

**Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum
Record Unit 403
The Grafton N. Collins Collection, 1862-1888
By Sarah Hutcheson**

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum

Call No.

Title: Grafton N. Collins Collection

Creator: J. H. Hill, G. N. Collins & E. P. Carpenter

Quantity: 1 cubic feet

Abstract: This record unit consists mainly of business correspondence between G.N. Collins and J.H. Hill, and G.N. Collins and E.P. Carpenter, about the Martha's Vineyard Railroad. The letters span the 1870s and 1880s. There are also four books pertaining to G.N. Collins's whaling business – owners' books for the Ship *Champion* and Bark *Vineyard*, a crew book for the Ship *Champion*, and a fourth book of accounts.

Acquisition Information: Collection was acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum in 2008 from the Edgartown National Bank.

Processing Information: Sarah Hutcheson, 2011

Access Restrictions: none

Use Restrictions: none

Preferred citation for publication: Martha's Vineyard Museum, Record Unit 403.

Index Terms

Martha's Vineyard Rail Road

Hill, Joel H.

Carpenter, E. P.

Collins, Grafton Norton

Ship *Champion*

Bark *Vineyard*

Schooner *E. W. Pratt*

Schooner *John Randolph*

Sloop *Escort*

See also: RU 117, Martha's Vineyard Railroad; RU 402, Worth Family Papers;

Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Correspondence

 Subseries A: Correspondence from J. H. Hill to G. N. Collins

 Subseries B: Correspondence from E. P. Carpenter to G. N. Collins

 Subseries C: Misc. Correspondence in to G. N. Collins

Series II: Account Books

Subseries A: Owners Books
Subseries B: Crew Account Book
Subseries C: Account Book

Biography/Historical Note:

Captain Grafton Norton Collins (1820-1889) was born in Edgartown on April 3, 1820, the son of Palfrey Collins and Dorcas Worth. He married Averick Heineken Norton on March 12, 1860 at Edgartown. They had three children, Benjamin Grafton Collins (b. 1860), Clarence H. Collins (b. 1866) and Harry F. Collins (b. 1874). Grafton was listed in the 1850 Edgartown census as a mariner. He owned ships, judging from the Owners' and Crew Books he kept, and was an investor in the Martha's Vineyard Railroad.

Joel Hills, of Newton Massachusetts, was also one of the original investors and incorporators in the Katama Land Company and the Martha's Vineyard Railroad. He was a principal of Hill & Brother, Flour Dealers in Boston. He was clerk of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad corporation.

E. P. Carpenter's stationary gives his business as "Selectmen, Overseers of the Poor, and Surveyors o Highways," based in Foxborough, Mass. (from where J.H. Hill wrote much of his correspondence). Some letters mention the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Co., of which G. N. Collins was treasurer.

The Martha's Vineyard Railroad was constructed in 1874 and was in existence until 1896. It ran from Edgartown to Oak Bluffs and back, a distance of 9 miles. It was hoped that its installation would revive Edgartown, which was failing somewhat with the decline of the whaling industry. The railroad may have done so briefly, but the railway itself was not a financial success, and by the 1890s, there wasn't even enough money to repair the turnaround in Oak Bluffs when a storm washed it out to sea, and the train was forced to run the distance from Oak Bluffs back to Edgartown backwards.

Scope and Content Note:

Most of the collection is taken up with a series of letters from Joel H. Hill to Captain Grafton Norton about the Martha's Vineyard Railroad. They span from 1871-1888, and deal with the minutiae of the establishment of the railroad ad the politics thereof. There are also letters from E. P. Carpenter to Captain Norton, mostly from 1880-1886, dealing mostly with the Railroad's financial business. Also in the collection are four account books: Owners' Books for the Ship *Champion* and the Bark *Vineyard*, a Crew Book for the Ship *Champion*, and account book detailing G.N. Collins's income, from the mid 1860s through the 1870s. Benjamin Worth, whose papers were found in the same house, was also an owner of these ships.

The last folder contains two owners' books, one crew book, and what seems to be some of Collins's personal accounts. One of the Owners' books and the Crew Book are for the whaling ship *Champion*, Thomas C. Worth master. Grafton N. Collins and Benjamin Worth Jr. (see RU 402) were the largest share-holders of the Ship *Champion* (each with 9/64ths). In the Owners' Book for the ship, Collins kept track of all the share-holders and the money they were due and received from the profits of the ship. The Crew book kept track of all money owed and paid to the crew members. The second Owners' Book is for the Bark *Vineyard*.

Series Descriptions:

Series I: Correspondence

Subseries A: Correspondence in from J. H. Hills

Box 1 of 2

Folder 1: 1871-1873

Folder 2: Jan - May, 1874

Folder 3: June - Dec, 1874

Folder 4: Jan - May, 1875

Folder 5: June - Dec, 1875

Folder 6: Jan - Mar, 1876

Folder 7: April - June, 1876

Folder 8: July - Sept, 1876

Folder 9: Oct - Dec, 1876

Folder 10: Jan - March, 1877

Folder 11: April, 1877

Folder 12: Sept, 1877

Folder 13: Oct, 1877

Folder 14: Nov, 1877

Folder 15: Dec, 1877

Folder 16: Jan - Mar, 1878

Folder 17: April - June, 1878

Folder 18: July - Sept, 1878

Folder 19: Oct - Dec, 1878

Box 2 of 2, Series I, Subseries A: Correspondence in from J. H. Hills continued.

Folder 1: Jan, 1879

Folder 2: Feb, 1879

Folder 3: March, 1879

Folder 4: April - June, 1879

Folder 5: July - Sept, 1879

Folder 6: Oct - Dec, 1879

Folder 7: 1880 - 1881

Folder 8: 1882 – 1888

Subseries B: Correspondence in from E. P. Carpenter

Box 2 of 2

Folder 9: 1872-1886

Subseries C: Correspondence in, miscellaneous

Folder 10: Note from Curriith Dearborn, 1879

Series II: Account Books

Subseries A : Owners Books

Folder 11: Owner's books for Ship *Champion* and Bark *Vineyard*, c. 1864-1867 – records of all shares paid to shareholders.

Subseries B: Crew Members Accounts Book

Folder 12: Crew Members Account Book for Ship *Champion* – records of all money due to and paid ship's crewmembers. This book has loose papers attached to particular pages, the receipts and documentation for individual entries. See RU 402 for Benjamin Worth's bills of sale for both these vessels.

Subseries C: Account Book

Folder 13: Account book with register of receipts, 1862-1871, which include several amounts received from the estate of Grafton Norton, and others from various sources, including interest on notes, dividend income from Wamsutta Mill in New Bedford, "sale of hay in Nathan Jernegan's barn", sales of oil and bone from whaling vessels, house rental, and a fee for fishing at Mattakeet Herring Creek. It also has debit and credit accounting for schooners *E. W. Pratt* and *John Randolph*, Sloop *Escort*, the Union Coal Company and the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company.