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 whaler 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

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

**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