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**The Maury Abstract Logs
1796-1861**



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Records of the Weather Bureau

Record Group 27

THE MAURY ABSTRACT LOGS
1796-1861

On the 88 rolls of this microfilm are reproduced 355 volumes of records known as the Maury logs. These records are abstract logs of ships that sailed during the period 1796-1861 and constitute one record series in Records of the Weather Bureau, Record Group (RG) 27.

The logs were named after their compiler, Lt. Matthew Fontaine Maury (1806-73), who served as Officer in Charge of the Depot of Charts and Instruments, U.S. Navy (July 1842-Dec. 1854) and Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Observatory and Hydrographical Office (Dec. 1854-Apr. 1861). The logs were retained by the Hydrographic Office when it was separated from the Naval Observatory in 1866. In 1904, the marine meteorological functions and records of the Hydrographic Office, including the Maury logs, were transferred to the Weather Bureau. The Maury logs were received into the National Archives in 1938.

Background

Soon after Maury assumed charge of the Depot of Charts and Instruments, he instructed his coworkers to extract meteorological information from the logbooks that had accumulated there over a number of years. The extracted information included observations of wind, precipitation, fog, unusual ocean currents, and other natural phenomena. Maury used the information to construct a chart of the North Atlantic, showing prevailing winds and currents and indicating recommended sailing routes, the first such wind and current chart being completed in 1847.

By 1848, Maury had designed a form that would accommodate the extracted meteorological data (vol. 534, brig *Hanover*, roll 88). Designated the "Abstract Log for the Use of American Navigators," it consisted of 10 pages of printed instructions and 24 pages of blank forms on which the following information could be recorded: date, latitude and longitude (at noon), current (in knots per hour), magnetic variation, air and water temperature (at 9 a.m.), general wind direction, and any remarks about the sighting of marine phenomena "calculated to be of service to those who may hereafter follow in the same track." Completion of an abstract became the price exacted by the Navy for one of Maury's charts.

In January 1848, Maury sent a copy of one of his charts of the Atlantic to Captain Jackson of the ship *W. H. D. C. Wright*. As Maury reported in a letter (May 12, 1848) to the *Wright's* owners (Messrs. Robert C. Wright & Co., Baltimore), Jackson became "the first that has ever attempted" the chart's recommended route to Rio de Janeiro. By using the chart, Jackson cut 17 days from the previous average sailing time. A partial abstract of this voyage is included in volume 527 (roll 87) on this microfilm publication. A report on the trip in a letter to the *Baltimore News American* (May 18, 1848) by Robert Wright included a paragraph extolling the virtues of Maury's charts. Maury's agent in Baltimore, Comdr. Louis M. Goldsborough, had to request a special shipment of charts and abstract log forms to satisfy the sudden increase in demand engendered by the *News American* article. From that time on, ships' masters completed abstract logs in ever-increasing numbers until Maury most certainly achieved his goal of obtaining "several thousand tracts to and fro, both in the Atlantic and Pacific."

Revisions of the original abstract log form were issued in late 1848 (vol. 398, roll 78), 1850 (vol. 122, roll 33), and 1852 (vol. 282, roll 73). Other editions of the abstract log resulted from an international conference organized by Maury and held in Brussels during August 1853. Delegates to the conference developed and endorsed the use of two types of abstract log forms: one for armed naval ships (see vol. 185, roll 49, frigate *Minnesota*) and one for merchant ships (see vol. 175, roll 45, ship *Beejapore*). The log for naval ships was adopted for use by the U.S. Navy on November 3, 1853, by order of the Secretary of the Navy. Both this naval abstract log form and the one for merchant ships were first published in the United States in 1854.

Completed abstract log forms were submitted to Maury by ships' masters or owners. In some cases, Maury's agents in major ports prepared the abstracts from ships' logs loaned to them. George Manning of New York and Daniel McKenzie of New Bedford transcribed large numbers of abstracts for Maury's use. For an example of Manning's work, see volume 10 (roll 5); for McKenzie's, see volume 15 (roll 6). In a few cases, original logs found their way into Maury's collection. Capt. John Hammond, for example, contributed 13 logbooks of ships under his command.

Soon after completed abstracts were received by Maury, they were bound into volumes. Each volume was assigned a number, and its contents were listed in an index volume. One of these index volumes, covering the period between April 1853 and April 1861, is in Records of the Naval Observatory, RG 78. Entries in that index indicate that by the latter date abstracts collected by Maury had been bound into 533 volumes.

Records Description

Microfilmed Index to the Abstract Logs - Roll 1

Only 355 of Maury's 533 volumes were among the records of the Weather Bureau that were transferred to the National Archives in 1938. Of these 355 volumes, 343 had been included in a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project in 1936. These 343 Maury volumes had been sent, along with 180 logs not associated with Maury, to New Orleans, where the two types of logs were interfiled and each of the resulting 523 volumes assigned a number. The WPA staff assigned numbers to the abstract log volumes without regard to numbers previously assigned by Maury and without distinguishing between Maury and other logs. In most cases, the new numbers obliterate any old numbers.

