

Finding Aid

The Saga of the USS *Saginaw* Gig

Kaua'i Historical Society

MS 55

The Saga of the USS *Saginaw* Gig

Abstract

This compilation of materials follows the voyage of the USS *Saginaw* on her final mission – to transport personnel and provide assistance for an improvement project at Midway Atoll. The island had become a United States possession in 1869, the harbor area named Welles Harbor, after the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, by Captain Reynolds during his visit there on the USS *Lackawanna*. In 1870, the U.S. Congress approved \$50,000 to improve the entrance channel to Sand Island.

The party of sailors and contractors aboard the *Saginaw* began their endeavor to blast, dredge and widen the opening in the reef, arriving there on March 9, 1870. While some progress was made, solid limestone in the reef caused cancellation of the project, due to estimated cost to complete the entrance. The *Saginaw* made four voyages back to Honolulu, a voyage of about 1300 miles each way, leaving Midway for the last time on October 28, with men and equipment for the voyage back to Honolulu, Captain Sicard charting a course for Ocean Island, 55 miles to the northwest. Now known as Kure Atoll, the island was a sanctuary for marooned sailors.

Early on the morning of October 29, the ship wrecks on the reef. Aboard are 14 officers, 52 enlisted men, 10 marines, and 17 contractors. At dawn, the salvage operation began, with all hands removing equipment and supplies from the vessel, and “Camp Saginaw” was established. Supplies included food for about four months for the group; sails and lumber from the ship provided shelter; and fresh water was obtained by using the salvaged boiler from the wreck to distill salt water.

The *Saginaw's* Gig, a 30-foot whaleboat, was rebuilt to make the voyage to Honolulu for help. Five volunteers, including the executive officer, Lieutenant John Talbot, provisioned for just over a month, set sail on November 18, 1870, leaving behind 88 men awaiting rescue. Seeking the westerly winds, the Gig headed northeast. After three storms and 25 days at sea, the provisions were gone, and the Gig was off course. After sighting Kaula Rock, 23 miles from Ni'ihau, Talbot changed course and headed for Kaua'i.

Late on December 18th, the Gig was in heavy seas off Hanalei Bay. While awaiting daylight to enter the bay, the Gig drifted down the eastern coast, capsizing on the reef at Kalihikai, near Anini Beach. As day broke, William Halford awoke on the sand, and began the search for other survivors. He was found by Peter Nowleins, who assisted Halford, as well as Mrs. Julia Bindt, who tended to his wounds. Sheriff Samuel Wilcox was summoned from Hanalei, and by the time he arrived, two bodies (James Muir and John Talbot) had washed ashore. John Andrews body came the next day, but Peter Francis was never found. On December 24th Halford arrived in Honolulu, seeking assistance from Henry A. Peirce, the U.S. Representative to the Sandwich Islands. The same day, the schooner Kona Packet, was provisioned and set sail for Kure Atoll. King Kamehameha V dispatched the royal steamer *Kilauea*, under Captain Thomas Long, on December 25th.

Arriving at Kure on January 4, 1871, the *Kilauea* took 88 survivors aboard; the Kona Packet arrived the next day. After their arrival in Honolulu, the remaining crew sailed for San Francisco on January 28, arriving there on February 8, 1871.

Scope and Content

Paul Nichtman, researching naval history, has compiled a collection of materials on the *USS Saginaw* which begins with her construction in 1858, outlines earlier voyages, and details the final voyage and rescue. After extensive research, Nichtman arranged articles, reports, drawings, and local accounts found in the early papers of the Kaua'i Historical Society into a presentation which took place on July 24, 2008.

Included in the collection are biographical data on officers, as well as Kaua'i residents who encountered the sole survivor. There is additional information on the more recent discovery of the wreck itself, and the relics which are now on display from the *Saginaw*. A time line and calendar assists the user in keeping the data in chronological order.

A copy of Mr. Nitchman's presentation video completes the collection.

Donated to the Kaua'i Historical Society by Paul Nitchman 2006, additional materials added later
Processed by Marylou Bradley with the assistance of Sharon Cloud, 2011, with support provided by the
Hawaii State Foundation for Culture and the Arts

