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C.W. PURDY & BRO. RIGGERS LOFT AT THE SPAR YARD COLLECTION

Creator:	Charles W. Purdy; various
Dates:	1841-1952 (bulk, 1883-1898)
Quantity:	0.5 linear feet (1 manuscript container)
Acquisition:	Accession #: 2006.16 ; Donated by: Paul and Ellen Purdy
Identification:	A58 ; Archive Collection #58
Citation:	[Document Title]. The C.W. Purdy & Bro. Riggers Loft at The Spar Yard Collection, [Box #, Folder #, Item #], Cape Ann Museum Library & Archives, Gloucester, MA.
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Language:	English
Finding Aid:	Processed by Stephanie Buck, Librarian/Archivist, 2006. Updated by Karla Kaneb, June 2020.

Biographical Note

The Purdy brothers, Charles W. and James A., were sons of John and Sarah (Johnson) Purdy of Nova Scotia. In 1852 John Purdy, who gave his profession as mariner, sailed from Yarmouth, NS, as a passenger on the schooner *Brilliant* arriving in Boston on March 27. He was 31 years old and married. Two years later his wife, Sarah made the same trip with their five children, accompanied by her father-in-law Samuel Purdy. By 1860 John, Sarah and their children, then numbering eight, were living at 12 Angle Street (now Cross Street), Gloucester, and John was employed as a 'rigger.' In 1861 he became an American citizen but, whatever John had expected of this new life apparently did not come about, and two years later he moved his family back to Nova Scotia. There he resumed his previous profession of mariner, commanding

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various vessels from schooners to steamships. A decade passed before the Purdy boys returned to Gloucester.

According to his obituary, Charles W. Purdy “*while still a young man, followed the fishing industry, going halibuting and to North Bay for mackerel, and was one of Gloucester’s oldest halibut skippers, some of his earlier commands being Schooners Athlete, Water Lily and Ralph E. Eaton.*”¹ However, this statement is not corroborated by other evidence. In fact there is a letter in the Purdy archive, signed by his father John N. Purdy, testifying to his brother James having served on the Nova Scotian vessels Athlete and Water Lily, although it is possible that Charles was also on these vessels. Again, according to his obituary, Charles was married three times, and he and his first wife were living in Eastport, Maine, when she died in childbirth along with their baby.² He then returned to Nova Scotia where he married his second wife, Sarah Slocum. By 1876 he had returned to Gloucester and found employment as a rigger at the Burnham Bros. wharf where he became known as an expert wire splicer.

On arriving in Gloucester Charles and Sarah first resided on Jackson Street (now part of East Main Street) at the head-of-the-harbor before moving to Essex Avenue. By 1880 Charles had been joined in both his home and his business by his brother James and in May 1881 Charles bought all the rigging tools and accoutrements “*contained in the Rigging Loft over Moses L. Andrews’ Spar Yard or Shop on Rogers Street.*” By 1882 the brothers were in business together as Charles W. Purdy & Bro., Riggers and Mast Setters, 5 Rogers Street. The company continued at the same address until Charles’ death in 1922, outfitting numerous vessels including the *Grampus*, the first fishing schooner commissioned by the United States Government as a research vessel.³

Charles and Sarah had eleven children two of whom died in childhood, and two as young women (see genealogy next page). Of the rest, Sarah and Albert remained in Gloucester while Ada, George, Helen, John and Alice all moved to the West Coast (first to the state of Washington and later California) where they were variously employed in non-seafaring pursuits.

¹ Charles Purdy is not named as a captain of any Gloucester vessels from 1869 on. There was a schooner *Water Lily* built in Gloucester in 1853 but was owned in Maine by 1872. The American schooner *Ralph E. Eaton* was built in Essex in 1877 (one year after Charles became a rigger). The first American schooner named *Athlete* was not built until 1906. [*Merchant Vessels of the United States and List of Vessels Belonging to the District of Gloucester.*]

² This is uncorroborated and at the time of his supposed third marriage Charles claims that it is his second. [*GVRM 1906.*]

³ The *Grampus* was launched in 1886 and one of her several purposes was to catch and transport live fish to the hatcheries along the coast where they could be milked of their roe to restock the fishing grounds.

