industry -- Massachusetts
Genre/Form: Drawings

Box 2, Folder 2	Fishing, Indians, Aleuts, Eskimos and Others
Box 2, Folder 3	Herring, graphics
Box 2, Folder 4	Sea Elephants
Box 2, Folder 5	Sea Scallops
Box 2, Folder 6	Seals
Box 2, Folder 7	Walrus, Sea Otter, Manatee
Box 2, Folder 8	Whales
Box 3, Folder 1	Gear, I
Box 3, Folder 2	Gear, II
Box 3, Folder 3	Miscellaneous Sketches, H. W. Elliott and J. W. Collins
Box 3, Folder 4	Nets
Box 3A, Folder 1	Nets, other countries
Box 3A, Folder 2	Nets, United States
Box 3A, Folder 3	Trawls
Box 3A, Folder 4	Unidentified Diagram
Box 4, Folder 1	Fishing Crews
Box 4, Folder 2	Fishing Vessels and Boats identified in U. S. National Museum Bulletin #27
Box 4, Folder 3	Fishing Vessels and Boats I
Box 4, Folder 4	Fishing Vessels and Boats II
Box 4, Folder 5	Fishing Vessels and Boats III
Box 4, Folder 6	Fishing Vessels and Boats, diagrams
Box 4, Folder 7	Fishing Vessels and Boats, sketches by H. W. Elliot and J. W. Collins

Box 5, Folder 1	Boat Models, identified in Bulletin #27
Box 5, Folder 2	Boat Models, not identified in Bulletin #27
Box 5, Folder 3	Fish and Fishing
Box 5, Folder 4	Sailing Vessels
Box 6, Folder 1	Gloucester I, identified in Bulletin #27
Box 6, Folder 2	Gloucester II, identified in Bulletin #27
Box 6, Folder 3	Gloucester III, identified in Bulletin #27
Box 6, Folder 4	Gloucester, blueprints identified in Bulletin #27
Box 7, Folder 1	Gloucester
Box 7, Folder 2	Salmon
Box 7, Folder 3	Shad
Box 8, Folder 1	Fishermen, identified in Bulletin #27
Box 8, Folder 2	Fishermen, not identified in Bulletin #27
Box 8, Folder 2	<p>[Group of Whaling Skippers cyanotype.], 1882 1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 10.0" x 8.0".) Collector: United States Fish Commission Language: English. Notes: AC0256-0000005 (AC scan no.) Unrestricted research use by appointment. Photographs must be handled with cotton gloves unless protected by sleeves. Four African American captains shoreside in New Bedford, Massachusetts.</p> <p>Topic: Whaling United States Fish Commission Whalers -- African Americans</p> <p>Place: Massachusetts -- New Bedford Genre/Form: Cyanotypes</p>
Box 8, Folder 3	Fishermen's Houses, identified in Bulletin #27
Box 8, Folder 3, photo 2046	<p>[Tenement House for Fishermen's Widows : black and white photoprint.], 1882 1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 8.2" x 10.2".) Collector: United States Fish Commission Language: English. Notes: AC0256-0000004 (AC scan no.)</p>

Unrestricted research use by appointment. Photographs must be handled with cotton gloves unless protected by sleeves.

Topic: United States Fish Commission
Tenement houses -- United States.
Widows -- United States.
Fishers' spouses
Fishing -- New England

Genre/Form: Photographs -- 1880-1890 -- Black-and-white photoprints

Box 8, Folder 4 Fishermen's Houses, not identified in Bulletin #27

Box 9, Folder 1 [Detroit, Michigan](#)

Box 9, Folder 1 [Detroit fishermen \[photoprint.\], Circa 1882](#)
1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 7.9" x 9.4")
Collector: United States Fish Commission
Language: English.
Notes: AC0256-0000001 (AC scan no.)
Unrestricted research use by appointment. Photographs must be handled with cotton gloves unless protected by sleeves.
Belle Isle in the Detroit Rivier. Image identified in the US National Museum Bulletin Number 27, 1894.

