

**The Filson Historical Society**

**Nathan S. Brinton  
Papers, 1863-1864**

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Size of Collection:  
0.33 Cubic Feet

Location Number:  
Mss./A/B858c

**Nathan S. Brinton  
Papers, 1863-1864**

**Scope and Content Note**

These are the papers of Major Nathan Sharpless Brinton which chiefly document the loss of \$2.6 million of Union Army payroll during the sinking of the *Steamer Ruth* on the Mississippi River near Cairo, Illinois on the night of 4 August 1863. Brinton was paymaster for the money, and collected documents related to the trial held to determine his culpability in the loss. Papers include statements by witnesses, proceedings of a court of inquiry, a board of survey report, and General Order No. 344 which found no misconduct in the loss of the funds. Finally, there is also an 1864 letter of promotion to Brinton's younger brother, Joseph Painter Brinton.

Folder 1 consists of statements and depositions by various witnesses and other individuals associated with the *Steamer Ruth*. It is likely that versions or copies of these documents are found in "Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry..." Statements and depositions are included from Peter Vandevort (Pilot of the *Ruth*), Major William H. Jameson (Paymaster), Major J. W. Brigden (Paymaster), Major George L. Febiger (Paymaster), Major J. M. Pumphrey (Paymaster), Major T. D. Greenwalt (Paymaster), L. S. Ellithorp (Diver), and J. H. Beidler (Doctor). These documents are dated August 1863.

Folder 2 consists of a document entitled "Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry Commenced by the Special Orders No. 408 Was Department Adjunct General's Office, Washington, Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> 1863. Destruction of *Steamer Ruth* by Fire!" This is a copy of court proceedings and statements prepared for Major Nathan S. Brinton regarding the destruction of the Union Army payroll on the *Steamer Ruth*.

The examinations and statements concern the fire on board the *Steamer Ruth*, possible causes, the subsequent sinking of the *Ruth*, and the destruction of the Union Army payroll on the ship. Witnesses discuss where they were when the fire broke out, their subsequent actions, and what they witnessed during the fire and subsequent evacuation of the ship. Witnesses are also questioned as to any possible allegiance or sympathy to the Confederate States of America.

As it was compiled from two or possibly three separate sources, and the pagination within the second portion is not in order, the logical order of this document can be confusing. A general table of contents is as follows:

**Part I**

Page 1-63: Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry

**Part II**

Page 1: Table of Contents for pages 2-38

Page 2-38: Evidence in the matter of the Burning of the "Ruth"

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**Scope and Content Note (continued)**

Page 56-39 (pages are in reverse order): Evidence in the matter of the Burning of the “Ruth”  
Unnumbered page: Table of Contents for pages 39-81  
Page 57-82: Evidence in the matter of the Burning of the “Ruth”

The document in Folder 2 begins with the Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry (pages 1-63), which contains the following contents:

Page 1: Details for the Court  
Page 3: Examination of Major William H. Jameson, Additional Paymaster  
Page 7: Examination of Major James A. Farrish, Additional Paymaster  
Page 8: Examination of Major George L. Febiger, Paymaster  
Page 12: Examination of Benjamin R. Pegram, Captain Steamer Ruth  
Page 16: Examination of Humphrey G. Root, Clerk Treasury Department, Washington, D.C.  
Page 19: Examination of Peter Vanderwort, chief engineer of the Steamer Ruth  
Page 22: Examination of Major Nathan L. Brinton, Paymaster  
Page 29: Examination of Henry Goddard, clerk to Major Brinton  
Page 31: Examination of Andrew Fleming, Pilot on Steamer Ruth  
Page 31: Examination of James A. Spencer, second clerk on Steamer Ruth  
Page 33: Examination of James Cain, first mate on Steamer Ruth  
Page 37: Examination of Milo L. Moore, carpenter on Steamer Ruth  
Page 41: Opinion of the court  
Page 44: Statement of Major William H. Jameson, Additional Paymaster  
Page 47: Statement of Major William H. Jameson, Additional Paymaster  
Page 49: Statement of Major James A. Farrish, Additional Paymaster  
Page 55: Statement of Major Nathan L. Brinton, Paymaster