Sarah (Slocum) Purdy died in 1905 and Charles married local girl Carrie H. Norwood the following year. According to their marriage certificate she was thirty-three and he sixty-one.⁴

Charles died on December 9, 1922, at the age of seventy-seven after suffering a stroke. All the pall bearers at his funeral were riggers and the Universalist minister Rev. William H. Rider officiated. His body was laid to rest in the family lot in Cherry Hill cemetery.

In 1879, while Charles was establishing himself in Gloucester, his father John Purdy wrote a series of letters to Boston steamship owners and agents attesting to the good work habits and sobriety of his other two sons, James and Byron, requesting that the recipients consider employing them. He explained that Byron was experienced with shipboard donkey engines but wanted shore work, and James had a chief mates certificate and was a good navigator. The letter mentioned earlier, testifying to James' seafaring career, was probably written at about the same time. In it John N. Purdy relates that James served with him as an ordinary seaman from July 1865 to July 1866. That they then both signed on with the *Athlete* until June 1867, at which time they both transferred to the *Water Lily*. James left the *Water Lily* in April 1868 and went his own way until rejoining his father on the *J.W. Dunscomb* in May 1872 as boatswain. James then rose through the ranks becoming first mate in November 1872 and captain in March 1873. The *J.W. Dunscomb* was sold to the 'Dominion Government' in the summer of 1873 and James stayed on, once again as boatswain, until November of that year. Then in early 1875 James himself wrote to the Canadian Department of Marine and Fisheries requesting that he be appointed first officer of the *Ella G. McLean*.

It is not apparent whether anything came of either John N. or James Purdy's letters but by the early 1880s both James and Byron were working as riggers for brother Charles in Gloucester. Byron then fades from the records and his fate remains unknown. James, however, married Agnes L. Vail in 1880, and after partnering Charles in the newly formed rigging company, Charles W. Purdy & Bro., moved out of Charles' house to his own on Western Avenue (and later Essex Avenue near Charles).

James was very active in the Baptist Church, on the corner of Middle and Pleasant Streets, being President of the Church Committee for several years. When he left Charles W. Purdy & Bro. and moved himself, his wife and their five children to Boston in 1899 the committee wrote him a letter of appreciation citing especially his "*unselfish devotion to the young people of his*

⁴ On the marriage certificate her parents are given as John & Susan (Boynton) Norwood. The only Gloucester birth record of a Caroline H. Norwood is in 1858 to John & Susan (no maiden) Norwood. If this is the same person she would have been 48 not 33 at the time of the marriage.

charge.” James changed his job as well as his address and went to work for a paper wholesaler, first on the line then as a salesman. He died in Winchester, MA on December 20, 1927.

1. John N. Purdy (1820-1885)

M: 1842 Sarah Johnson (1820-1895)

Children born in Nova Scotia

2. Charles W. (1845-1922)

M1: c.1872 Sarah A. Slocum (1846-1905)

2.1 Ada (1872-A1922)

2.2 Fred H. (1874-1879)

2.3 Carrie E. (1876-1898)

2.4 Sarah/Sadie A. (1877-A1922) m: Gardner Pool

2.5 Twins Albert (1879-A192) m: Estelle Wheeler

2.6 Alberta (1879-1880)

2.7 George H. (1881-A1922)

2.8 Laura A. (1883-1905)

2.9 Helen S. (1885-1979) m: Everett E. Canning

2.10 John B. (1888-A1922)

2.11 Alice S. (1890-A1922)

M2: 1906 Carrie H. Norwood

3. Ceylon S. (1848-A1922) m: Andrew Lamareaux

4. Mary A. (1850-B1922)

5. Odessa R. (1852-1898)

6. James A. (1854-1927)

M: 1880 Agnes E. Vail (1857-1932)

6.1 Etta M. (1880-A1920)

6.2 Frank A. (1882-1968)

6.3 Annie R. (1884-A1930)

6.4 Clara O. (1887-1969)

6.5 James (1890-A1910)

Children born in Gloucester

7. Byron B. (1857-A1886)
8. Clara E. (1858-A1922) m: Eugene A. Wells
9. Viola E. (1860-A1922) m: Lochlin McKay

Acquisition Note

These books and papers were donated to the Cape Ann Historical Association by Paul and Ellen Purdy, 425 Drozdyk Drive, Apt. # 247, Groton, CT 06340. Paul Purdy is the grandson of James A. Purdy, brother and business partner of Charles W. Purdy.