Container List

Box File

- 1 1 *USS Saginaw* – The Ship
Drawing: U S Steamer *Saginaw* / Navy Yard Mare Island, April 1863
Saginaw [historical data] from Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships Vol. VI R-S, p. 230
Side elevation of XI-inch gun carriage and slide / from 1866
Ordnance Manual
[Drawing, gun detail]
Saginaw log, 1 page dated October 29, 1870
- 2 *USS Saginaw* – Time line
Time line 1858-2010, prepared by P. Nitchman, 9/1/2010
Calendar 1870-1871, prepared by P. Nitchman, 3/12/2009
- 3 Personnel
Appendix: [List of Personnel] from The Last Cruise of the Saginaw
by George H. Read; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912
p. 126-128 and “The Wreck” p.12-13
USS Saginaw Lists of : Officers, enlisted personnel on board October 29, 1870;
Contractors on board, December 26, 1871. Prepared by
Paul Nitchman, 7/10/2010
- 4 Principals: Biographies and obituaries
Composite photographs:
Sicard, Talbot, Halford, Wilcox, Long, Peirce and Kamehameha V
USS Talbot; *USS Sicard*; *USS Halford*
Montgomery Sicard – biography
John Gunnel Talbot – biography / source: <http://famousamericans.net>
William Halford – biography / source: <http://www.history.navy.mil>
and photograph: *USS Benicia* photo by Bradley & Rulofson;
biography, provided by Val John Halford, relative /source:
<http://bobrosser.tripod.com>
Thomas Long – biography / source: <http://www.findagrave.com>
with additional notations added by Paul Nitchman
Henry A. Peirce – biography / source: <http://en.wikipedia.org>
biography / photocopy, source not noted; biographical notes /
“The Hanama’ulu Experience: Chronology” source:
<http://poipuwebdesigns.tripod.com>
Kamehameha V – biography / source: <http://en.wikipedia.org>
John Mortimer Lydgate II – biography / prepared by Paul Nitchman
Samuel W. Wilcox – photograph and biography / source not given;
biography / from Abner Wilcox and Lucy Elizabeth Wilcox:
a genealogy of their family in Hawaii, Honolulu, 1950

Box File

- 1 4 Principals (continued)
Edward Johnson and Lois S. Hoyt Johnson – biographies / from
Missionary Album : portraits and biographical sketches of the American
Protestant Missionaries to the Hawaiian Islands Honolulu: Hawaiian
Mission Childrens' Society, 1969 p. 124
George Henry Read / service record and photograph / source not given
Perry Garst – biography / source not given
James Kelsey Cogswell – biography / source not given
George W. Townsend – obituary / from *The New York Times* September
21, 1902
Henry C. Blye – obituary / from *The New York Times* February 24, 1922
James Butterworth – obituary / source not given
- 5 Bibliography / prepared by Paul Nitchman, 7/12/2010
- 6 The Mission
Funds appropriation, 1870 / source: PDF file, p.22 www.fws.gov/midway
Item from Report of the Secretary of the Navy, p. 216 date not noted
Item from Report of the Secretary of the Navy, p. 225-6, April 4, 1870
- 7 Report of the Secretary of the Navy on the loss of the *USS Saginaw*
dated November 15, 1870-January 27, 1871 / pp. 207-215
- 8 Court of Inquiry / Loss of the *USS Saginaw* February 1871
- 9 Midway Islands
“Midway Islands History” / source: <http://www.janeresture.com>
Aerial photograph / source: Google Earth
- 10 Kure Island
“Kure Island” / source: <http://www.janeresture.com>
Composite photograph: Camp Saginaw at Kure Atoll October 1870
thru January 1871 / prepared by Paul Nitchman
“Polynesian Rats” / source: <http://www.extension.org>
- 11 Northwest Hawaiian Islands
Map / source not given
- 12 Voyage of the *USS Saginaw* Gig
“History of the *Saginaw's* Gig / composite photograph prepared by
Paul Nitchman
Map of the voyage entitled “The Cruise of the *Saginaw* Gig”
source not noted

