



Smithsonian

Institution Archives

United States Exploring Expedition Collection, 1838-1885

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Smithsonian Institution Archives
Washington, D.C.
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	United States Exploring Expedition Collection
Date:	1838-1885
Identifier:	Record Unit 7186
Creator::	United States Exploring Expedition (1838-1842)
Extent:	4.37 cu. ft. (6 document boxes) (1 half document box) (1 12x17 box) (1 16x20 box)
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 7186, United States Exploring Expedition Collection

Historical Note

The United States Exploring Expedition, also known as the Wilkes Expedition, was authorized by an act of Congress in 1836 as "a surveying and exploring expedition to the Pacific Ocean and South Seas." It was prompted by a desire to obtain information concerning an area which was rapidly becoming of interest to American traders and whalers. A contingent of scientists accompanied the expedition, commanded by Lieutenant Charles Wilkes of the United States Navy, including Charles Pickering, Titian Ramsay Peale, Joseph P. Couthouy, James Dwight Dana, William Rich, William Dunlop Brackenridge, and Horatio Hale. In addition to the scientists, two illustrators, Joseph Drayton and Alfred T. Agate, also accompanied the expedition.

The expedition, which consisted of five ships and crews provided by the United States Navy, sailed from Norfolk, Virginia, in August 1838. By the time it returned to New York in June 1842, it had visited and explored Madeira, both coasts of South America, Tierra del Fuego, the South Pacific islands, Australia, New Zealand, Antarctica, the Hawaiian Islands, Oregon, California, the Philippine Islands, Singapore, the Cape of Good Hope, and St. Helena. Wilkes' voyage along the Antarctic coast during the expedition established the existence of that continent.

During the voyage, the scientists gathered specimens and studied the flora and fauna of each place visited. At various points along the route specimens were packed and sent back to the United States. Eventually, the specimens were placed in the custody of the National Institute in Washington, D.C., and installed in the Great Hall of the Patent Office. They remained there until their removal to the Smithsonian Institution in 1858.

Descriptive Entry

Several reports covering the scientific work of the expedition were made, and most were published. One of the exceptions was the ichthyology report, which Charles Pickering was originally assigned to prepare. It was delayed, however; and by the middle of 1849, Jean Louis Agassiz had been placed in charge of the work. Due to the pressures of his many other commitments, and to the growing reluctance of Congress to appropriate additional funds after 1862, Agassiz never completed the project. In 1885, twelve years after Agassiz's death, the fish specimens, his manuscript, and its illustrations were sent to the United States National Museum.

The two illustrators, Joseph Drayton and Alfred T. Agate, produced numerous drawings of fishes during the expedition, many of which are in this collection. Drayton also helped supervise the illustrations and engraving work for a number of the scientific reports which were published.

A number of the items covering the ichthyology of the United States Exploring Expedition have been held, along with the specimens, by the Division of Fishes of the United States National Museum of Natural History. This record unit includes an unsigned manuscript on the fishes of the expedition, apparently the work of Jean Louis Agassiz which was sent to the United States National Museum in 1885; notes on the fishes and echinoderms collected by the expedition, either by Charles Pickering or based on his notes; a number of items concerning the drawings, specimens and the itinerary of the expedition; and drawings and illustrations of fishes done during the voyage or as illustrations for the ichthyology report. An unpublished manuscript on the fishes of the United States Exploring Expedition by Henry Ward Fowler has been placed in Record Unit 7180.

In addition to the ichthyological materials some items in this collection were held by the Smithsonian Library. These items consist of a letter from R. R. Waldron to Mrs. Sarah Jane Hale concerning her son Horatio Hale's travel plan, 1841; a manuscript on the expedition by Titian Ramsay Peale, which was published by the *American Historical Records*, 1874; notebooks on botany, mostly by William Dunlop Brackenridge; catalogues and annotated lists of ethnological, geological, mineralogical, and natural history specimens collected by the expedition; drawings of echinoderms by Drayton; original invoices and other official papers of the expedition, mostly shipping lists of specimens sent to the United States; and some loose sheets from the purser's account book, 1838-1842.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Anthropologists
- Anthropology
- Botanists
- Botany
- Geologists
- Geology
- Ichthyologists
- Ichthyology
- Invertebrate zoology
- Invertebrates
- Natural history
- Naturalists
- Scientific expeditions
- Zoologists