Scope and Content of the Collection

The collection contains record books and genealogical information and consists primarily of eight small notebooks detailing the daily working of the Charles W. Purdy and Bro. Rigging Company at 5 Rogers Street in Gloucester, Mass. between the years 1883 and 1898.

Series Description

- I. Series I: Record Books
- II. Series II: Genealogy
- III. Series III: Business Papers
- IV. Series IV: Misc. Other

Container List

Box #1

Series I

DAY BOOKS

- 1: April 26, 1883 – July 1, 1884. {6.5 x 3.5 x 0.5}
- 2: April 1, 1885 – October 31, 1885 {6.5 x 3.5 x 0.5}
- 3: November 3, 1885 – May 28, 1886 {6.5 x 3.5 x 0.5}
- 4: January 28, 1896 – June 6, 1896 (very smudged) {6.75 x 4}
- 5: ? 19, 1898 - ? 18, 1898 {6.75 x 4}
- 6: April 19, 1898 – July 29, 1898 {6.75 x 4}

Daily entries, in pencil, of vessels worked on, what done, and cost.

For instance, between April 26 and July 23, 1883 they rigged 48 vessels, many of them built in Essex. Most were also older boats, presumably in for repairs or refitting. Five were built

in 1883, so possibly newly rigged. These were: Annie C. Hall and Electric Light, both built Booth Bay, ME.; F.H. Smith, built Bristol, ME; Della F. Tarr, built Salem, MA; Virginia Dare, built Essex, MA.

The initials of workmen, with hours worked, are written in the margins.

All of the books also contain a record of cash paid out to employees etc.

The employees listed are:

Jas (James) A. Purdy* (Charles W.'s brother)

Byron B. Purdy (Charles W.'s brother, most of whose pay is either allocated for 'board' or to repay his brother James)

John White*

Tho's Day*

Tho's Goodwin*

John Johnson

A.F. Hennessey*

John O'Neal

Ed. Millett

Henry Johnson

Harvey Jeffrey

Frank Burrell

Tho's Colbert

John Handran

William Baxter*

Archie Williams

[Those marked with an * appear in the City Directories as Riggers]

Bk. 1: April 26, 1883 – July 1, 1884.

Initials in the margin, perhaps of workers & hours. Vessels:

Isaac A. Chapman

C. Anderson

Polar Wave

S.M. Jacobs

A.H. Johnson

Gertie Foster

Falcon

Grace L. Fears

Gatherer

Alice M. Williams

Fred Gerring

Nellie N. Rowe

Edith L. Conley

Maud L.

Annie C. Hall

Cassie F. Roberts

Mary Fernald

F.H. Smith

Sarah P. Ayer

Electric Light

W.A. Baker

Davis Brown

Goldsmith Maid

Sultana

Col. Cook

N.Y. McFarland

Gertie Evlyn

Lila Bell

Morning Star

Capt. Snow

Wide Awake	John D. Long
A.R. Crittenden	Cora Smith
S.K. Lane	Virginia Dare
H.N. Reed	Maggie & Blanche
A.M. Stople	Falcon
Joseph P. Ring	Ellen M. Johnson
Edith H. Rowe	Col. French
Frank Martin	Etta Digby
Mary L.	Della F. Tarr

ACCOUNT BOOKS

1: 1891: Running account for each vessel rigged, with work done and cost.

The vessels were:

Annie Wesley, J.E. Garland, Lorna Doone, Masconoma, Mayflower, Nommbega.

Includes a sketch of a vessel with masts and spars measured out. {6.75 x 4}

2: Feb. 20, 1896 – Dec. 3, 1886 “James Purdy and Cunningham and Thompson, 1886.”