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| 1 | 12 | <p>Voyage (continued)</p> <p>Drift of the <i>Saginaw</i> Gig / as shown on a map of the Hanalei coastline area</p> <p>Kaula Rock, Ni'ihau / article from the Offshore Island Restoration Committee, Hawaiian Islands / source: http://www.botany.hawaii.edu</p> |
| 13 | | <p><i>Kilauea</i></p> <p>Drawing of the <i>Kilauea</i></p> <p>Log of the <i>Kilauea</i> / source: http://library.mysticseaport.org pages 1-7</p> <p>"The Trip of the "<i>Kilauea</i>" / from the <i>Honolulu Advertiser</i> January 21, 1971</p> |
| 14 | | <p>Hanalei and Kalihikai locals involved in the <i>Saginaw</i> Gig incident</p> <p>December 19-21, 1870 / prepared by Paul Nitchman 4/21/2009</p> |
| 15 | | <p>NOAA / National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration</p> <p>NOAA History / source: http://www.history.noaa.gov</p> <p>NOAA Ship <i>Hi'ialakai</i> / source: http://www.moc.noaa.gov</p> <p>"Historic Hawai'i wreck found" / source: <i>Honolulu Advertiser</i> October 18, 2003</p> |
| 16 | | <p>Notes and Capt. Halford interviewed by J.M. Lydgate</p> |
| 17 | | <p>Articles from books and magazines</p> <p>"The <i>Saginaw's</i> Gig / being the account of an heroic adventure amid the Pacific's lonely islands" by Victor Slocum / from <i>The Rudder</i> January 1933</p> <p>"The Wreck of the <i>Saginaw</i>" / source : Vallejo Museum (possibly contributed by Andrew I. McKee, 1896-1976, served at Mare Island Shipyard, 1934-38)</p> <p>"Strong Man of the <i>Saginaw</i> / shipwreck off Ocean Island provides a saga of indomitable courage" by A. Grove Day / from <i>American Heritage</i> New Series V.2 no. 3, Spring 1951, p.13-15</p> <p>"1870 The Cruise of the <i>Saginaw</i> Gig" / from <u><i>Sea Fights and Shipwrecks / True Tales of the Seven Seas</i></u> by Hanson W. Baldwin; New York: Hanover House, 1955 p.102-120 (bibliography of author included)</p> <p><u><i>Kauai / the Separate Kingdom</i></u> by Edward Joesting; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984. p.212-213 and chapter notes from appendices</p> <p><u><i>A Glorious Page in Our History / The Battle of Midway 4-6 June 1942</i></u> Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., 1990 p.2-3</p> <p>"Saga of the <i>Saginaw</i>" by James Murray / source: http://www.navsup.navy.mil</p> <p>"Saga of the <i>Saginaw</i>" by Scot MacDonald / from <i>Surface Warfare Magazine</i> November 1980 p. 10-16</p> <p><u><i>A Long Line of Ships / Mare Island's Century of Naval Activity in California</i></u> by Arnold S. Lott : Annapolis : U.S. Naval Academy, 1954</p> <p>"First Ship Built at Mare Island : <i>U.S.S. Saginaw</i>" photograph; pp. 54-58; pp. 108-109</p> |

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Articles (continued)

"The Wreck of the *Saginaw* / Heroism on the high seas!" / from
O'ahu Cemetery Burial Ground & Historic Site by Nanette Napoleon
 Purnell : Honolulu : O'ahu Cemetery Association, 1995 pp.50-55

"Bright Lookout on a Dark Night, the Loss of the *Saginaw*" by Hans Van
 Tilburg from *Sea History Magazine* No. 112 Autumn 2005 pp. 8-11

"How the United States Ship *Saginaw* was lost on the Ocean Island Reef"
 from *The Sun* / Baltimore, October 17, 1909 2d section p.13

"Narrative of William Halford – Only Survivor of the Gig of the *Saginaw*"
 U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, v.61 no. 391 September 1935
 p.1287-1297

American Polynesia and the Hawaiian Chain by Edwin H. Bryan, Jr.
 Honolulu, HI : Tongg Publishing Company, 1942. Chapter 56:
 "Kure Island"

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Articles from books and magazines (continued)

"The *Saginaw* : A Correct Account of the Event" published in *The Daily Herald*
 September 25, 1909

Report of the Secretary of the Navy, dated April 18, 1871; May 13, 1871; May 1, 1871;
 April 29, 1871. Various communications regarding Captain Thomas Long
 who commanded the *Kilauea* during the rescue

Castaway Boats by Captain Victor Slocum. New York: Sheridan House, 2001
 Chapter 8 : "The *Saginaw's* Crew" p. 156-178

"Rescue Miracle Miles from Civilization" by Jim Flannery. *Soundings Magazine*
 posted online May 28, 2009

"The Wreck of the United States Sidewheel Steamer *Saginaw*" by Steve C.
 D'Antonio. *Nautical World Magazine*, v.2 no.3, February 1999

Last Cruise of the *Saginaw* by George H. Read. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company,
 1912. Various pages

"The Steamer *Saginaw* – Details of the Wreck of the Steamer on Ocean Island"
The New York Times January 12, 1871 p.1 and "The Loss of the *Saginaw*"
 January 17, 1871

"The Shipwrecked Crew" *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser* January 18, 1871

"The Saga of the *USS Saginaw* Gig; a Tale of Iron Men in Wooden Ships" by
 Paul Nitchman. *Channel Crossings Magazine* no. 16, Spring 2010

"*USS Saginaw* – Kure Atoll" Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National
 Monument Maritime History www.hawaiiireef.noaa.gov/maritime/saginaw

"Welcome Kure Island" published by the Hawaiian Regional Directory
www.janeresture.com/kure

"Mission Log: July 1, 2006 Mapping Continues at Kure Atoll" by Kelly Gleason
 published by the National Marine Sanctuaries
www.sanctuaries.noaa.gov/missions/2006nwhi/log_070106

"Shoretime Shorts" by Ray Coll, Jr. *The Honolulu Advertiser* October 8 & 9, 1935

"A Wreck and a Rescue (a true story)" by William D. Stevens *St. Nichols: an
 illustrated magazine for young children* v.35 pt.1 Nov. 1907-April 1908
 p.533-35 (includes bibliography of the author)