

**Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum
Record Unit 239**

Gold Rush and the Vineyard

By Karin Stanley and Jean Ross

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum

Call No.

Title: Gold Rush

Creator: Karin Stanley

Quantity: .25 cubic feet

Abstract: This collection of documents relating to the gold rush, and more specifically the Vineyard's participation in it contains personal letters, (1849-1856) documents on mining companies formed to sail west in search of gold, (1849-1855) and a number of reference materials, from publications to clippings related to the gold rush and the Vineyard's participation in it (1848-2009).

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information: The documents of the Gold Rush were acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum in _____ by _____.

Processing Information: Karin Stanley

Access Restrictions: none

Use Restrictions: none

Preferred citation of publication: Martha's Vineyard Museum, Gold Rush, Record Unit 239.

Index Terms:

Gold Rush

Vineyard Mining Company

Dukes County Mining Company

Rialto Mining Company

Ship *Splendid*

Ship *Walter Scott*

Schooner *Rialto*

Schooner *Two Brothers*

Schooner *L.M. Yale*

Bark *Sarah*

Bark *Oscar*

Brig *Vesta*

Whaleship *Niantic*

Henry B. Marchant

Theodore Mayhew

Edward Pease

Robert Parker
John O. Morse
Vineyard Camp

Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Personal Letters, 1849-1856

Series II: Vineyard Mining Company

 Subseries A: Business Papers, 1849-1850

 Subseries B: Bark Sarah, 1849-1855

Series III: Dukes County Mining Company, 1849-1850

Series IV: Rialto Mining Company, 1849-1923

Series V: Reference, 1848-1989

Historical Note

Like the rest of the eastern seaboard, gold fever hit the Vineyard in the late fall of 1848. Suddenly gold, not whales, lured Vineyard men away. A clipping from the Vineyard Gazette explains, "it is a well-known fact that the digging of gold in California stirred Martha's Vineyard from center to circumference. During the year 1849 two ships, three schooners, one bark and one brig, carrying in all nearly three hundred men, sailed from her ports to San Francisco." The vessels were the ships *Splendid* and *Walter Scott*, the schooners *Rialto*, *Two Brothers*, and *L.M. Yale*, the bark *Sarah*, and the brig *Vesta*. The bark *Oscar* left from Mattapoisett with many Vineyard men on board. Certainly other Vineyard men shipped out on other vessels or went by an overland route.

Mining companies were formed with members purchasing shares to buy or charter a ship to take them around Cape Horn and up the Pacific coast to San Francisco. Some returning whale ships were refitted for California as ship owners turned to the more reliable passenger and freight business. One of the first associations, the Rialto Mining Company, set sail in the schooner *Rialto* from Holmes Hole in February of 1849. Others soon followed. At least one Vineyard captain, Henry Cleveland, on-board the whaleship *Niantic*, switched from whaling in the Pacific to providing transportation to men who were waiting in Panama for passage north to California. However, as personal letters reveal, California often proved to be a disappointing and difficult place to make a living. In 1851 Henry Marchant writes that he would "rather be with my family and dig clams for a living than to live such a life as a man lives in this cuntrey." In the same year Edward Pease observed that "it is no uncommon thing to hear men say that when they left New England they left their principles behind." Many men, disillusioned with the gold fields turned to driving freight wagons, opening shops, or simply returned to whaling, as the bark *Sarah* did in 1850.

Scope and Content Note

This .25 cubic foot collection contains documents arranged chronologically within their series. These documents consist of personal letters written from California, business papers relating to the mining companies formed on the Vineyard for the purpose of gold exploration, and a number of reference materials on the gold rush in general and the Vineyard's participation in it.

The personal letters (1849-1856) reveal the often less than ideal conditions that existed in California for the Vineyard men. Henry Marchant writes longingly to his wife of missing his family, of hardships endured, and the rough nature of the gold country. Both Marchant and Edward Pease write about freighting as a work alternative to gold mining. Pease also tells of a harrowing trip on a hard road, wallowing in the mud, leaving several oxen for dead. The business papers of the mining companies formed for the purpose of mining in California consists of constitutions, meeting minutes, and lists of members. The Vineyard Mining Company papers also consist of a number of original documents related to outfitting the Bark *Sarah* for the trip West.

The MVM also has in their collection the log book from the ships *Oscar* and *Sarah*. This log, kept by an unnamed writer tells of the voyage of the ship *Oscar* from Mattapoissett on October 6, 1849 through April 18, 1850 when he left the ship in California. The writer then kept a journal of his mining adventures in the log book. On November 8, 1850 the writer boards the Bark *Sarah*, of the Vineyard Mining Company. At this time the ship returns to whaling and our writer keeps a log of this voyage through February 24, 1851. This is a fascinating account of how Vineyard men combined whaling with their desire to participate in the gold rush. Clippings include a piece about Captain Henry Cleveland's ship *Niantic* which transported men from Panama to San Francisco and eventually became a beached storehouse and hotel.

Reference materials, copies of publications and clippings, relate to the gold rush in general and the Vineyard's participation in the gold rush. This series also contains reference materials listing crew names and background information on the ships which sailed.

Series Descriptions

Series I: Personal Correspondence, 1849-1856

This series contains letters written by Vineyard men about their experiences in California. In this Record Unit the letters of Henry Marchant are transcribed photo copies; the originals may be found in the Whaling and the Vineyard Collection. The letter of Edward Pease is also a transcribed copy, with the original located in RU 327: Richard L. Pease Collection.

Box 1 of 1

Folder I: Personal Correspondence, 1849-1856

Series II: Vineyard Mining Company, 1849-1855

This series contains documents relating to the Vineyard Mining Company, which was formed in August of 1849 for the purpose of outfitting the Bark *Sarah* for a mining expedition to California.

Subseries A: Business Papers, 1849-1850

This subseries consists of the original constitution of the Vineyard Mining Company, which was formed “for the purpose of Mining in California” and the signatures of the original members.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 2: Vineyard Mining Company Business Papers, 1849-1850

Subseries B: Bark *Sarah*, 1849-1855

This subseries contains documents relating to the acquisition and outfitting of the Bark *Sarah* for the purpose of sailing to San Francisco for an expedition to the gold mines. It includes a bill of sale for a share in the vessel, contracts between Captain John O. Morse and owners of the Bark, and a listing of wages of crew members.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 3: Vineyard Mining Company Bark Sarah, 1849-1855

Series III: Dukes County Mining Company, 1849-1850

This series contains the constitution and minutes (December 31, 1849-February 25, 1850) of the Dukes County Mining Company. The members of the company embarked for California on the ship *Splendid*.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 4: Dukes County Mining Company, 1849-1850

Series IV: Rialto Mining Company, 1849-1923

This series contains a photocopy of an 1849 newspaper clipping announcing the departure of the schooner *Rialto* from Holmes Hole, along with a listing of those on board.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 5: Rialto Mining Company, 1849-1923

Series V: Reference (1848-1989)

This series contains copies of publications, newspaper clippings, and research related to the gold rush and Vineyarders participation in it. Crew lists and a

write up on the history of Vineyard ships which sailed to California are also included.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 6: Sailings to California: Vessels, 1848-1849

Folder 7: Crew Names, 1849-1852

Folder 8: The Vineyard Camp, 1850-1851

Folder 9: Periodicals, 1891-1989

Folder 10: Clippings, 1849-1985

Folder 11: Miscellaneous Papers, 1849-1851

Folder 12: "The Gray Dress," by Nina Eldridge, 1909

Folder 13: Photocopy of Log of the Ship *Niantic*, 2009