Types of Materials:

Manuscripts
Scientific illustrations

Names:

Agassiz, Louis, 1807-1873
Agate, Alfred T., 1812-1846
Brackenridge, William D. (William Dunlop), 1810-1893
Couthouy, Joseph Pitty, 1808-1864
Dana, James Dwight, 1813-1895
Drayton, Joseph
Hale, Horatio, 1817-1896
National Institute
Patent Office Building (Washington, D.C.)
Peale, Titian Ramsay, 1799-1885
Pickering, Charles, 1805-1878
Rich, William
United States Exploring Expedition (1838-1842)
Wilkes, Charles, 1798-1877

Container Listing

Series 1: CORRESPONDENCE, 1841.

Box 1

Box 1 of 9

Folder 1 Letter from R. R. Waldron (U. S. S. Vincennes), Bay of San Francisco, California to Mrs. Sarah Jane Hale, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 30, 1841. Waldron wrote to inform Mrs. Hale of her son, Horatio Hale's travel plan.

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Series 2: MANUSCRIPTS ON THE UNITED STATES EXPLORING EXPEDITION.

Box 1

Box 1 of 9

Folder 2 "The South Sea Surveying and Exploring Expedition, its origin, organization, equipment, purposes, results, and termination," by Titian Ramsay Peale, circa 1874. (Includes several typewritten copies).
Published in American Historical Records, Philadelphia, v. 3, 1874, p. 244-251, 305-311.

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Series 3: CATALOGUES, DRAWINGS, AND OTHER MATERIALS CONCERNING SPECIMENS COLLECTED BY THE UNITED STATES EXPLORING EXPEDITION, 1838-1864.

Box 1

Box 1 of 9	Folder 3 Manuscript on Botany, undated
Box 1 of 9	Folder 4 Original notebooks of the botanist, volumes 1-16. Peru, New South Wales (Australia), Samoa Islands group, Tonga Islands group, Fiji Islands group, and Hawaiian Islands group (William Dunlop Brackenridge).
Box 1 of 9	Folder 5 Botanical notebooks, Fiji Islands, volumes 5, 6, 10-27

Box 2

Box 2 of 9	Folder 1 Botanical notebooks, East Indies, volumes 1-17
Box 2 of 9	Folder 2 Echinoderms: drawings by Joseph Drayton Digital Content: Echinoderms, drawings by Joseph Drayton, 1838-1839 [Field Book Registry Item No. 742; SIA No. SIA_007186_B02_F02]
Box 2 of 9	Folder 3 Ethnology: "Collection of the United States South Sea Surveying and Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842," by Titian Ramsay Peale, 1846

Box 3

Box 3 of 9	Folder 1 Ethnology (continued): Bound volume labeled Catalogue U. S. Exploring Expedition, and containing "Ethnological collections of the U. S. South Sea Exploring Expedition" and "Molds made by George A. Matile for the Smithsonian Institution 1863, 1864."
Box 3 of 9	Folder 2 Geology: Original catalogue of geological specimens from Australia [by] James D. Dana
Box 3 of 9	Folder 3 Geology: Original catalogue of geological specimens collected at Sandwich Islands by James D. Dana
Box 3 of 9	Folder 4 Signature card of James Dwight Dana, undated (Accession 11-078)
Box 3 of 9	Folder 5 Mineralogy: Checklist of minerals
Box 3 of 9	Folder 6 "Original Invoices and other Official Papers of the U. S. Exploring Expedition" Digital Content: Original Invoices and other official papers of the US Exploring Expedition, 1839-1840 [Field Book Registry Item No. 759; SIA No. SIA_007186_B03_F06]

- Notes:
- Official letters to Capt. Wilkes, 1839-1840, mostly transmitting shipping lists of specimens, and some loose sheets from the purser's account book, 1838
 - Original invoices of shells, 1839-1840
 - Original invoices of miscellaneous specimens, 1839-1841
 - Original invoices and catalogue of geological and mineralogical specimens, 1839-1840