This book is largely blank with a few pages containing lists of purchases of food and supplies “order on Boynton.” This may be a reference to the wharf that their shop was on. {6 x 3.5}

Series II

Folder 1

1: Birth Certificates:

Etta Morse Purdy, Dec. 24, 1880

Anna R. Purdy, Sept. 29, 1884

Clara O. Purdy, Dec. 29, 1887

2: Copy of Family Tree entries for:

John Purdy and Elizabeth Aline

Samuel Purdy and Abigail Shortliff

3: Copy of “Unplaced Purdys”

4: Certificate of Competency as Mate given to James Purdy by the Canadian Bureau of Fisheries, Ottawa, Mar. 2, 1874. The back of the certificate gives his address as St. Johns, and that he was born Mar. 10, 1852, in Yarmouth Nova Scotia

5: Citizenship paper for John N. Purdy of Gloucester who became citizen April 1, 1861 in Boston, issued Nov. 21, 1899. It has several stamps overwritten by names.

Nov. 21, 1899 – son, James A. (Board of Election, Boston)

Nov. 13, 1909 – James A., son (Registrars of Voters, Somerville)

Oct. 22, 1919 – James A. Purdy, son (Registered, Winchester, MA)

Oct. 10, 1934 – Grand daughter Etta M. Purdy (Registrars of Voters, Melrose)

Mar. 28, 1952 – Etta M. Purdy (Registrars of Voters, Melrose)

6: Testament, Mar. 26, 1899, acknowledging James A. Purdy’s dedicated service to the Baptist Society on his removal from Gloucester.

7: Copy of piece about break-up of the vessel *Newfield*, Oct. 11, 1900

8: Typewritten copy of Charles W. Purdy's obit from Gloucester Daily Times, Dec. 9, 1922

LETTERS

1: From J. N. Purdy to "Gentlemen" attesting to J. A. Purdy having served as an ordinary seaman from July 1865 to November 1873, on various vessels and in various positions.

2: Feb. 27, 1875 – From Dept. of Fisheries, Ottawa, to James A. Purdy re: his appointment as first officer of the Ella G. McLean.

3: Three letters dated Sept. 19, 1879, from John N. Purdy requesting the recipient consider employing his sons, James A. and Byron.

A: To Frank (Snow?), Long Wharf, Boston. J.N. states that Byron has served two years as a fireman on his screw steamship, but would prefer shore work, and James has a chief mates certificate.

B: To Spragg & Soul Co., Boston. J.N. states that Byron has experience with steamers and donkey engines, but would prefer shore work, and James is a good navigator.

C: To Ladd & Hall, Boston. J.N. states that Byron has experience with steamers and donkey engines, but would prefer shore work, and James is a good navigator.⁵

Series III

Folder 2

1: Typewritten extract of the section on C.W. Purdy, Riggers from *Industries and Wealth of Essex and Middlesex Counties, Massachusetts*.

2: Two Bill Heads for C.W. Purdy & Bro. Riggers and Mast-setters.

One torn but dated July 21, 1888. The other blank

3: Mortgage Deed, May 13, 1881

Charles W. Purdy to George W. Somes. Transfer of the contents of the rigging loft above Moses L. Andrews' Spar Yard. [contents itemized]

4: Copy of the 'Contents' page from *Fast and Able*, Gordon W. Thomas, with the vessels Purdy Riggers worked on checked off.

Series IV

BOOKS

Cape Ann Summer Directory, Albert W. Dennis; pub. by The Salem Press Co., Salem, Mass., 1911. {9.5 x 7} [Removed to Library Reference Shelf.]

Industries and Wealth of Essex and Middlesex Counties, Massachusetts; pub. by American Publishing & Engraving Co., New York, NY, 1889. {1 x 8 x 0.5}

The North Shore; pub. by L.H. Nelson Co., Portland, ME, 1905 [Photographs] {10 x 8}

Lunar and Horary Tables for New and Concise Methods of performing the Calculations Necessary for Ascertaining the Longitude by Lunar Observation or Chronometers, David

⁵ In 1861 Boston Directory Ladd & Hall were Commercial Merchants who ran a steamer between Boston & Yarmouth & Halifax.

Thomson; pub. by Wm. H. Allen & Co., London, England, 1841. [contains a hand drawn compass] {9.5 x 6 x 1, in a cardboard box}

Addenda added by processor:

Gloucester Vital Records

Massachusetts Vital Records

Census Records

Gloucester City Directories

Copy Charles W. Purdy obit and funeral notice.