

**Guide to the John Ericsson and Samuel Taylor Letters, 1887
MS0188**

**The Mariners' Museum Library
At
Christopher Newport University**

Contact Information:
The Mariners' Museum Library
100 Museum Drive
Newport News, VA 23606
Phone: (757) 591-7782
Fax: (757) 591-7310
Email: library@MarinersMuseum.org
URL: www.mariner.org/library

Processed by Bill Edwards-Bodmer, 2010

DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

Repository: The Mariners' Museum Library
Title: John Ericsson and Samuel Taylor Letters
Inclusive Dates: 1887
Catalog number: MS0188
Physical Characteristics: 3 letters
Language: English
Creators: Ericsson, John, 1803-1889; Taylor, Samuel W.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Ericsson was born in the province of Vermland, Sweden, on July 31, 1803. The son of a mining engineer, Ericsson showed an early interest in mechanics. By the age of ten, he had designed and constructed a miniature sawmill and by 13, he was a cadet in the Swedish navy. By the age of 17, he entered the Swedish army, joining as an ensign in the 23rd. Corps, a specialized engineering unit for the army. While serving in the army, Ericsson became interested in steam engines and developed the theory for his caloric engine, which operated on the principle that air heated to very high temperature could be used to drive engines.

In 1826 Ericsson published a paper on his work to develop a caloric engine. That year he demonstrated his invention to the British Society of Civil Engineers. Although the engine failed in the demonstration, Ericsson impressed the English engineer John Braithwaite. Braithwaite was impressed with the young Swede's determination and offered him a position as a partner in his firm. In the ten years that Braithwaite and Ericsson worked together they developed some 30 new inventions, including an evaporator, a depth finder, a series of improved engines, and a steam engine with a surface condenser.

By 1836, Ericsson had patented a design for the screw propeller. An American naval officer, Robert Stockton, was impressed with Ericsson's propeller and persuaded him to immigrate to the United States. In 1839, with Stockton's influence, Ericsson was awarded a contract to build a screw-propelled warship for the United States Navy. Launched in 1843, the USS *Princeton* was the first warship in naval history to be designed and built as a screw-powered ship. During the ship's trials in 1844, one of the guns exploded killing several dignitaries on board. Efforts by the Navy to assign the blame to Ericsson, led the engineer to redirect his creativity into civilian fields.

By June 1862, Confederate forces started the conversion of the USS *Merrimack* into the CSS *Virginia*. Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, countered with the creation of a board to build an ironclad vessel. After presentations and negotiations, Ericsson's design of the USS *Monitor* was accepted. *Monitor's* successful battle with the Confederate ironclad *Virginia* on March 9, 1862, made Ericsson a hero in the North. Throughout the rest of the Civil War, Ericsson was involved in the design and construction of a number of ironclad monitor type vessels of the United States Navy.

After the Civil War, Ericsson continued his work on maritime and naval technology. He designed ships for foreign navies, experimented with submarines and self-propelled torpedoes, and worked on technologies as exotic as solar energy. Ericsson continued to work on his invention until his death in New York City on March 8, 1889. In August 1890, following a memorial service at New York, his body was placed on board the cruiser *Baltimore*, which carried him across the Atlantic to his native Sweden for burial.

Samuel W. Taylor was Ericsson's personal secretary for twenty-seven years, beginning in 1862 as a copy clerk and then becoming his private secretary in 1864. Taylor and Ericsson became very close, with Taylor acting as gateway to the outside world as Ericsson became increasingly reclusive. Nearly all communication from Ericsson to others went through Taylor. Likewise, Taylor alerted Ericsson to events of the outside world that would interest him.

Further biographical information on Taylor is scarce.

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

This collection consists of three letters. Two of the letters were written by Ericsson's secretary, Samuel W. Taylor, to F.H. Pierce, Esq. and refer to an inquiry made by Pierce to obtain an autograph of John Ericsson. The third letter was written by Ericsson to Taylor, and was sent to Pierce by Taylor as an Ericsson autograph. The Ericsson letter refers to a gift of \$10.00 that Ericsson sent to Taylor's sons to purchase fireworks for the Fourth of July. This letter provides a glimpse of the gentler side of Ericsson, a characteristic for which the *Monitor*-builder was not necessarily known.

The letters are organized into a single folder and arranged chronologically.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Accession Number

CA1

Accession Date

Before 1941

Restrictions

The collection is open to all researchers.

Publication Rights

Copies of any materials may not be reproduced, published, or distributed in any form without the expressed permission of The Mariners' Museum.

Preferred Citation

John Ericsson and Samuel Taylor Letters, 1887, MS0188, The Mariners' Museum Library

Note to Users

Due to the fragile and rare nature of the collection, researchers are requested to handle the materials with caution and in accordance with prescribed archival practices. When using these materials, please preserve the original order of the collection.

FILE GUIDE

Folder 1 Correspondence, 1887

July 2, 1887

One page letter written in pencil from John Ericsson to S.W. Taylor, with which Ericsson enclosed a gift of \$10.00 for Taylor's sons for the purchase of fireworks for the Fourth of July.

September 14, 1887: New York

One page letter written in ink from S.W. Taylor to F.H. Pierce, Esq., in which Taylor refers to Pierce's request for an Ericsson autograph and offers to send Ericsson's July 2 letter as a souvenir. Taylor quotes Ericsson's letter verbatim.

September 15, 1887: New York

Two page letter written in ink from S.W. Taylor to F.H. Pierce, Esq., in which Taylor encloses Ericsson's July 2 letter as a souvenir. Taylor also describes a softer and gentler side of Ericsson.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Church, William Conant. *The Life of John Ericsson*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907.

Thulesius, Olav. *The Man Who Made the Monitor: A Biography of John Ericsson, Naval Engineer*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2007.

SUBJECTS

Ericsson, John, 1803-1889

Ericsson, John, 1803-1889-Autographs

Fourth of July celebrations-New York