

**Guide to the Dabney Minor Scales Letter, 1862 July 31  
MS0318**

**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](mailto:library@MarinersMuseum.org)**  
**URL: [www.MarinersMuseum.org/library](http://www.MarinersMuseum.org/library)**

Processed by Jay E. Moore, 2012

## DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

**Repository:** The Mariners' Museum Library

**Title:** Dabney Minor Scales Letter

**Inclusive Dates:** 1862 July 31

**Catalog number:** MS0318

**Physical Characteristics:** 1 transcript and 1 stat (copy) of a letter (correspondence)

**Language:** English

**Creator:** Scales, D. M. (Dabney Minor), 1841-1920

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dabney Minor Scales was born on June 1, 1841, near Holly Springs, Mississippi. His father Peter was a planter and was descended from a family which settled in colonial Virginia and North Carolina. He was appointed to the US Naval Academy and was in his last year at the Academy at the outbreak of the Civil War. He joined the Confederate Navy at the rank of midshipman and served initially on CSS *Savannah* in 1861 and 1862 and then on CSS *Capitol* on the Mississippi River. *Capitol* burned on 28 June 1862 and was sunk as an obstruction on the Yazoo River.

Scales was serving as a lieutenant aboard the CSS *Arkansas* at the time he wrote the letter in this collection in July 1862. CSS *Arkansas* was a twin-screw ironclad ram, whose construction was delayed by shortages of the war. Though construction began in late 1861, it was May 1862 when Lt. Isaac Newton Brown took command and supervised her completion. On July 14 she headed towards Memphis, intending to stop in Vicksburg for supplies. On her way down the Yazoo River she encountered the Union ironclad gunboat *Carondelet* accompanied by the side-wheel gunboat *Tyler* and the side-wheel ram *Queen of the West* coming up the river on a reconnaissance mission. The ensuing fierce action ended with *Carondelet* being disabled and forced ashore. *Arkansas* ran through fire from the Union fleet and found refuge under the Vicksburg batteries in a heavily damaged condition and with many casualties. On July 22 while anchored off Vicksburg, she was attacked by *Queen of the West* and the ironclad *Essex* but managed to withstand the assault. Finally on August 6, in a final encounter with *Essex* near Baton Rouge, she was unable to escape and was set on fire to avoid capture.

After the surrender of Vicksburg, Scales made his way to Port Huron, LA, and there manned a battery. He was appointed passed midshipman. He saw service protecting blockade runners along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts on the Confederate ironclad *Atlanta* off Savannah, GA between December 1862 and April 1863. He then was assigned to Europe and spent time in London and Paris regarding the outfitting and manning of ships constructed in England for the Confederacy. Finally in 1865, he served as Fifth Lieutenant on CSS *Shenandoah*.

After the Civil War, Scales went to Mexico for several months before returning to Mississippi. He began practicing law in 1869 in Memphis, TN, and married Mrs. W.D. Powell in Nashville, TN. They had 3 children. He was elected to the Tennessee legislature and served in the Senate. In 1884 he became a member of the Memphis

Confederate Historical Association and, as its president, was consequently Commander of Camp 28 of the United Confederate Veterans. He was commissioned into the United States Navy as a lieutenant during the Spanish-American War and was engaged in sea service during the entire conflict. He died on May 26, 1920.

### **SCOPE AND CONTENT**

The collection consists of a Photostat copy and a typed transcript of a four-page letter from Confederate midshipman Dabney Minor Scales aboard CSS *Arkansas* to his father Peter Scales, in which he details the events in July 1862 on the Mississippi River. These actions include details of the July 22<sup>nd</sup> attack on *Arkansas* by *Essex* and *Queen of the West*. He also writes about the capture of a Union transport carrying military mails, and expresses his satisfaction and pride at the reports Union naval officers and sailors were sending home about the bravery of the *Arkansas* during the fight on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Scales says that they “give us credit for the most daring deed performed during the war...” These stand in marked contrast to letters he saw that were written for publication, which he called “an infamous pack of lies.” The letter also contains both a small diagram of the river at Vicksburg and a sketch of the *Arkansas*, presumably done by Scales.

The collection is organized into 1 folder.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

#### **Accession Number**

CA60

#### **Accession Date**

1961

#### **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**

Dabney Minor Scales Letter, 1862 July 31, MS0318, 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.

## RELATED MATERIALS

The holder of the original letter is unknown.

Three other repositories hold correspondence or diaries of Dabney Minor Scales. The Library of Congress has letters from Scales to John Grimball in the John Grimball Papers, 1853-1918. Duke University's Rubenstein Library holds Scales's diary that he kept aboard CSS *Atlanta* in 1862-63. The Memphis Public Library & Information Center houses Photostats of 4 letters from Scales to his father Peter, including another Photostat of the July 31, 1862 letter referenced in this finding aid.

## FILE GUIDE

### BOX 1

**Folder 1**        Correspondence, 1862  
                  July 31, 1862: Confederate Steamer *Arkansas* off Vicksburg

                  Transcript of letter

## SOURCES CONSULTED

“Genealogy - Obituary of Dabney Minor Scales - W. D. Powell - Yate Wellford - G. W. Winchester - Memphis, Tennessee.”

[http://www.confederatevets.com/documents/scales\\_tn\\_cv\\_11\\_20\\_ob.shtml](http://www.confederatevets.com/documents/scales_tn_cv_11_20_ob.shtml)

(accessed May 3, 2012).

Fowler, William M., Jr. *Under Two Flags: the American Navy in the Civil War*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990.

## SUBJECTS

Arkansas (Ironclad ram : 1862)

Queen of the West (Sidewheel ram : 1862)

Essex (Gunboat : 1862)

United States-History-Civil War, 1861-1865-Naval operations, Confederate

United States-History-Civil War, 1861-1865-Naval operations

United States. Navy-Officers-Correspondence

Sailors-United States-Correspondence