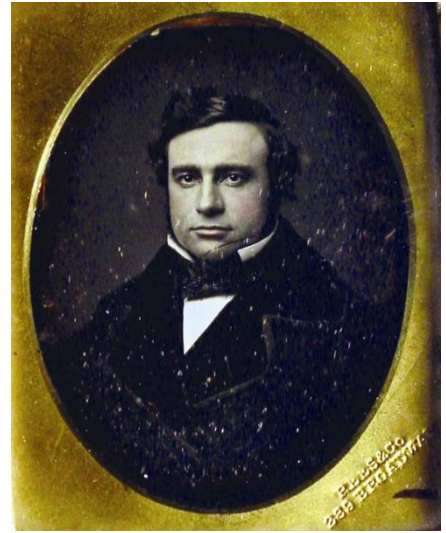




Isaac Jennings (1823-1887) followed in his father's footsteps, even though his parents did not want him to! His father was Captain Abraham Gould Jennings. At age fifteen, restless and bored with life in Fairfield, Isaac decided to go to sea. In New York, he found a job as a cabin boy on a **transatlantic voyage**, a trip that crosses the Atlantic Ocean, but soon regretted his choice. Having tried other kinds of work and finding he disliked them, the teenager decided to continue learning how to be a ship captain.



A photograph of Isaac Jennings. From the collection of the Fairfield Museum and History Center.

He returned to Fairfield to study navigation with the goal of becoming a captain. In 1846, while serving as First Officer, Jennings led a dramatic rescue of a near-lifeless man clinging to the broken hull of their whaling ship. On another voyage he rescued the crew of a British ship struggling off the coast of Newfoundland in Canada. Jennings achieved his goal of becoming a captain at the age twenty-five, and by thirty he was supervising the construction of a clipper ship named *William Chamberlain*. He made numerous voyages to European cities, and sailed to Kolkata, India and around Cape Horn in South America. At the age of forty, with the start of the Civil War, he retired from life at sea, and went into the paper business with an older brother.

Captain Isaac Jennings married Mary Bukley on October 9, 1855. They had two children, Mary Eliza (Minnie) Jennings (1859-1871) and Charles Jennings (1865-1950). Minnie died

at a young age. We do not know the exact cause, but it was probably “consumption,” which could be tuberculosis or another type of illness.

Letter to Minnie

Captain Isaac Jennings brought his family aboard his ship, *William Chamberlain*, from August 1, 1861 until January 1, 1862. On the first day, a man falls overboard while Captain Jennings is playing with his daughter Minnie in his cabin. He hears a scream, and runs out to the deck. He began to shout out orders to his crew. Knowing it would take too long to clear off a lifeboat and send it down to save him, Captain Jennings threw a life preserver directly at the sailor and he was able to grab on. It took four men to go out and save him.

After his wife, Mary, and daughter, Minnie, return home, Captain Jennings returns to sea. Now that he is alone, Isaac misses his family, especially his daughter. On the following pages are an excerpt from the letter and the transcription.

Captain Jennings Writing to His Daughter, Minnie

Cadix Spain. Jan. 20. 1862

My Dear Little Daughter. Minnie

I think it will please you to get a letter from your papa. which though you may not read now. you can talk about it. and ask mama to save it for you till you get old enough to see for yourself what I have written you from Spain. a little treasure that many little girls would like to have.

I suppose you have not forgotten the voyage you made with papa and mama to Havana. and many pretty things you saw there. and all about the ship. how she used to roll. and how mama was frightened and thought you would fall out of bed. but you was never afraid of any thing but loved to run about the cabin. or swing on the little scup papa fixed for you under the boat. Well your papa

Cadiz, Spain Jan. 20, 1862

My dear Little Daughter Minnie,

I think it will please you to get a letter from your papa which though you may not read now, you can talk about it and ask mama to save it for you till you get old enough to see for yourself what I have written you from Spain, a little treasure that many little girls would like to have.

I suppose you have not forgotten the voyage you made with papa and mama to France and many pretty things you saw there and all about the ship, how she used to roll and how mama was frightened and thought you would fall out of bed.

But you was never afraid of anything but loved to run about the cabin or swing on the little scup {?} papa fixed for you under the boat. Well your papa's on another voyage over the big water in the same ship with fair wind all the time but the waves are very high sometimes and made the ship roll so hard one night that the stove tumbled over full of coals of fire but the steward heard it and gathered them up before they burnt the carpet much. I suppose your mama would have been frightened at such a time and thought the ship would burn up. I have got no Kittie with me now to set the table but a cabin boy about as black as the steward. He is now writing a letter for the steward and I had to laugh when he asked me if Cadiz was spelt Catus or Catis. Tell mama that papa thinks he has found the drawers that she said Kittie lost. When I was putting on a clean shirt. You know I used to put on a clean shirt when the pilot came on board, well when I was puting on my clean white shirt what should I find nicely packed away but your little drawers and then papa had to laugh again at the efforts of your little industry and all the trouble you gave mama looking for the those same drawers and the blame that Kittle got for losing them. I find a great many of your little playthings left on board all giving evidence of the great bump of destructiveness on your little head, there is your once pretty doll old Catherine gave you with no head band but one leg, then there is your little duck with no head nor wings and then there is your little rabbit with ears, eyes out and all dirty and many other little things that I find hand have to look at more than ever before because they put me in mind of you and your little innocent little amusements. Could I shed tears as easily as your mama they would often have occasion to flow from emotions interrupted with joy and sorrow. For you that I have such a little darling, form sorry that we are separated. I suppose that you are talking more and more every day to the amusement as well as somethings the disturbance of those that have to listen. I

think if I could be with you now I should have patience to bear with your for a while. I hope you have been a good girl and taking good care of mama and not let her fall out of bed since ei have been gone. I hope that you say your prayers every night and morning and ask God to make you a good girl and return your papa safe home again. I would love to write more but I have no more space but to add much love from you Papa.