Descriptive Summary
Repository: Martha’s Vineyard Museum
Title: U.S. Customs House and Custom Collectors, Martha’s Vineyard
Creator: Nancy Young
Quantity: 3 cubic feet
Abstract: This collection of original records and documents from the Port of Edgartown Custom House includes ship manifest, protests, court records, and Treasury accounts as well as reports and accounts of Lighthouses in the district. Most documents are original or noted if not.
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Index Terms
Cooke, Jr., Thomas
Custom House, Holmes Hole
Custom House, Port of Edgartown
Custom Records, Edgartown
Custom Collectors, U.S. District of Edgartown
Light Vessels, Cape Cod
Light Vessels, Nantucket
Lighthouses, Cape Cod
Lighthouses, Nantucket
Lighthouse, Martha’s Vineyard
Marine Hospital, Martha’s Vineyard
Norton, Constant
Pease, John
Pease, Joseph Thaxter
Superintendent of Lights, District of Edgartown
Thaxter, Leavitt
Vinson, John

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Historical Note:
  Professor Morrison author of “Maritime History of Massachusetts” said in 1921 that he considered “the Edgartown Custom records of considerable importance for the movement of shipping.”

  The Vineyard’s first Custom Collector was Matthew Mayhew, son of Governor Thomas Mayhew, who received his commission from Britain in 1671. Edgartown this became a Port of Entry and center of a customs District under the Crown until 1774, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from 1774 until 1789, when the United States Customs Service was established by Congress. Custom Collector was a political
patronage appointment even on the Island and most Collectors were important party supporters.

The first Federal Collector, John Pease, 1789-1909, and his successors were responsible for enforcing Customs regulations on Martha’s Vineyard, No Man’ Land, the Elizabeth Island and Falmouth. In 1913 when Edgartown ceased to be a Port of Entry the position of Collector was abolished.

The Collector’s job was to assess and collect duty on imported articles, to prevent fraud and smuggling, and control carriers, persons and articles entering the United States. The Collector received a commission on the fees paid to the Treasury. Until the beginning of the 20th century, custom duties were the government’s main source of income.

Masters of incoming vessels not owned by Edgartown citizens had to leave copies of their manifests with the Edgartown Collector, and sail to the port of delivery of their cargo with hatches sealed, usually with a Custom Inspector abroad. Damaged vessels seeking a harbor of refuge were exempt from the entry fee and this led to many legal disputes.

A few years into the 19th century, the Collectors were required to assess fees for the care of the sick and disabled seamen and Marine Hospitals.

As Superintendent of Lights, the Collector was responsible for maintenances of Light houses, light vessels and other aids to navigation in their districts.

The Custom District of Edgartown had no Customs House per se. Until 1849, each Collector used an office in his home. The second floor room in the Museum’s Thomas Cooke House was traditionally the Customs office used by the second federal Collector Thomas Cooke, Jr. The Customs Service rented an office from 1849-1913, on the second floor of the building on the northwest corner of Main and Water Streets.

**Scope and Content Note:**

The earliest document in the collection is a Protest from 1785 concerning the storm damamged Brig *Thomas*, filed in Edgartown by a Notary Public. Other protests relate indetail the voyages and causes of the damage that made ships seek shelter.

The collection is rich in documents from the term of the second Collector, 1809-1830, Thomas Cooke, Jr. These include Custom House accounts, ship manifests with cargo lists for vessels arriving from out of the country, and coasters, along with the accounts and payrolls of the deputy Collectors who went on board the vessels. There are lists of forfeited good in Court Judgements, their auction sale prices, and the legal expenses involved.

Hezikiah Joel, Chappaquiddick Indian, presented his bill to Dr. Cooke for writing letters, power of attorney, traveling off-Island to settle claims, and paying claims. His own fee had to be paid not to him but to the Guardians of the Indians.

