

Key West's Oldest House Newsletter

September 2018

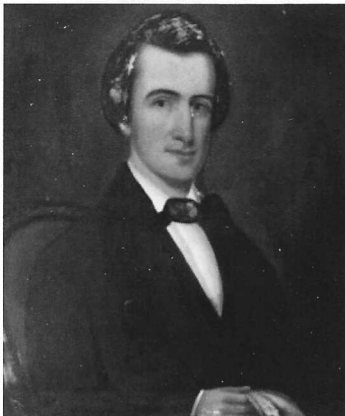
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Who was William Henry Ward?

Researched and written by Karl Reutling

During our archiving activities, Karl Reutling unearthed a truly priceless document: the handwritten journal of William Ward, accounting for some of his travels as a young Navy midshipman. Below is a brief overview of his life, much of which has been extracted from this journal.

When we began updating the genealogy of the Watlington Johnson family who resided in the Oldest House, a few pieces of information mentioned William H. Ward. We knew that the third daughter of Francis and Emeline Watlington, Emeline Frances, had been married twice. Family history had it that her first husband, a "Wm. H. Ward" died during the Civil War (1861-1865). His portrait remained in the family, and descendants donated it to The Oldest House when 322 Duval Street became a museum. That's all we knew. So, who was he, where did he come from, what happened? In the past three years intensive research has been done on the family, and we now know much more about the enigmatic Mr. Ward. (A journal he kept, recently donated to OIRF by Mark Langley, helped answer some questions). It makes a very interesting story, a concise version we offer here.



Lt. William Henry Ward

William H. Ward was born about 1830 in Onondaga County, New York. He grew up in Syracuse. When he was but fifteen, he desired to become an officer in the U.S. Navy. With support from local leaders, he was appointed to the U. S. Navy School (later Academy) at Annapolis.

As a Midshipman he served on two warships, the ship of the line USS Ohio, and the sloop of war USS St. Marys, and participated in several operations during the Mexican-American War (1846-48). He sailed the north and south Atlantic Oceans, the

Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific Ocean. His time in the Navy spanned from 1845 to 1852 at which time he resigned his commission. Stepping ashore at Key West, he met young Emeline Frances Watlington. A very talented writer, he wrote a poem titled "My Emeline."

By 1857, Ward had revived the newspaper The Key To The Gulf and continued as Editor-publisher into 1861. In 1858 Emeline became Mrs. Ward. The married couple took residence at 322 Duval St., "The Oldest House." By early 1861, they had a daughter.

The Key to the Gulf newspaper advocated secession long before Florida's secession from the United States in January 1861. Ward was undoubtedly in league with his father-in-law Francis Watlington and well acquainted with lawyer and politician Stephen Mallory. As Key West stayed in control of the United States, Mr. Ward was warned by U.S. Army Major French more than once to cease the rebellious writings in the newspaper. He did not cease, and The Key to the Gulf was suppressed. William Ward then left Key West "Laying aside the weapon of the sage for that of a soldier, to try the issues... on the field of battle."

By 1862, Lt. William H. Ward was a Confederate States Naval officer engaged in the defense of New Orleans on the Mississippi River, serving on the unfinished ironclad CSS Louisiana. That gunboat was floated down the river, in among Union vessels by Fort St. Philip which were negotiating under the white flag of truce.

The Louisiana violently exploded; it appeared to be intentional. He was arrested and taken prisoner, accused of committing "an infamous act" by US Navy Commander David D. Porter. Ward and other rebel officers were transported to Ft. Warren, a prison in Boston harbor. By 1864, he had been paroled and prisoner-exchanged back to the Confederates. Serving on the commerce raider CSS Chickamauga, Lt. Ward became its last Captain. In early 1865, the Chickamauga was on Cape Fear River defending the port of Wilmington from Federal assault. It went up the river as the Union Navy advanced, incurring horrific casualties in the retreat. The main battery exploded. The cruiser was scuttled across a narrow part of the river, where it remains today. Lt. William Henry Ward was missing in action and presumed dead.

In 1866, young widow Emeline married widower Joseph Pilot Roberts. They enjoyed a good family life in Key West.

My Emeline

My Emeline! My bird of love!
My beautiful, my gentle dove!
Oh that again on rapture's wings
Thou to my heart set fluttering.

My Emeline, Sweet Emeline!
Where'er thou art, thou still art mine!
Though parting years between us roll,
No years can sever soul from soul.

My Emeline! The pain, the care,
The solitude, the soul's despair,
All I endure, one moment sweet
Repay the moment that we meet.

My Emeline! Though dark my lot,
So time be fair. I heed it not.
Midst fortune's storms I turn afar
To hail thy love, my only star!

My Emeline! If prayers be heard,
All bliss awaits my beauty's bird.
For by the heart that loves the best
I'll bless thee and thou shalt be blessed.

My Emeline! Though truth my fail,
Though friends be false, though love be frail
Though every heart may change but time
Forsake me not, Sweet Emeline.

William H. Ward

Are you a member of OIRF?

Through private donations and memberships from individuals, business, and public agencies we are working to raise funds to preserve and maintain the Oldest House in south Florida, provide innovative programming, and provide grants for significant and worthy historical restoration projects in Key West. You can help us make it happen here: www.oirf.org/join