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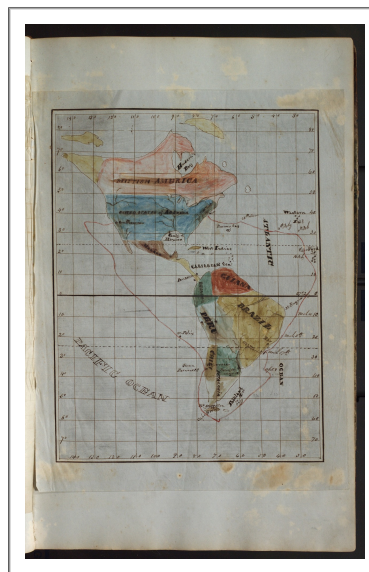
National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Alexander Van Valen Papers

NMAH.AC.0935

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2008



Archives Center, National Museum of American History

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Alexander Van Valen Papers
Date:	1849-1850
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0935
Creator:	Van Valen, Alexander
Extent:	1.5 Cubic feet (4 boxes)
Language:	Collection text is in English.
Summary:	Personal papers of Alexander Van Valen documenting his participation in the California Gold Rush, 1849-1850.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Purchased by the National Museum of American History from Cowan's Historic Americana Auctions in 2006.

Available Formats

1849 Diary digitized in 2014.

Processing Information

Processed by Kiley Orchard (intern), 2008; supervised by Vanessa Broussard Simmons, archivist.

Preferred Citation

Alexander Van Valen Papers, 1849-1850, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Biographical / Historical

Alexander Van Valen was born in Poughkeepsie, New York, on June 25, 1819. He married Susan Maria Talmage, and the couple had twin daughters, Catharine Eliza and Sarah Maria, born June 2, 1845. Van Valen served as treasurer of the California Gold Mining Company, one of many companies formed to participate in the 1849 California Gold Rush. Funded by two wealthy New York merchants, Henry A. Kerr and B. S.

Clark, the company consisted of Van Valen and four men other men. Van Valen and his business partners agreed to spend two summers in California and pay Kerr and Clark one quarter of any profits made. Van Valen sailed aboard the San Francisco-bound *Hersilia* on January 22, 1849. Once in California, he and his company decided to try to strike it rich, first along the Mokelumne River and then up the San Joaquin River to Stockton. The trip proved unsuccessful, and Van Valen returned to New York less than two years later. He died on November 24, 1869.

Scope and Contents

The collection consists mostly of the personal papers of Alexander Van Valen during his journey and subsequent stay in San Francisco, California, to participate in the Gold Rush, 1849-1850. Of particular interest are the founding documents of the mining company, his 85 page journal, and his many letters, mostly to and from his wife Susan. Also included are portraits and daguerreotypes of his family. This collection is especially valuable to researchers who are interested in the California Gold Rush, nineteenth century maritime travel, business history, and migration.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into two series.

Series 1, Personal Papers, 1849-1850

Series 2, Other Materials, 1849-1850

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Gold mines and mining
- Mining

Types of Materials:

- Correspondence -- 19th century
- Daguerreotypes
- Diaries -- 19th century
- Hand coloring
- Maps -- 19th century
- Painted photographs
- Photographs -- Daguerreotypes -- 1840-1860

Places:

- California
- California -- San Francisco
- San Francisco (Calif.) -- 1840-1850

Container Listing

Series 1: Personal Papers, 1849 - 1850

Scope and Contents: This series consists mostly of Van Valen's personal correspondence and his 85 page diary documenting the 199-day journey aboard the bark *Hersilia*. Van Valen describes the voyage and aspects of passenger life. The diary includes a list of the ship's passengers, hand-drawn maps, sketches, and business agreements. Once in San Francisco, Van Valen writes about the city, mining operations, day-to-day life, and other miners. After the diary ends, handwritten letters provide descriptions of the environment and day-to-day life. The collection also contains portraits of Van Valen and his family and a daguerreotype of his wife and daughters. There is an unknown piece of writing in the "Map" folder and an American Seaman's certificate declaring Van Valen a United States citizen.

Box 1, Folder 1	Certificate, 1849
Box 1, Folder 1	[Alexander Van Valen Diary] [book], Jan. 1849 to August 1850, 1849, Jan. 1849 to August 1850 1 Item (Ink on paper.; 14.0" x 9.1") Image(s): Diary Digital Content: Diary transcription Author: Van Valen, Alexander Language: English. Topic: Gold Gold mines and mining Place: San Francisco (Calif.) California -- Gold discoveries Genre/Form: Books -- 19th century Holographs Diaries -- 19th century
Box 1, Folder 2	Diary (photocopied/typescript), 1849
Box 1, Folder 3	Letters, 1849 March-1849 August
Box 1, Folder 4	Letters, 1849 September-1850 February
Box 1, Folder 5	Letters, 1850 March-1850 August
Box 1, Folder 6	Transcribed letters, 1849
Box 1, Folder 7	Transcribed letters, 1850
Box 1, Folder 8	Typescript letters, 1849
Box 1, Folder 9	Typescript letters, 1850
Box 1, Folder 10	Daguerreotype, undated

Box 2, Folder 1	Alexander Van Valen portrait, undated
Box 2, Folder 1	Susan Talmage Van Valen portrait, undated
Box 3, Folder 1	Map, undated
Box 4, Folder 1	Catharine Eliza and Sarah Maria Van Valen portrait, undated

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Series 2: Other Materials, 1849 - 1850

Scope and Contents: This series consists of a "Keepsake for the 1987 conference of the Western History Association, held in Los Angeles, California." Authorship of the diary attributed to William H. Hoyt and Alexander Van Valen, with the latter thought to be the probable author of the major portion. Also included is a volume of songs by Mr. Willis.

Box 3, Folder 2 Incidents of a voyage to California, 1849 : a diary of travel aboard the bark Hersilia, and in Sacramento, 1850 - 1850

Box 3, Folder 3 Songs by Mr. Willis, circa 1850

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