Joseph Thaxter Pease, 1845-1849 and 1853-1855, had complaints filed against him in Washington accusing him of ordering unnecessary ship surveys to enlarge his fee. From his terms we also have correspondence and accounts of vuiliding new Light
House and navigational aid along with Light House Keepers’ reports (including those of two female keepers).

Included in the collection are letters to President Lincoln from Vineyard Republicans urging John Vinso’s appointment as Collector. Collector Vinsons’ 1861 Commission, signed by President Lincoln, but dated after his assassination, is in the collection.

The voluminous and often fault-finding correspondence from the U.S. Treasury and the accounting required of the Collector by Washington is well documented starting in 1800 and continuing into the late 1800’s.

More Superintendent of Lights records, mostly from Joseph Thazter Pease’ term, are in RU212 Lighthouses. Original Custom House ledgers and an original certificate signed by Pres. Abrahama Lincoln attesting to ship as American can be found elsewhere in the Library. Florence Kern’s histories of the individual Collectors are in the “Intelligencer.”

Most documents are original or noted if not.

**Series I: Custom Collectors’ Correspondence: 1800-1880**

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**Subseries A: U.S. Treasury: 1833-1856**

Folder 1: 1833,1836 JPN
Folder 2: 1843 JTP
Folder 3: 1846 JTP
Folder 4: 1847 JTP (includes letter complaining of his forcing ships to pay entry fee)
Folder 5: 1849 JTP
Folder 6: 1850 JTP
Folder 7: 1855 & 1856 CN

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**Subseries B: Comptroller’s Office 1800-1849**

Folder 8: 1804, 1806 JP
Folder 9: 1845 JTP
Folder 10: 1846 JTP
Folder 11: 1847 JTP
Folder 12: 1848 JTP
Folder 13: 1849 JTP

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**Subseries C: Commissioner of Customs: 1849-1850**

Folder 14: 1849 JTP
Folder 15: 1850 JTP

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**Subseries D: First Auditor 1845-1850**

Folder 16: 1845 JTP
Folder 17: 1846 JTP
Folder 18: 1847 JTP
Folder 19: 1848 JTP
Folder 20: 1849 JTP
Folder 21: 1850 JTP

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Subseries E: Register Office: 1845-1848
   Folder 22: 1845 JTP
   Folder 23: 186 JTP
   Folder 24: 1847 JTP
   Folder 25: 1848 JTP

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Subseries E: Miscellaneous Correspondence: 1845-1880
   A. Holmes Hole Custom House: 1845-1846
      Folder 26: 1845 JTP
      Folder 27: 1846 JTP
   B. General Correspondence: 1845-1880
      Folder 28: 1845, 1846 JTP
      Folder 29: 1850 LT
      Folder 30: CN
   C. Letters of Recommendation: 1861
      Folder 31: 1861 JV (letters and petition to Pres. Lincoln recommending John Vinson as Collector

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Series II: Custom Collector Accounts: 1809-1865
   Subseries A: Receipts 1809-1860
   A. Edgartown
      Folder 1: 1809 TC, Jr.
      Folder 2: 1813 TC, Jr.
      Folder 3: 1823 TC, Jr.
      Folder 4: 1846 TC, Jr.
      Folder 5: 1849 TC, Jr.
      Folder 6: 1858 TC, Jr.
      Folder 7: 1860 TC, Jr.
   B. Holmes Hole
      Folder 8: 1821 TC, Jr.
      Folder 9: 1822 TC, Jr.
      Folder 10: 1823 TC, Jr.
      Folder 11: 1825 TC, Jr.
      Folder 12: 1848 JTP

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Subseries B: U.S. Treasury Dept. 1812-1855
   A. Treasury Drafts
      Folder 13: 1847, JTP
B. Treasury Reports
   Folder 16: 1854, CN
   Folder 17: 1855, CN