In addition to arranging and numbering the volumes, the WPA staff prepared a card index containing references to both Maury and other logs. A transcription of this index, prepared by the Archives staff in 1939, is reproduced on roll 1 of this publication. It lists in alphabetical order each ship having a log or abstract in a volume numbered by the WPA staff. Each entry includes the type of ship, the master's name, the itinerary and dates of voyage, and the WPA number of the volume. For example, the first entry in the index reads:

<u>Name of Ship</u>	<u>Type of Ship</u>	<u>Name of Master</u>	
A. A. Drebert	Bark	Geo. T. Hewitt	
<u>Origin of Voyage</u>	<u>Destination of Voyage</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Volume</u>
Philadelphia	Barbados	1858	206
Anguilla	Philadelphia		

Appended to the WPA index on roll 1 are more recently prepared lists of the contents of 12 Maury volumes that were overlooked by the WPA staff.

Microfilmed Abstract Logs - Rolls 2-88

Rolls 2-88 contain the 343 Maury volumes numbered by the WPA staff and 12 Maury volumes that were never assigned WPA numbers. Prior to microfilming, these latter volumes were assigned numbers 524-535. The volumes are arranged in numerical order. Each volume is preceded on the microfilm by a list, prepared by the National Archives and Records Service staff, showing the order of its contents. Only a few of the volumes are paginated; for these, the list serves as a table of contents.

Most of the material consists of abbreviated reports of meteorological observations made at sea and, in the case of the numerous abstracts submitted by whalers, abbreviated reports of whale sightings. Annotations in the volumes show how Maury used the abstracted data. Some exceptions to the general tendency to brevity are worth noting. For example, the abstract log of the ship *Dashing Wave* (vol. 24, roll 8), is accompanied by a letter from the captain expressing his views on the political priorities of 1854. The log of the steamer *City of Pittsburgh* (vol. 35, roll 11) contains a lengthy and vivid account of a visit to that ship by the Emperor Dom Pedro II, of Brazil in 1852. Volume 119 (roll 32) includes a manuscript entitled "Smyleys Cost (sic) Pilot from River Plate (Rio La Plata) to Cape Horn Falkland Islands South Shetland Palmersland and Orkney." The log of the ship *John Q. Adams* (vol. 171, roll 44), the log of the ship *Post* (vol. 189, roll 51), the log of the bark *Sherwood* (vol. 211, roll 62), and the log of the ship *Black Sea* (vol. 213, roll 63) all include excellent reports and drawings of flora and fauna observed at sea. An "Account of Cyclones in the Pacific" is appended to the log of the ship *Raduga* (vol. 223, roll 67). In the log of the whaling ship *George Champlain* (vol. 241, roll 70), whale sightings and kills are graphically depicted. Interspersed throughout the log of the ship *George* (vol. 282, roll 73) are drawings of solar phenomena prepared by a passenger, John B. Williams. Volume 289 (roll 74) includes a manuscript report entitled "Indian or Asiatic Archipelago Dutch, Spanish, English and Independent."

Bound with the abstract logs in several of the volumes are some reports of land-based meteorological observations received by Maury. These include the following: (1) observations at Gabon, West Africa for 1852 and 1853 (vol. 48, roll 15); (2) observations at Halifax, Nova Scotia for April 1851 and observations at Unionville, S. C. for 1847 (vol. 155, roll 41); (3) observations at Lord Wrottesley's Observatory, Staffordshire, England from May 1843 to May 1852 (vol. 163, roll 43); (4) observations at the Magnetical Observatory, Toronto, Canada for October and November 1858, observations at Melbourne, Australia, April-June 1858, and observations at Victoria, Australia, 1856-58 (vol. 171, roll 44); (5) observations at Lisbon, Portugal from December 1856 to June 1858 (vol. 171, roll 44 and vol. 495, roll 84); (6) observations by John B. Williams (see also abstract log of the ship *George* in volume 282, roll 73) at Lauthala, Fiji Islands from December 1857 to November 1859 (vol. 189, roll 51; vol. 206, roll 60; and vol. 218, roll 65); and (7) observations at Durban, South Africa for 1857 and 1858 (vol. 197, roll 55).

