

WASHINGTON STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MsSC 3

Title: Nathaniel Crosby III collection

Creator(s): Nathaniel Crosby III, WSHS staff

Dates (bulk): 1857, 1947-1962

Dates (inclusive): 1857-1962

Extent: 2 folders (0.2 linear feet)

Abstract: The Nathaniel Crosby III (1835-1885) collection is comprised of his journal of a voyage in 1857 aboard the *Mercedes* from Hong Kong to San Francisco, California. The collection also includes news clippings and other documents containing information about Crosby, his house in Tumwater, Washington, and his relatives.

Accession number: 1921.20

Access Restrictions: The collection is open for research.

Biographical Note: Nathaniel ("Nat") Crosby III was born on 3 December 1835 in Wiscasset, Maine to Nathaniel Crosby, Jr. (1810-1856) and Mary Lincoln Crosby (1808-1866). Nat's sister, Martha Crosby Burr (1840-1914), was born in 1840. Nat's father, Nathaniel, Jr., was a merchant sea captain, and in 1846 he accepted a job by the U.S. Government to sail from Boston to the Oregon Territory with a cargo of supplies for the white pioneers arriving there. Onboard his ship, the *O. C. Raymond*, Nathaniel, Jr. reached the mouth of the Columbia River, and arrived in Portland, Oregon, "...then a small collection of log cabins a few miles down the Willamette from Oregon City..." in 1847.

After dropping off the supplies, Crosby decided to stay, and began to trade along the Pacific Northwest coast. During one of these trading voyages he discovered Budd's Inlet in the Puget Sound. The heavily forested area appeared to be a great spot for logging, milling, and shipping timber. Crosby and his crew were greeted by a party of settlers led by Michael Simmons, and after they showed him the Tumwater Falls (a promising source of power for windmills or sawmills), Nat's father decided to send for his family and relatives to settle there. The Crosbys, including 14-year old Nat, arrived in Portland aboard the *Grecian* in March 1850. Nathaniel Crosby, Jr.; his brother, Capt. Calnrick; and their families moved to Tumwater, Washington while the other Crosbys decided to stay in Oregon.

Clanrick bought a grist mill from Simmons, and opened a general store while Nat's father continued his career as a sea merchant captain. On 17 December 1856, Nathaniel Crosby, Jr. died suddenly in Hong Kong, and was buried there. Nat and his widowed mother sailed to Hong Kong the following year. They sailed back to the United States in the summer of 1857, and returned to Tumwater where Nat worked for his uncle Clanrick before purchasing a plot of his land. Nathaniel Crosby III married Cordelia Jane Smith (1939-1902) in 1860, and subsequently built a house on his plot of land in Tumwater. This house stands to this day; it is now called the Crosby House Museum, and is run by the organization, Daughters of the Pioneers of Washington.

Nat and Cordelia later moved to Olympia, and had two sons: Frank Lawrence (1862-1935) and Henry Lowe Crosby (1870-1950). Henry would later have seven children of his own, including the famous singer and actor, Bing Crosby (1903-1977). Indeed, Nathaniel Crosby III is Bing Crosby's grandfather. A biographical sketch conducted by the Washington State Historical Society found in Folder 1 states that Nat's occupation was a "boat captain" and a store clerk (he worked at his uncle Clanrick's general store: Crosby & Irving), he was a member of the Republican Party, and he had no religious preference. He died on 18 December 1885.

Bibliography:

Boone, Rolf. "Step Back in Time at the Crosby House in Tumwater." *Olympian* (Olympia, WA), Oct. 19, 2014.

Burr, Charles A. Talk given at Presentation of Old Crosby House in Tumwater to Daughters of the Pioneers by Bing Crosby and Family, The Olympia Brewing Company and Mrs. Adolph Schmidt, Tumwater, WA, October 1947.

Crosby, Jr., Nathaniel. "Biographical Sketch: To Be Filed For Future Use." Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA.

Funk, Goldie Robertson. "The Old Crosby Home At Tumwater: Opportunity and Spirit Of Adventure Brought Bing's Kin to the N.W." *Seattle Times*, Mar. 20, 1949.

Scope and Content: The Nathaniel Crosby III collection is comprised of a journal covering Crosby's voyage from Hong Kong to San Francisco in the summer of 1857 on the Chilean vessel, *Mercedes*. The collection also contains documents and newspaper articles regarding the Crosby family housed in Folder 1. In December of 1856 Nathaniel Crosby III's father died in Hong Kong, and so he and his mother sailed there the following year. His journal in Folder 2 chronicles their voyage home from Hong Kong to San Francisco, and includes an inventory of items—including articles of clothing—and their monetary value.

According to the daily entries, the *Mercedes* left Hong Kong on 7 July 1857 and arrived in San Francisco on 27 August. The entries are all handwritten in brown ink, and range from a single sentence to half a page long. The entries include meteorological information, and cover the daily activities of the ship's crew. Following the last entry, on the next page is a smaller sheet of white paper titled, "American Clipper Ship 'John Wade'". The handwritten document notes a trial of a "first officer Carpenter," and a "second officer Steward" who were accused of murdering a crew member of their ship, the *John Wade*, "...in Hong Kong harbor - commenced July 6th..." The writer goes on to explain that there was sufficient evidence, and Carpenter and Steward will most likely be executed and will be transported, but it is not specified where they will be transported. The captain of the *John Wade* is described as "an accessory after the fact—not having been present at the time of the murder—will probably receive some lighter punishment, and may possibly escape entirely." It is unknown why this handwritten sheet of paper has been pasted inside the journal. Following this document there is a set of blank pages, and then what appears to be a personal balance sheet of a "L.R. Crosby" for the month of March 1910. The handwriting is different from the journal entries, and is written in a different color of ink.

Folder 1 contains 5 documents. The first document is a speech made by Charles A. Burr to commemorate the Daughters of the Pioneers of Washington's acquisition of the Tumwater Crosby House (now called the Crosby House Museum) in 1947. Burr refers to Nathaniel Crosby III as "Uncle Nat," and mentions that several members of the Crosby family are present. The second document is a photocopy of a 1962 *News Tribune* article that explains that a Washington State Historical Society staff member showed a copy of the journal to Bing Crosby. The next two documents are newspaper articles about the Crosby House, and the fifth document is an old WSHS "biographical sketch" of Nathaniel Crosby III.

Access Terms:

Diaries, letters, and memoirs
Crosby, Nat
Crosby family.
Tumwater (Wash.)

Related Archival Materials:

- C1964.26.4.10.1: Crosby House
- C2013.18.70: Nathaniel Ostrander House
- C2015.0.49: Frank Crosby
- C2015.1.52: Room with Crosby and Stevens articles
- C2018.0.9: Nathaniel Crosby III store

Processing Information: The collection originally contained only the journal in Folder 2 which was donated by Frank L. Crosby in 1921. WSHS staff added the material in Folder 1 sometime between 1962 and 2018. This finding aid was created in July 2019.

Preferred Citation: MsSC 3, Nathaniel Crosby III collection, Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma (Wash.)

Finding Aid Creator: Connor Quisenberry

Contents List

Folder	Content
1	Biography, etc.; 1947-1962
2	Journal, 1857-1910