C. Bonds Payable- Correspondence
   Folder 18: 1813, TC, Jr.
   Folder 19: 1845, CN

D. Bonds Payable
   Folder 20: 1812, TC, Jr.
   Folder 21: 1826, TC, Jr.
   Folder 22: 1827, TC, Jr.

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Subseries C: Court Judgments with legal fees 1809-1865
   Folder 23: 1809 TC, Jr.
   Folder 24: 1810 TC, Jr.
   Folder 25: 1811 TC, Jr.
   Folder 26: 1812, 1813, TC Jr.
   Folder 27: 1814, TC, Jr.
   Folder 28: 1815 TC, Jr.
   Folder 29: 1816 TC, Jr.
   Folder 30: 1817 TC, Jr.
   Folder 31: 1818 TC, Jr.
   Folder 32: 1819 TC, Jr.
   Folder 33: 1821 TC, Jr.
   Folder 34: 1826 TC, Jr.
   Folder 35: 1865 JV

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Series III: Marine Hospital, Ill and Disabled Seamen: 1821-1849
   Subseries A: Patients lists: 1821-1849
      Folder 1: 1821 TC, Jr.
      Folder 2: 1822 TC, Jr.
      Folder 3: 1823 TC, Jr.
      Folder 4: 1843 LT
      Folder 5: 1844 LT
      Folder 6: 1845 JTP
      Folder 7: 1847 JTP
      Folder 8: 1848 JTP
      Folder 9: 1849 JTP

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Subseries B: Accounts: 1844-1857
   Folder 10: 1844, LT
   Folder 11: 1845 JTP
Folder 12: 1846 JTP
Folder 13: 1847 JTP
Folder 14: 1846 JTP
Folder 15: 1853 Notebook “Money for Sick and Disabled Seamen,” JTP
Folder 16: 1855, 1857 CN

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**Series IV: Superintendent of Lights 1843-1850**

Subseries A: Superintendent’s Correspondence: Light Houses 1843-1847

1. **General Correspondence**
   - Folder 1: 1846 JTP
   - Folder 2: 1847 JTP
   - Folder 3: 1850 JTP

2. **Individual Light House Correspondence**
   - Folder 4: Cape Pogue Light, 1843 LT
   - Folder 5: Cape Pogue Light, 1845 JTP
   - Folder 6: Cape Pogue Light, 1846 JTP
   - Folder 7: Chatham Light, 1846 JTP
   - Folder 8: Cutterhunk Light, 1845, 1847 JTP
   - Folder 9: Edgartown Light, 1845 JTP
   - Folder 10: Holmes Hole Light, 1845, 1846 JTP
   - Folder 11: Monomoy Point Light, 1845, JTP
   - Folder 12: Monomoy Point Light, 1846, JTP
   - Folder 13: Monomoy Point Light, 1847, JTP
   - Folder 14: Nantucket Light, 1845, 1846 JTP
   - Folder 15: Nobsque Point Light, 1845 1846 JTP
   - Folder 16: Point Gannon Light, 1845 JTP
   - Folder 17: Point Gannon Light, 1846 JTP
   - Folder 18: Pollack Rip Light 1845 JTP
   - Folder 19: Tarpaulin Cove Light, 1845 JTP
   - Folder 20: Tarpaulin Cover Light, 1846 JTP
   - Folder 21: Tarpaulin Cover Light, 1847 JTP

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Subseries B: Superintendent’s Accounts: Light Houses, 1845-1849

1. **General Accounts**
   - Folder 22: 1845, 1846 JTP

2. **Individual Light House- Accounts**
   - Folder 23: Cape Pogue Light, 1845 JTP
   - Folder 24: Cape Pogue Light, 1846 JTP
   - Folder 25: Cape Pogue Light, 1849 JTP
   - Folder 26: Chatham Light, 1846, 1847 JTP
   - Folder 27: Cutterhunk Light, 1845 JTP
   - Folder 28: Cutterhunk Light, 1846 JTP
   - Folder 29: Cutterhunk Light, 1859 JTP
Folder 30: Edgartown Light, 1845, 1846, 1849 JTP
Folder 31: Holmes Hole Light, 1845 JTP
Folder 32: Holmes Hole Light, 1846 JTP
Folder 33: Holmes Hole Light, 1849 JTP
Folder 34: Hyannis Light, 1849 JTP
Folder 35: Monomoy Point Light, 1845, 1849 JTP
Folder 37: Point Gannon Light, 1845, 1846 JTP
Folder 38: Tarpaulin Cover Light, 1846, 1847, 1849 JTP
Folder 39: West Chop Light, 1846 JTP