Box 3 of 9	Folder 7 Annotated lists of specimens received from the U. S. Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842 Digital Content: Annotated lists of specimens received from the US Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842 [Field Book Registry Item No. 761; SIA No. SIA_007186_B03_F07]
Box 3 of 9	Folder 8 Catalogue of specimens collected by the U. S. Exploring Expedition and received by the Philadelphia Museum, 1838-1842 Digital Content: Catalogue of specimens collected by the US Exploring Expedition and received by the Philadelphia Museum, 1838-1842 [Field Book Registry Item No. 762; SIA No. SIA_007186_B03_F08]
Box 3 of 9	Folder 9 List of specimens unpacked by Charles Pickering, undated
Box 3 of 9	Folder 10 Catalogue of specimens sent to the United States by Charles Pickering, undated

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Series 4: MANUSCRIPT ON THE FISHES COLLECTED BY THE UNITED STATES EXPLORING EXPEDITION.

Note: Includes an uncompleted manuscript covering the fishes collected by the United States Exploring Expedition. The manuscript's author is unidentified; but appears from handwriting samples to be Jean Louis Agassiz. It was sent to the United States National Museum about 1885.

Box 4

Box 4 of 9	Folder 1 Introduction
Box 4 of 9	Folder 2 Lophobranchii
Box 4 of 9	Folder 3 Tetradons
Box 4 of 9	Folder 4 True Balistes
Box 4 of 9	Folder 5 Diodons
Box 4 of 9	Folder 6 Aluterini
Box 4 of 9	Folder 7 Ostraceons
Box 4 of 9	Folder 8 Clarias
Box 4 of 9	Folder 9 Scomberesoces

Box 5

Box 5 of 9	Folder 1 Gadites
Box 5 of 9	Folder 2 Clupeoides
Box 5 of 9	Folder 3 Salmonides
Box 5 of 9	Folder 4 Erythroides
Box 5 of 9	Folder 5 Descriptions of seventeen unnamed genera
Box 5 of 9	Folder 6 Xyrichthys
Box 5 of 9	Folder 7 Scaroids
Box 5 of 9	Folder 8 Corsyphus
Box 5 of 9	Folder 9 Chirhio

Box 5 of 9 Folder 10 Somphosus

Box 5 of 9 Folder 11 Anampres

Box 5 of 9 Folder 12 Epibulus

Box 5 of 9 Folder 13 Eels

Box 5 of 9 Folder 14 Myzontes

Box 5 of 9 Folder 15 Selachians

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Series 5: NOTES, LISTS, AND RELATED MATERIALS CONCERNING WORK DONE ON FISH AND ECHINODERM SPECIMENS COLLECTED BY THE UNITED STATES EXPLORING EXPEDITION.

Box 6

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Box 6 of 9 | Folder 1 Folder labeled "Notes relating to Expl. Exp. Collections by Charles Pickering." Also on folder is note "All these collections of Echinoderms have been returned to Smithsonian by A. Agassiz." Includes notes concerning drawings and plates, notes on sharks, six page list of specimens, "List of Specimens sent to Prof. Agassiz" and apparently transcribed notes of Charles Pickering covering echinoderms and fishes of the Exploring Expedition. |
| Box 6 of 9 | Folder 2 Itinerary of the United States Exploring Expedition sent to Louis Agassiz by Charles Wilkes
Digital Content: Itinerary of the United States Exploring Expedition sent to Louis Agassiz by Charles Wilkes, 1838-1842 [Field Book Registry Item No. 765; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F02] |
| Box 6 of 9 | Folder 3 List of drawings sent to Charles Wilkes, January 28, 1860 |
| Box 6 of 9 | Folder 4 Report on care of fish specimens of the United States Exploring Expedition at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, by Robert Bliss, Jr., undated |
| Box 6 of 9 | Folder 5 Unidentified lists of fish specimens of United States Exploring Expedition, undated |

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Series 6: DRAWINGS AND TRACINGS OF FISHES, MARKED "REJECTED."

Note: This series contains drawings and tracings of fishes seen and/or taken by the United States Exploring Expedition. The majority of the works are signed by either Joseph Drayton or John H. Richard. Drayton was a draftsman who accompanied the expedition. A number of his drawings, done during the voyage, are dated and locations are given. Richard was hired after the return of the expedition to prepare drawings for the plates that were to illustrate the work on ichthyology. Other artists identified include W. Dougel; Alfred T. Agate, who was also on the voyage; and Alexander Agassiz.

