

**Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum  
Record Unit 339**

**Captain Peter Cromwell Papers, 1837-1878**

By Nancy Cole and Zachary Gerson-Nieder

**Descriptive Summary**

**Repository:** Martha's Vineyard Museum

**Call No.**

**Title:** Captain Peter Cromwell Papers

**Creator:** Nancy Cole and Zachary Gerson-Nieder

**Quantity:** .25 cubic feet

**Abstract:** This collection of the papers of Captain Peter Cromwell contains business and personal correspondence, as well as a legal document from the period before his death in 1857. It also includes family papers, connected to his wife and children, both while he was alive and after his death.

**Administrative Information**

**Acquisition Information:** The Captain Peter Cromwell Papers were acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum in \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.

**Processing Information:** Nancy Cole

**Access Restrictions:** none

**Use Restrictions:** none

**Preferred citation for publication:** Martha's Vineyard Museum, Captain Peter Cromwell Papers, Record Unit 339.

**Index Terms**

Captain Peter Cromwell

Susan (Cleveland) Cromwell

Susan Folger Cromwell

Presbury Coffin Cromwell

Peter T. Cromwell

Bark *Malta*

Bark Sunbeam

Ship *Clifford Wayne*

Ship *Cortes*

Ship *Reindeer*

Schooner *Memento*

Eel River Railroad Company

## Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Personal Papers

Series II: Personal Correspondence

Subseries A: Correspondence from Wife

Subseries B: Correspondence from Sisters

Subseries C: Correspondence from Brothers

Subseries D: Miscellaneous Correspondence

Series III: Business Papers

Series IV: Legal Papers

Series V: Miscellaneous Papers

Series VI: Family Papers

Subseries A: Person Papers

Subseries B: Legal Papers

Subseries C: Insurance Policies

Subseries D: Receipts

Subseries E: Stocks and Shares

Subseries F: Ship Accounts

Subseries G: Correspondence

Subseries H: Miscellaneous

## Historical Note:

Captain Peter Cromwell was born in Tisbury on February 7, 1814, one of five children of Moses and Jedidah (Coffin) Cromwell. He was a master mariner and leading whalerman who was First Mate and Captain on several whaleships. His brother Samuel was also a First Mate and Captain on whaleships. His brother Benjamin was well known as a Captain of the New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat Company.

On August 18, 1844, Peter married Susan Cleveland. They had three children, Susan Folger, b. 7/9/1845, Presbury Coffin, b. 3/9/1851, and Peter T. b. 3/2/1854. Like most whaling captains, Peter was away for many of the years when his children were young. He died on 9/16/1857, while at sea on one of those voyages, as Captain of the *Reindeer*.

As a First Mate or Captain of a whaling vessel, Peter earned between 1/22 and 1/13 lay or share of the proceeds from the voyage. As a result, he made enough money to invest in shares of whaling vessels (the *Clifford Wayne* and the *Sunbeam*) and to purchase a pew in the Baptist Church in Tisbury.

As a seaman, often away from home for several years at a time, Peter needed someone to act for him in business, legal and other transactions. On July 26, 1845, he appointed his wife Susan to "be my true and lawful attorney for me in and I my name and stead to act, transact, do, perform, negotiate and finally settle any and all business and any and

all acts and things whatsoever which I the said Peter Cromwell would legally do if personally present and acting.”

After his death in 1857, his wife Susan was appointed Administrator of his estate (1858) and guardian to their children (1862) by the Dukes County Probate and Insolvency Court, Commonwealth of Massachusetts. She continued to act for the family in business matters, maintaining the shares in vessels and a railroad company.

**Scope and Content Note:** The Peter Cromwell papers include his personal, business and legal papers and family papers kept after his death in 1857. The latter makes up the majority of the papers. Among the legal papers, is a note signed by Peter in 1845 giving his wife Susan the power to act on his behalf in all matters, business, legal and otherwise when he was away at sea. After his death, she continued to keep shares in several vessels, as indicated by insurance policies and ships accounts.

## **Series Descriptions:**

### **Series I: Personal Papers**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 1: Poem written to “Susan”, signed Peter Cromwell, telegraph to Peter Cromwell, 13, February, 1856 from J. R. Norton.

Folder 2: ‘Hail Columbia’ (in Latin and English)

### **Series II: Personal Correspondence**

#### **Subseries A: Correspondence from Susan Cromwell**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 3: Letters from Susan to Peter Cromwell, 1851-1855

#### **Subseries B: Correspondence from Sisters**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 4: Letters to Peter Cromwell from his Sisters, 1852-1855

#### **Subseries C: Correspondence from Brothers**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 5: Letters to Peter Cromwell from his Brothers, 1854-1855

#### **Subseries D: Miscellaneous correspondence**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 6: Misc. letters to Peter Cromwell, 1853-1857

### **Series III: Business Papers**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 7: Deed to pew in Baptist Church, Tisbury, November 9, 1837. Bill of sale for share in ship *Clifford Wayne*, July 20, 1841. Customs certificate for ship *Cortes*, Lahaina

Maui, Hawaii, April 6, 1850. Receipt for subscription to Vineyard Gazette, October 26, 1855. Insurance policy on ship *Reindeer*, June 10, 1857. Bill of sale for share of Bark *Sunbeam*, June 14, 1856.

Folder 8: Financial Accounts of Peter Cromwell's voyages, 1853-1856

Folder 9: Various Receipts, 1853-1855

Folder 10: Custom Clearance into Lahaina, 3/6/1855

## **Series IV: Legal Papers, 1845**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 11: Appointment of Susan Cromwell, as administrator to estate of Peter Cromwell, July 26, 1845

Folder 12: Bearer's Bond preventing John Antone from leaving Lahaina, 3/17/1855

## **Series V: Miscellaneous Papers**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 13: Transcription of Peter Cromwell, with notes by Peter Bigelow

## **Series VI: Family Papers**

### **Subseries A: Personal Papers**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 14: Poem. Fragment of music sent to Miss Susan Cleveland. Invitation to Miss Susan A. Cleveland, with sketches of whales on reverse. Invitation to Miss Susan Cleveland from K. A and L. D. Luce. Practice ledger book, Peter T Cromwell, Tisbury.

### **Subseries B: Legal Papers, 1858-1862**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 15: Legal Papers Regarding the Estate of Peter Cromwell after his Death.

### **Subseries C: Insurance Policies, 1857- 1878**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 16: Insurance policies on vessels in which the family owned shares.

### **Subseries D: Receipts**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 17: Receipts for purchases and ships accounts.

### **Subseries E: Stocks and Shares**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 18: Papers relating to stock shares in the "Eel River Railroad Company and share of Schooner *Memento*.

**Subseries F: Ship Accounts, 1860-1873**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 19: Ships Accounts for Bark *Sunbeam* and Ship *Reindeer*.

**Subseries G: Correspondence, 1853-1864**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 20: Susan Cromwell Correspondence, 1853-1864.

**Subseries H: Miscellaneous**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 21: U.S. Income Tax worksheet for Susan Cromwell, 1870. Notice of a lecture at the Holmes Hole Baptist Church.