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**Subseries C: Superintendent’s Correspondence: Light Vessels 1845-1850**
Folder 40: Cross Rip Vineyard Sound, 1845 JTP
Folder 41: Cross Rip Vineyard Sound, 1846 JTP
Folder 42: Sow and Pigs Floating Light Vessel 1847, 1850 JTP
Folder 43: Tuckernuck Shoal Floating Light Vessel, 1846 JTP

**Subseries D: Superintendent’s Accounts: Light Vessels 1845-1849**
Folder 44: Cross Rip Light Vessel, 1845 JTP
Folder 45: Cross Rip Light Vessel, 1846 JTP
Folder 46: Cross Rip Light Vessel, 1849 JTP
Folder 47: Sows and Pigs Floating Light Vessel, 1846 JTP
Folder 48: Sows and Pigs Floating Light Vessel, 1847 JTP (includes expenses for installation)
Folder 49: Sows and Pigs Floating Light, 1848 JTP
Folder 50: Sows and Pigs Floating Light, 1849 JTP
Folder 51: Tuckernuck Shoal Floating Light Vessel, 1845 JTP
Folder 52: Tuckernuck Shoal Floating Light Vessel, 1846 JTP

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**Series V: Custom House Documents 1785-1858**

**Subseries A: Protests 1785**
Folder 1: 1785 JP

**Subseries B: Reports 1809-1847**
Folder 2: 1809 Weighers Reports TC, Jr.
Folder 3: 1809 Surveyor Reports TC, Jr.
Folder 4: 1847 Treasury Circular listing amount of duty

**Subseries C: Seamen’s Certificates 1800-1829**
Folder 5: 1800 JP
Folder 6: 1829 TC, Jr.

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**Subseries D: Registers of Oaths (sworn by owners of vessels) 1850-1858**
Folder 7: 1850 LT (copies)
Folder 8: 1851 LT (copies)
Folder 9: 1852 LT (copies)
Folder 10: 1853 LT (copies)
Folder 11: 1854 JTP (copies)
Folder 12: 1855 CN (copies)
Folder 13: 1856 CN (copies)
Folder 14: 1857 CN (copies)
Folder 15: 1858 CN (copies)

Subseries E: Coaster Manifests listing cargo 1811-1829
Folder 16: 1811 TC Jr.
Folder 17: 1812 TC Jr.
Folder 18: 1813 TC Jr.
Folder 19: 1815 TC Jr.
Folder 20: 1818 TC Jr.
Folder 21: 1821 TC Jr.
Folder 22: 1822 TC Jr.
Folder 23: 1823 TC Jr.
Folder 24: 1825 TC Jr.
Folder 25: 1826 TC Jr.
Folder 26: 1829 TC Jr.

Subseries G: Permanent Registers of Vessels as listed in Custom House ledgers in the Museum 1820-1853 (copies)
Folder 27: Permanent Register of Vessels employed in the Foreign Trade, 1833-1844 JTP (copy)
Folder 28: Permanent Enrollment of vessels in coasting trade and fisheries 1819-1853 (copy)
Folder 29: Permanent Enrollment of vessels under 20 tons in coasting trade 1820-1828 (copy)

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Series VI: Publications 1896-1989
Folder 30: “Notes on the Collection of Customs and the Massachusetts Custom Houses” compiled by the Historical Activities Committee of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, Massachusetts, 1970
Folder 33:
  a. List and dates of terms, 1789-1896 of Edgartown Custom Collectors, by John W. Pease, Oct. 5, 1896 (Handwritten mss.)