There is then a second document entitled “Evidence in the matter of the Burning of the ‘Ruth’ Taken Before the Board of Survey.” This contains examinations of the following individuals:

Page 2: Examination of Major Nathan L. Brinton, Paymaster  
Page 13: Examination of Henry L. Goddard, Paymaster’s Clerk  
Page 18: Examination of Major Josiah Tilden, Paymaster  
Page 21: Examination of Major T. D. Greenwalt, Paymaster  
Page 26: Examination of Major William Wallace White, Paymaster

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**Scope and Content Note (continued)**

After the last page of the examination of Major William Wallace White (page 38) the page count begins on page 56, counts down to page 39, has a table of contents related to pages 39 to 82, and then begins on page 57 and counts pages up to page 82.

The table of contents for these pages reads as follows:

Page 39: J. L. Greves, Paymaster's Clerk

Page 40: Major J. W. Brigden, Paymaster

Page 43: Charles A. Clark, Teamster

Page 45: Delany Blackwood, Chambermaid

Page 48: Margaret Ann Hill, Chambermaid

Page 51: Major George L. Febiger, Paymaster

Page 54: H. H. Wernse, Teller Assistant Treasurer

Page 56: Daniel Kelcher, Watchman U. S. Treasury

Page 58: Sergeant Sebastian Worth, Company I 9<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteers, Guard

Page 60: Benjamin Farrar, U. S. Treasurer

Page 61: Corporal John Dieterle, Company I 9<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteers, Guard

Page 62: Private Phillip Sohns, Company I 9<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteers, Guard

Page 64: Private Anton Wibes, Company I 9<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteers, Guard

Page 65: Captain Benjamin R. Pegram, Master of Ruth

Page 70: Peter Vandevort, Pilot of Ruth

Page 74: Major W. B. Mendenhall, Paymaster

Page 77: Captain Phillip Kruer, Commander of the Guard

Page 81: Major N. S. Brinton, Paymaster

Folder 3 consists of the Report of the Board of Survey. This ten page document summarizes the movement of the money from Washington, D. C. to the Steamer Ruth, the evidence brought before the court, and the findings of the court. It is dated September 1863.

Folder 4 consists of a print copy of General Order No. 344, which states that the court of inquiry finds that the Steamer Ruth was destroyed by an incendiary, and that no government official is guilty of misconduct or neglect in the loss of the Union Army payroll. This document is dated 19 October 1863.

Folder 5 consists of a letter promoting Joseph P. Brinton to brevet Colonel. This letter is dated 10 November 1864 and is signed by Edward Stanton, Secretary of War. An envelope is included in this folder. Joseph was the younger brother of Nathan S. Brinton.

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**Biographical Note**

Nathan Sharpless Brinton was born 10 November 1829 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. He married Mary D. Buckley, and the two apparently had no children. Brinton was commissioned in the Union Army as a Major and Additional Paymaster 1 June 1861. On 4 August 1865 Brinton was brevetted Lieutenant Colonel, and honorably mustered out 1 October 1865. He died 25 September 1914, and his wife died August 13, 2013.

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**Folder List**

Box 1

Folder 1: Statements and Depositions, August 1863

Folder 2: Court of Inquiry into the Destruction of the *Steamer Ruth*, 11 September 1863

Folder 3: Report of the Board of Survey, September 1863

Folder 4: General Order No. 344, 19 October 1863

Folder 5: Joseph Painter Brinton Letter of Promotion, 10 November 1864

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**Subject Headings**

Brinton, Joseph Painter, 1835-1915  
Courts-martial and courts of inquiry  
Deep diving – Mississippi River  
Disasters  
Fires  
Mississippi River  
Mississippi River Valley – History – Civil War, 1861-1865  
Ruth (Steamer)  
Sabotage  
Stanton, Edwin McMasters, 1814-1869  
Steamboat disasters  
Steamboats  
Steamboats – Fires  
Steamboats – Ruth  
United States. Army. Wisconsin Infantry Regiment, 9th (1861-1866). Company I  
United States – History – Civil War, 1861-1865 – Destruction and pillage  
United States – History – Civil War, 1861-1865 – Equipment and supplies  
United States – History – Civil War, 1861-1865 – Naval operations  
United States – History – Civil War, 1861-1865 – Transportation