Topic: Fishing
Fishers

Genre/Form: Photographs -- 1880-1890 -- Black-and-white photoprints

Box 9, Folder 1 [Detroit fishermen \[photoprint.\], Circa 1882](#)
1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 7.9" x 9.4")
Collector: United States Fish Commission
Language: English.
Notes: AC0256-0000002 (AC scan no.)
Unrestricted research use by appointment. Photographs must be handled with cotton gloves unless protected by sleeves.
Belle Isle in the Detroit Rivier. Image identified in the US National Museum Bulletin Number 27, 1884

Topic: Fishing
Fishers

Genre/Form: Photographs -- 1880-1890 -- Black-and-white photoprints

Box 9, Folder 2 Eastport, Maine

Box 9, Folder 3 Oxford, Maryland

Box 9, Folder 4 Nantucket, Massachusetts

Box 9, Folder 5 Rockport, Maine

Box 9, Folder 6 Tiverton, Rhode Island

Box 9, Folder 7	Other Locations, identified in Bulletin #27
Box 9, Folder 8	Other Locations, not identified in Bulletin #27
Box 10, Folder 1	Buildings Related to the Fishing Industry
Box 10, Folder 2	Gloucester, not identified in Bulletin #27
Box 10, Folder 3	Pelagic Sealers
Box 10, Folder 4	Purse Net Fishing, identified in Bulletin #27
Box 10, Folder 5	Views from Other Countries
Box 11, Folder 1	Fishing Vessels, identified in Bulletin #27
Box 11, Folder 2	Miscellaneous Photographs and Blueprints identified in Bulletin #27
Box 11, Folder 2	<p>Wharf of D. C. & H. Babson in Gloucester, Massachusetts [photoprint.], Circa 1882</p> <p>1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 7.9" x 10.0")</p> <p>Collector: United States Fish Commission</p> <p>Language: English.</p> <p>Notes: AC0256-0000003 (AC scan no.)</p> <p>Unrestricted research use by appointment. Photographs must be handled with cotton gloves unless protected by sleeves.</p> <p>Fish drying on the wharf. Image identified in the US National Museum Bulletin Number 27, 1884</p> <p>Topic: Fishing Wharves Fishing industry -- Massachusetts Fishers</p> <p>Genre/Form: Photographs -- 1880-1890 -- Black-and-white photoprints</p>
Box 12, Folder 1	Miscellaneous Photographs identified by subject I
Box 12, Folder 2	Miscellaneous Photographs, identified by subject, II
Box 13, Folder 1	Albatross I
Box 13, Folder 2	Albatross II
Box 14, Folder 1	Albatross cyanotypes
Box 14, Folder 2	Fishhawk
Box 14, Folder 2	Fishing Vessels

Box 14, Folder 3	Grampus and Lookout
Box 14, Folder 4	Launches, blueprints
Box 14, Folder 5	Thetis
Box 14, Folder 6	Wood's Hole
Box 15, Folder 1	Catamarans, Dugouts, South America and West Indies, blueprints
Box 15, Folder 2	Outriggers and other Native Boats, South Seas Expedition of Albatross, 1899 1900
Box 15, Folder 3	Fishing Vessels, Foreign Models
Box 15, Folder 4	Fishing Vessels, Foreign Models, Berlin Exposition I
Box 15, Folder 5	Fishing Vessels, Foreign Models, Berlin Exposition II
Box 16, Folder 1	Alaska Investigation, 1894 1895, blueprints
Box 16, Folder 2	Alaska Investigation, 1908, blueprints
Box 16, Folder 3	Alert, photographs and blueprints
Box 16, Folder 4	Blueprints, identified by subject
Box 16, Folder 5	Blueprints, not identified by subject
Box 16, Folder 6	New England Fishing schooners from D. Foster Taylor, and Chesapeake Bay Bug Eyes
Box 17, Folder 1	Boston Wharves
Box 17, Folder 2	Fish Processing
Box 17, Folder 3	Fishing Vessels
Box 17, Folder 4	Fulton Market, New York
Box 17, Folder 5	Miscellaneous Blueprints, identified by subject
Box 17, Folder 5	Wharves and Buildings
Box 18, Folder 1	Miscellaneous unidentified photographs I
Box 19, Folder 1	Miscellaneous Unidentified photographs II

Box 19, Folder 2	Miscellaneous Unidentified photographs III
Box 20, Folder 1	Sailing vessels in groups
Box 20, Folder 2	Fishing vessels and boats V
Box 20, Folder 3	Fishing vessel and boats VI
Map-folder 1	Bureau of Fisheries Poster, "Eat More Fish"
Map-folder 1	Bureau of Fisheries, Statistics of Shrimp Industry, 1916
Map-folder 1	Canned Shrimp, Saturday Evening Post
Map-folder 1	Diagram, unidentified
Map-folder 1	Discharging Fresh Halibut, pencil
Map-folder 1	Halibut Schooner, pen and ink
Map-folder 1	Menhaden Steamer, pen and ink