Logs Indexed but not Microfilmed

Although their contents are listed in the microfilmed index, no non-Maury volumes are reproduced in this publication. Specifically, the omissions include the following: (1) a journal kept on board the steamer *Hancock* during the North Pacific Exploring Expedition (vol. 110), belonging to a series of survey notes in Records of the Hydrographic Office, RG 37; (2) all log books received by the Hydrographic Office after 1865 (vols. 229, 231, 236, 237, 238, 240, 245, 253, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 278, 280, 284, 285, 291, 294, 296, 297, 298, 299, 301, 302, 303, 305, 307, 345, 348, 349, 351, 352, 357, 358, 359, 360, 365, 366, 367, 369, 370, 372, 400, 401, 402, 403, 427, 484, 485, 486, 487, 492, 493, 497, 504, 505, 510, 513, 514, 516, 518, 521, and 523); (3) all marine meteorological journals received by the Hydrographic Office between 1877 and 1895 and belonging to the series of these journals in RG 27 (vols. 308-344); (4) all examples of the Series A form used by the Hydrographic Office to record meteorological data beginning in 1873 (vols. 430-483); (5) lists of charts or indexes to marine meteorological journals compiled by the Hydrographic Office after 1869 (vols. 246, 263, 264, and 371); (6) marine meteorological reports submitted to the Chief Signal Officer between 1870 and 1900 (vol. 429); (7) indexes to and summaries of marine reports submitted to the Office of the Chief Signal Officer (vols. 239, 242, 243, 279, 346, 347, and 399); (8) reports of meteorological observations made by the Chief Signal Officer between June 1, 1876, and November 30, 1877 (vols. 230 and 244); (9) a meteorological register kept at Benecia Barracks, Calif., by the post surgeon between 1856 and 1865 (vol. 290), belonging to the series of daily observations of meteorology at military posts in RG 27; (10) a meteorological diary for Lewinsville, Va., kept from June 1858 to May 1866 (vol. 373); and (11) two log books received by the Weather Bureau after 1904 (vols. 499 and 508).

Related Records

Additional information about Maury's efforts to compile oceanographic data can be found in Records of the Naval Observatory, RG 78, primarily in the 19 volumes of letters sent by the superintendent between July 1842 and November 1862. Letters that accompanied the logs submitted to Maury by ships' masters and owners are also in RG 78 in the series of letters received. Various editions of Maury's publications, including his *Sailing Directions*, incorporating information from the logs, are in Publications of the U.S. Government, RG 287. Copies of the wind and current charts, based on completed abstracts, are among the cartographic records in RG 37. An unpublished history of the Federal government's involvement in marine meteorology,

prepared in 1938 by the staff of the Agriculture Department Archives Division of the National Archives, is among the finding aids for RG 27.

A collection of Maury's papers is in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress; and at least four book-length biographies of Maury have been published. They are *A Life of Matthew Fontaine Maury* by Diana Corbin (London, 1888), *Matthew Fontaine Maury; Pathfinder of the Seas* by Charles L. Lewis (Annapolis, 1927), *The Pathfinder of the Seas; The Life of Matthew Fontaine Maury* by John W. Wayland (Richmond, Virginia, 1930), and *Matthew Fontaine Maury; Scientist of the Sea* by Frances L. Williams (New Brunswick, N.J., 1963). In a useful article in *The American Neptune* (Apr. 1941, p. 149-158), Lewis J. Darter discusses "Federal Archives Relating to Matthew Fontaine Maury." Nathan Reingold analyzes the reaction of Maury's contemporaries to his work in *Science in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, 1964).

Sharon L. Gibbs wrote this introduction and arranged the records for microfilming.

CONTENTS

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Volumes</u>
1	Index and Supplement
2	1-3
3	4-5
4	6-8
5	9-12
6	13-16
7	17-20
8	21-24
9	25-27
10	28-31
11	32-35
12	36-40
13	41-43
14	44-46
15	47-50
16	51-53
17	54-57
18	58-61
19	62-65
20	66-69
21	70-73
22	74-78
23	79-82
24	83-85
25	86-90
26	91-95
27	96-99
28	100-104
29	105-108
30	109, 111-113
31	114-117
32	118-121
33	122-124
34	125-128
35	129-133
36	134-137
37	138-141
38	142-146
39	147-149
40	150-153
41	154-157
42	158-161

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Volumes</u>
43	162-166
44	167-172
45	173-175
46	176-177
47	178-179
48	180-182
49	183-185
50	186-187
51	188-189
52	190-191
53	192-193
54	194-195
55	196-197
56	198-199
57	200-201
58	202-203
59	204-205
60	206-207
61	208-209
62	210-212
63	213-214
64	215-216
65	217-219
66	220-221
67	222-223
68	224-226
69	227-228, 232
70	233-235, 241, 247
71	248-252, 254-257
72	271-277
73	281-283, 286-287
74	288-289, 292-293, 295, 300, 304, 306, 350, 353, 354
75	355-356, 361-364, 368, 374-376
76	377-386
77	387-391
78	392-398
79	404-407
80	408-412
81	413-421
82	422-425
83	426
84	428, 488-491, 494-496
85	498, 500-503, 506-507, 509, 511-512, 515, 517, 519
86	520, 522, 524-526
87	527-533
88	534-535