

COURTIS, ABEL GARDNER, *GLEANINGS OF AN OCEAN VOYAGE: AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE HOWARD TEMPLE OF HONOR, NO. 10, ON THE EVENINGS OF SEPT. 23d, 1872 & JAN. 6th, 1873* BY A MEMBER OF THE ORDER

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Abel Gardiner Courtis was born in Lynn, Massachusetts, March 29, 1838, the son of Benjamin and Rebecca (Harris) Courtis. He was educated in the Lynn public schools and was a resident of Lynn for most of his life. In his teens, he was an apprentice in the office of the *Lynn Bay State*. Courtis spent almost two years at sea (1856-1858) while on a whaling voyage to the Arctic on board the merchant whaler *Fortune*. Upon his return from the sea, he worked in Boston and later at the *Lynn Reporter*. He was closely connected to the growth and development of the Lynn newspaper industry. In 1867, as a member of the firm of Kimball, Nichols & Courtis, he was one of the founders of the *Lynn Transcript* and later became the sole proprietor in 1877. He sold the newspaper in 1881 and started a bookbinding business in Lynn. Courtis married Emeline A. Herrick of Beverly, MA in July of 1859. They had four children: Benjamin S., Edward G., Jennie F., and Elva S. After the death of his first wife in 1892, he married Hannah A. Breare of Lynn in 1895. Courtis wrote poetry and some of his poems are included in his address. He is listed in *The Poets of Essex County, Massachusetts* (1889). Courtis died in January 1918 and is buried in Pine Grove Cemetery in Lynn.

HISTORY OF THE SHIP

The *Fortune* (bark) was built in Amesbury, Massachusetts in 1822 and made her first voyage out of Plymouth, MA to the Pacific the same year. Over the next thirty-five years, The *Fortune* would make twelve voyages to the Pacific and the Arctic--the last voyage in 1857. The ship was destined to become one of the sixteen granite-loaded vessels known as "The Stone Fleet," sunk by the Union Navy to block the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina in 1861. The event inspired Herman Melville to write his poem "The Stone Fleet: A Sailor's Lament." The fate of the ship is listed in the American Offshore Whaling Voyages database as "Stone Fleet #1, sunk Dec, 1861."

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The address is an account of Courtis' almost two-year voyage (1856-1858) on board the merchant vessel *Fortune* which sailed out of New Bedford, Massachusetts under the command of Captain Matthew Anderson. Courtis wrote the narrative fifteen years after his voyage and contrasts that former time with the present. His voyage took place " ... before the decadence of the whaling interest (which has left the docks of New Bedford almost deserted and those of Nantucket wholly so) ... " (pp. 157-158). His account speaks of the golden age of whaling and transports the reader onto the bustling deck of a 19th century merchant whaling ship. The author incorporates many details concerning natural history (including a detailed description of the whale's anatomy and physiology), celestial phenomena, geography, and political history. Courtis

uses nautical and maritime terms to describe the initial voyage across the Atlantic Ocean along the west coast of Africa and the east coast of South America and around Cape Horn into the Pacific Ocean. He writes how he was almost swept overboard rounding Cape Horn in rough, icy seas and gives an account of luring in albatrosses by baited hooks. Courtis writes about Hawaii

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and comments on its language and early sugar cane industry. Whaling was the backbone of Honolulu's commercial life and whalers used the port as a winter base to supply their ships and make repairs. In the spring of 1857, during the seasonal period of almost perpetual daylight, the Fortune and its crew cruised for whales in the Okhotsk Sea off the Russian peninsular of Kamchatka. Courtis describes the Arctic with crashing icebergs, harsh gales, and dangerous pack ice. He follows this section with a fifteen-page explanation of how a whale is captured, killed, hauled aboard ship, and put through a process called "cutting-in" and "trying-out." His description of the voyage home reminds the reader that being at sea could be as dangerous as the pursuit and capture of whales. Courtis recounts a harrowing gale with thirty or forty foot seas which Captain Anderson said was "... by far the most severe he had ever encountered in his maritime experience of thirty years in all seas." (p. 169). The crew had to lash themselves to the rail so they would not be swept overboard and one man was crushed on deck when the ship's wheelhouse was demolished by the waves. Three or four weeks after this event, the Fortune returned to Honolulu and unloaded its haul: 600 barrels of oil and 11,000 pounds of whale bone. The oil and bones were loaded on board the clipper ship John Gilpin of Boston. Courtis received his discharge from the Fortune and set sail on board the ship Coral, under the command of Captain Manchester, for the return voyage to New Bedford, Massachusetts.

PROVENANCE

Purchased in November 2011.