The works in this series were found in envelopes which were marked as "rejected" or "rejected for publication." There is no hint as to the proposed work for which these drawings were rejected. Other drawings found in envelopes marked "selected for publication" are in Series 7.

The arrangement of the drawings is alphabetical by the scientific name of the fishes given on the envelope or drawing. Each folder corresponds to one envelope. In a case where more than one scientific name was represented by the drawings in an envelope, the envelope was alphabetized by the name which appeared first. An alphabetical index to the other names follows.

Acanthurus - See Folders 17 and 24

Amphacanthus - See Folders 6 and 17

Arripris - See Folder 11

Blennioids - See Folder 19

Catostomus - See Folder 17

Chaetodon - See Folders 9 and 17

Diodons - See Folder 32

Ephippus - See Folder 17

Gobius - See Folders 15 and 19

Hemisamplius - See Folder 8

Holocanthus - See Folder 17

Isacia - See Folder 11

Leucisceus - See Folder 17

Mylachilus - See Folder 17

Pentapus - See Folder 11

Pharopteryx - See Folder 11

Priacanthus - See Folder 11

Priodon - See Folder 24

Pseudolabrus - See Folder 33

Salmonidae - See Folders 9 and 30

Sicyopterus - See Folder 15

Zanelus - See Folder 17

Box 6

Box 6 of 9	Folder 6 Drawings of Amphacanthus
Box 6 of 9	Folder 7 Drawings of Balistoids
Box 6 of 9	Folder 8 Drawings of Belone, Hemisamphius and other unidentified fishes (two drawings removed to Box 8) Digital Content: Drawings of Belone, Hemisamphius and other unidentified fishes (two drawings removed to Box 7), 1838 [Field Book Registry Item No. 775; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F08]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 9 Drawings of Chaetodon Digital Content: Drawings of Chaetodon, 1842-1885 [Field Book Registry Item No. 776; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F09]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 10 Drawings of Characini and Salmonidae Digital Content: Drawings of Characini and Salmonidae, 1838 [Field Book Registry Item No. 778; SIA Nos. SIA2012-3584 and SIA2012-3585]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 11 Drawings of Cheilodactylus, Pentapus, Arripris, Isacia Pharoptyryx, Priacanthus and other unidentified fishes Digital Content: Drawings of Cheilodactylus, Pentapus, Arripris, Isacia Pharoptyryx, Priacanthus and other unidentified fishes, 1842-1885 [Field Book Registry Item No. 779; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F11]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 12 Drawings of duplicate Clupoids Digital Content: Drawings of duplicate Clupoids, 1838-1841 [Field Book Registry Item No. 795; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F12]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 13 Drawings of Cottoids (two drawings removed to Box 8) Digital Content: Drawings of Cottoids (two drawings removed to Box 8), 1842-1885 [Field Book Registry Item No. 796; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F13]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 14 Drawings of Cyprinoids
Box 6 of 9	Folder 15 Drawings of Eleotris, Gobiis, Sicyoperus and other unidentified fishes Digital Content: Drawings of Eleotris, Gobiis, Sicyoperus and other unidentified fishes, 1838-1885 [Field Book Registry Item No. 805; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F15]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 16 Drawings of Galaxia Digital Content: Drawings of Galaxia, 1838-1885 [Field Book Registry Item No. 808; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F16]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 17 Drawings of Galaxia, Catostomus, Leuciseus, Mylachilus, Zanelus, Ephippus, Holocanthus, Amphacanthus, Acanthurus and Chaetodon Digital Content: Drawings of Galaxia, Catostomus, Leuciseus, Mylachilus, Zanelus, Ephippus, Holocanthus, Amphacanthus, Acanthurus and

[Chaetodon, 1838-1885 \[Field Book Registry Item No. 812; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F17\]](#)

