

National Archives at Atlanta

The *Clotilda*: A Finding Aid

Built and licensed in Mobile, Alabama in 1855, the *Clotilda* (or *Clotilde*) was a two-masted schooner that measured eighty six feet long by twenty three feet wide. She had a copper hull and measured 120 tons. According to the records, the ship's first voyage transporting cargo was on January 25, 1856, when she departed for Havana, Cuba carrying 70,000 feet of lumber. Throughout the next four years, the *Clotilda* continued to ferry goods between Mobile, domestic ports in Texas and Louisiana, and foreign ports in Cuba and Mexico, establishing itself as a reliable cargo vessel.

The *Clotilda*, commanded by Captain Foster, entered Mobile Bay on July 7, 1860 carrying 103 slaves from "a foreign kingdom, place, or country" fifty-two years after the United States legally abolished the international slave trade. The information given in the Final Record Book lists 103 slaves, followed by "more or less," as well as the date of July 7, 1860. Several books and other publications have referenced sources that list 110 slaves and give some alternate dates: July 8 and July 9 of the same year, as well as autumn of 1859. This would make the *Clotilda* the last known ship to bring slaves to the U.S., unloading her cargo just over eighteen months after the *Wanderer* landed at Jekyll Island, Georgia.

While they do not appear to be members of the crew or sponsors of the ship, Burns Meaher and John Dabney "reserved" a number of the slaves prior to their importation and acquired them when they arrived in Mobile. The first summonses and writs of seizure for Meaher and Dabney were issued on July 27, 1860; however, the orders were not executed until December 17 and 20 1860, respectively, by giving the defendants the information verbally. The returns for both writs of seizure yielded a predictable result: the slaves were not found. Thus, the cases against Meaher and Dabney were dismissed on January 10, 1861, just months prior to the start of the Civil War. Of note, John M. Dabney appears again in the Mobile Circuit Court records in 1876 for a criminal violation of the Enforcement Acts (1870-71).

These records in the custody of the National Archives at Atlanta provide a cursory account of the *Clotilda* and its role in this significant event in U.S. history. There have been several books and articles published that offer more details about the ship's owner, its voyage to Africa, the land of the slaves' origin, their lives as slaves, and their post-emancipation lives in Mobile.

U.S. Circuit Court, Mobile, AL
Mixed Cases, 1837 – 1860
Case #3516
AS 08/11/04, Box 57

U.S. vs. William Foster and Richard Sheridan, 1859-1860

- U.S. Attorney A.J. Requier requesting from the defendants a list of the names, dates of birth, residences, and description of the personnel who arrived on the *Clotilda* with them
- Formal summons for several men of the crew

U.S. District Court, Mobile, AL
Mixed Cases, 1837 – 1860
Case #2619 & #2621
AS 08/10/13, Box 66

#2619

U.S. vs. John M. Dabney

- Describes charges against Dabney and commands the seizure of forty illegally imported slaves: ten men, ten women, ten boys, and ten girls

#2621

U.S. vs. William Foster

- Written record of the charges against Foster and \$1000.00 fine

U.S. District Court, Mobile, AL
Final Record Book, 1859 – 1860
S.O. 016
Ret #: S-23
Pages: 270-274
AP 19/14/01

U.S. vs. Burns Meaher

- Gives Summons, Information, Judge's Order, Writ of Seizure, and Dismissal of the case

U.S. vs. John Dabney

- Gives Information, Judge's Order, Summons, Writ of Seizure, and Dismissal of the case

U.S. District Court, Mobile, AL
Minute Book, 1836 – 1866
Ret #: S-130
Pages: 398-400
AP 19/15/01

U.S. vs. Byrnes Meaher, U.S. vs. John Dabney, and U.S. vs. William Foster

- December 1860 Contains brief notation that cases for Meaher, Dabney, and Foster would be continued
- January 10, 1861 Contains brief notation that cases for Meaher and Dabney would be dismissed and the case against Foster would be continued

U.S. District Court, Mobile, AL
Admiralty Docket Book, 1841 – 1866
Ret #: S-38
AP 19/14/01

U.S. vs. William Foster

- December term 1860, Information for breach of laws of U.S. continued
- December term 1865, lists case name
- March term 1866, lists case name
- April term 1866, lists case name

U.S. Customs Service, Mobile, AL
Coasting Licenses over 20 Tons, v. 9, 1848 – 1859
Collector of Customs
S.O. 157
CP 01/05/06

