

Diary, photographs and related material of Lieutenant Dabney Scales and the *Shenandoah*

Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 15779

Acquired 2016

In February 1865 Lieutenant Dabney Scales, ships officer on the American Confederate warship CSS *Shenandoah*, wrote of Melbourne society:

Passing over the long drive to Melbourne ... we were ushered by our host into the little parlour, where a quadrill was just being formed ... The music was not very good for dancing, and the dancing, that is the gallops, ... were not good for either music or dancers ... [W]e amused ourselves either in listening to songs from some of the gentlemen or in chatting (chaffing) on the veranda ... with Miss H. to keep me company.¹

The *Shenandoah* was a feared commerce raider in the Confederate navy. Between 1864 and 1865 it captured 38 Union merchant vessels and fired the last shot of the American Civil War. One wonders how an officer from this warship found himself enjoying the company of Melbourne society.

The *Shenandoah* entered Port Phillip Bay unannounced on 25 January 1865, where it undertook repairs until 18 February. Local sympathy for the Confederate cause was high; more than 7000 Melburnians visited the ship at Williamstown, and its officers were invited to numerous social functions, including a grand ball held at Craig's Hotel in Ballarat. The *Shenandoah's* stay was a diplomatic challenge for the Victorian government; its official position was to strictly observe Britain's neutrality in the American conflict. The United States Consul protested and there were tense moments when *Shenandoah's* captain refused entry to Victorian authorities who wanted to find out if Australians were aboard the ship. The authorities' suspicions were confirmed when, shortly after the ship set sail, 42 stowaways appeared, much to the 'surprise' of officers.

The visit of the *Shenandoah* represents the only link between an Australian colony and the American Civil War. Dabney Scales' diary was concealed in the disbound journal of a captured whaling ship and, while some of its 104 pages are charred and worn, it is in good condition given that it circumnavigated the globe.

With its easy to read cursive script, the diary, purchased with photographs and other material through the support of the State Library Victoria Foundation and Copland Foundation, provides a unique insight into both the workings of the ship and the period it spent moored in Port Phillip. It also provides a fascinating snapshot of how sections of Melbourne society viewed the American Civil War.

Confederate States SS Shenandoah. *Continued*

March 23^d. 1865. At Sea - South Pacific Lat 5° 43' S Long 175° 46' W
 My last blankbook (containing my journal from
 1864 to 15th Feb. 1865) gave out to day, and
 as I had no other, Brimball kindly offers me this one
 captured with the Yankee whaling bark Commodore
 off Tristan da Cunha on the day following the last date on
 the other page. At present I am very much behind
 with my journal, and am now copying from notes
 made at Melbourne. The last page of my other volume
 leaves the ship on the patent slip at Williamstown, near
 Melbourne, Australia -

On the afternoon of the 23rd, while Whittle & the Capt were
 ashore (and Brimball in charge) a police officer came on board
 with a warrant for the arrest of one Charlie, who he alleged
 was shipped on board & acting on the capacity of ship's cook.
 Brimball assured him that there was no such man on the
 articles, further more that we knew the law on the subject,
 and had shipped no one since the ship had been in English
 waters. I got the ship's articles and showed them to him that there
 might be no room for doubt on the subject. He then asked if
 he might take a look to see if the man was forward among the crew.
 This, of course, Brimball peremptorily refused, saying that
 our flag covered Confederate soil, and that so soon as he
 set his foot upon the deck of the vessel, he was no longer
 upon English but Confederate territory. He seemed considerably
 taken aback at this, and said that he could only await for
 their instructions from Melbourne. *Mandement à propos
 de Charlie. J'avais eu, quelques jours au pavillon, un cuisinier
 abord, qui s'occupait de la cuisine, mais je savais bien que, et le
 commandant, et le commandant signaient. Et je savais aussi
 que cet individu n'avait pas signé, et que jamais il n'avait
 hâte de signer aux officiers. Le Mandat d'arrêt. Mandat
 en français appelé Charlie, qui avait sans renseignements, avait
 puissance pour arrêter un homme, et cet individu avait
 signé, et signé abord le navire. Donc, ce ne pouvait pas
 être lui.*

Feb. 14th, the day following, the same officer came aboard
 in the morning to see the Capt, making the same request -
 search the ship - and received à peu près the same answer.

Entry for 23 March 1865, describing the Shenandoah berthing at Williamstown, from the diary of Lieutenant Dabney Scales, CSS Shenandoah. Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 15779