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Series VI: Acquisition of Custom House Records by MVM 1920-1932
Folder 34:
b. Feb. 2, 1939, Letter from Archivist of N.B. Custom House to Henry beetle Hough re Edgartown Custom House records (copy)
   Folder 35:
   a. Notes and receipt on sale of CH records to MVM, 1929, 1932 (copies)

**Series VI: Oversize Documents**

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**Custom Collectors’ Correspondence: continued**

  Comptroller’s Office: continued
  Folder 1: 1800 JP
  Folder 2: 1804 JP
  Folder 3: 1808 JP
  Folder 4: 1809 JP
  Folder 5: 1820 JP (final settling of his acct. as Collector)

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**Custom Collector Accounts: continued**

  Receipts: continued
  Folder 6: 1813 TC, Jr.
  Folder 7: 1814 TC, Jr. (Hezekiah Joel; receipted bill for work at CH)
  Payroll:
  Folder 8: 1856 CN
  Folder 9: 1858 CN
  Folder 10: 1860 CN
  Treasury Dept: continued
  Folder 11: 1800 JP
  Folder 12: 1804 JP
  Folder 13: 1806 JP
  Folder 14: 1807 JP
  Folder 15: 1809 JP
  Folder 16: 1825 TC, Jr.
  Folder 17: 1836 CN
  Folder 18: 1846 JTP
  Folder 19: 1849 JTP
  Folder 20: 1855 CN
  Folder 21: 1856 CN
  Debentures:
  Folder 22: 1822 TC, Jr.

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**Marine Hospital, Ill and Disabled Seamen 1821-1849 continued**

**Accounts: 1844-1857 continued**

  Folder 24: 1845 JTP
  Folder 25: 1846 JTP
  Folder 26: 1847 JTP
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Custom House Documents 1785-1858, continued

Subseries G: Bills of Sale
Folder 30: 1806 JP
Folder 31: 1809 JP
Folder 32: 1810 TC, Jr.
Folder 33: 1811 TC, Jr.
Folder 34: 1844 JTP

Subseries H: Custom Collectors’ Commissions
Folder 35: 1791 thru 1903 (photocopies)
Folder 36: Deputy Collector Commissions 1821 TC, Jr. 1842 LT (photocopies)
Folder 37: John Vinson’s Commission as Collector, 1861 signed by Pres. Abraham Lincoln dated July 30th, after his assassination

Series VI: Oversize Documents, continued
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Custom House Documents 1785-1858, continued

Entry of Merchandise:
Folder 1: 1811 TC, Jr.
Folder 2: 1818 TC, Jr.
Folder 3: 1821 TC, Jr.
Folder 4: 1822 TC, Jr.
Folder 5: 1826 TC, Jr.
Folder 6: 1840 JTP

Protests:
Folder 7: 1805-1806 JP
Folder 8: 1809 TC, Jr.
Folder 9: 1810 TC, Jr.
Folder 10: 1811 TC, Jr.

Ship Manifests: listing masters, and cargo
Folder 11: 1809 TC, Jr.
Folder 12: 1810 TC, Jr.
Folder 13: 1815 TC, Jr.
Folder 14: 1816 TC, Jr.
Folder 15: 1817 TC, Jr.
Folder 16: 1818 TC, Jr.
Folder 17: 1819 TC, Jr.

Holmes Hole Custom House:
Folder 18: 1849 JTP: Return of monies
Folder 19: 1825 TC, Jr.: Ship arrivals
**Miscellaneous**
Folder 20: Temporary ship registration 1844 LT
Folder 21: Certificate of embarkation in Spanish 1849 JTP
Folder 22: Certificate in 4 languages attesting to ship as American, signed by Pres. Millard Fillmore 1851, JTP

**Superintendent of Lights**

**Accounts:**
Folder 23: 1845 JTP
Folder 24: 1849 JTP, TC Jr.