Box 6 of 9	Folder 18 Drawings of Germa (drawing removed to Box 8)
Box 6 of 9	Folder 19 Drawings of Gobiids and Blenniids Digital Content: Drawings of Gobiids and Blenniids, 1838-1885 [Field Book Registry Item No. 816; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F19]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 20 Drawings of Lophobranch Digital Content: Drawings of Lophobranch, 1838-1885 [Field Book Registry Item No. 820; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F20]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 21 Drawings of Lophobranchii Digital Content: Drawings of Lophobranchii, 1838-1885 [Field Book Registry Item No. 823; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F21]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 22 Drawings of Muraenoids (two drawings removed to Box 8)
Box 6 of 9	Folder 23 Drawings of Myzontes Digital Content: Drawings of Myzontes, 1839 [Field Book Registry Item No. 826; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F23]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 24 Drawings of Nasius, Priodon and Acanthurus (drawing removed to Box 8)
Box 6 of 9	Folder 25 Drawings of Notothenia
Box 6 of 9	Folder 26 Drawings of Ostracionidae
Box 6 of 9	Folder 27 Drawings of Pennujta (?)
Box 6 of 9	Folder 28 Drawings of Pomocentroids Digital Content: Drawings of Pomocentroids, 1838-1885 [Field Book Registry Item No. 850; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F28]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 29 Drawings of Rhinoscopelus
Box 6 of 9	Folder 30 Drawings of Salmonidae
Box 6 of 9	Folder 31 Drawings of Serranus
Box 6 of 9	Folder 32 Drawings of Tetradons and Diodons Digital Content: Drawings of Tetradons and Diodons, 1838-1885 [Field Book Registry Item No. 857; SIA No. SIA_007186_B06_F32]
Box 6 of 9	Folder 33 Drawings of Thalassoma, Pseudolabrus and other unidentified fishes

Digital Content: Drawings of Thalassoma, Pseudolabrus and other
unidentified fishes, 1838-1885 [Field Book Registry Item No. 862; SIA No.
SIA_007186_B06_F33]

Box 6 of 9

Folder 34 Drawings of unidentified fishes

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Series 7: DRAWINGS AND TRACINGS OF FISHES, MARKED "SELECTED."

Note: This series contains drawings and tracings of fishes seen and/or taken by the United States Exploring Expedition. Like the "rejected" drawings of Series 6, the majority of these works are by either Joseph Drayton or John H. Richard. Further information on these two artists is given in the introduction to Series 6. Other artists identified include Alfred T. Agate, W. Dougel, and Ts. (or Js.) Burkhardt.

The works in this series were found in envelopes marked "selected for publication." There is no hint as to the proposed work for which these drawings were selected. Other drawings, found in envelopes marked "rejected" are found in Series 6.

This arrangement of the drawings is alphabetical by the scientific name of the fishes given on the envelope or drawings. Each folder corresponds to one envelope. In a case where the drawings in one envelope represent more than one scientific name, the folder was alphabetized by the name which appears first and the other(s) is included in the following list.

Kubliidae - See Folder 7

Monacanthids - See Folder 1

Serranidae - See Folder 7

Box 7	
Box 7 of 9	Folder 1 Drawings of Balistids and Monacanthids
Box 7 of 9	Folder 2 Drawings of Clupeoids (two drawings removed to Box 8)
Box 7 of 9	Folder 3 Drawings of Eels
Box 7 of 9	Folder 4 Drawings of Eptatretus
Box 7 of 9	Folder 5 Drawings of Exocoetus Brachypterus (two drawings removed to Box 8)
Box 7 of 9	Folder 6 Drawings of Ostracions
Box 7 of 9	Folder 7 Drawings of Pempherids, Kubliidae, and Serranidae (drawing removed to Box 8)
Box 7 of 9	Folder 8 Drawings of Pleurnectids (drawing removed to Box 8)
Box 7 of 9	Folder 9 Drawings of Scombroids (drawing removed to Box 8)
Box 7 of 9	Folder 10 Drawings of Symentognathi (two drawings removed to Box 8)
Box 7 of 9	Folder 11 Miscellaneous drawings (12 drawings removed to Box 9)
Box 8	
Box 8 of 9	Drawings relocated from Boxes 6 and 7

Box 9

Box 9 of 9

Drawings pulled from Box 7, Folder 11 for display in America's
Smithsonian exhibit (drawings are mounted in archival enclosures),
figures: 40, 43, 44, 44a, 47, 48, 50, 51, 53, 56, 58, 59

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