Vessel License for Schooner *Clotilda*, 1855
License #24

- Image of document online: <http://www.archives.gov/southeast/exhibit/2.php>

U.S. Customs Service, Mobile, AL
Cargo Manifests, 1822 - 1905
AC 06/33/04

After she was licensed in 1855, the *Clotilda* became a busy cargo ship, transporting goods and supplies between Mobile and other ports in the United States, Mexico, and Cuba. These records are tri-fold cargo manifests which give information about these voyages: date, port of departure, port of destination, master, owner, and cargo description. There are also Crew Lists which name the members of the crew, their place of birth, place of residence, age, and physical description. These records are also a good source for comparing the shipping exploits of the *Clotilda* to her peer ships from Mobile during this era. The records are not arranged chronologically within each box; however, each box contains records from the same year. Some boxes have tabs which separate the manifests by month.

Box 69

- 1/25/1856, departed Mobile for Havana, Cuba carrying a large cargo of lumber. This could be the ship's maiden voyage, as it represents the first record of it carrying cargo out of Mobile.
 - o This, and all the 1856 manifests, lists William Foster as the Shipper/Owner and Captain Russell as Master of the ship.

Box 70

- 2/22/1856, arrived in Mobile from Havana carrying a cargo of sugar, plantains, beef, etc.
- 7/14/1856, departed Mobile for Tampico, Mexico carrying lumber.

Box 71

- 6/23/1856, arrived Mobile from Tampico carrying bread, beef, and bacon.
- 8/28/1856, arrived Mobile from Tampico carrying spices, beef, and flour.

Box 74

- 5/23/1856, departed Mobile for Tampico carrying lumber.
- 9/13/1856, departed Mobile for Brazos Santiago, TX carrying lumber.

Box 75

- 11/15/1857, departed Mobile for the port of Franklin, LA on the Bayou Teche carrying lumber and salt.
 - o This manifest is interesting in that the Shipper and Master listed are different from those listed on the 1856 manifests. This shows Sands (sp?) and Co. and James Hall as Shippers and James A. Wright as Master.

Box 76

- 8/28/1857, departed Mobile for Tampico. Instead of a cargo manifest, this is a List of Persons Composing the Crew. There are six crew member names listed, their place of birth, place of residence, age, and physical description.
 - o This manifest also lists James A. Wright as Master.
- 10/19/1857, arrived Mobile from Galveston, TX carrying ballasts (the only listed cargo). According to the manifest, the ship had departed Mobile on 9/5/1857, had also been to Brazos Santiago and departed Galveston on 10/5/1857, stopping through Port Isabel, TX before reaching Mobile.

Box 77

- 8/28/1857, departed Mobile for Tampico. This is the cargo manifest for this departure showing that the ship carried 72,000 feet of lumber.
- 6/17/1857, departed New Orleans for Mobile carrying ballasts. This lists William Foster as Master.

Box 80

- 3/11/1858, arrived Mobile from Attacopre (sp?) carrying molasses and sugar. The ship stopped in Franklin, LA on 2/25/1858 where the cargo was inventoried.

Box 81

- 1/4/1858, arrived Mobile from Bayou Teche carrying molasses and sugar. The ship stopped in Franklin, LA on 12/16/1857 where the cargo was inventoried.
- 4/12/1858, from the Collector's Office, District and Port of New York, a certificate stating that the crew aboard the ship corresponded to the crew list given to the Boarding Officer.

Box 82

- 4/12/1858, departed Mobile for Matanzas, Cuba carrying 66,325 feet of lumber.

Box 83

- 1/21/1858, departed Mobile for Franklin, LA carrying 79,500 feet of lumber.

Box 84

- 9/9/1859 arrived Mobile from Matagorda, TX carrying ballasts.

Box 85

- 10/24/1859 arrived Mobile from Brazos de Santiago carrying ballasts.
- 8/15/1859 departed Mobile for Matagorda, TX carrying 77,534 feet of lumber.

Box 86

- 9/26/1859 departed Mobile for Brazos de Santiago carrying 72,500 feet of lumber.
- 11/9/1859 departed Mobile for Galveston, TX carrying 70,100 feet of lumber.

Box 90

- 2/27/1860 crew list showing the eight crewmen on board bound for St. Thomas.
 - o Of note, William Foster is listed as the ship's master.

Box 93

- 2/27/1860 departed Mobile for "St. Thomas or a Market" carrying 41,000 feet of lumber, 18 barrels of whiskey, 75 barrels of flour, 46 barrels of beef, 74 barrels of bread.
 - o William Foster is the ship's master.
 - o This is the final manifest available for the *Clotilda* in this series.