

# Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum

## Record Unit 212

### Lighthouses Collection

By Julia Novakovic

#### Descriptive Summary

**Repository:** Martha's Vineyard Museum

**Call No.**

**Title:** Lighthouses Collection

**Creator:** various

**Quantity:** 2.5 cubic feet

**Abstract:** The Lighthouses Collection is a compilation of published pamphlets, newspaper and magazine articles, 19<sup>th</sup> century bills and receipts, lighthouse journals, and research notes. The history and a timeline for each lighthouse, on Martha's Vineyard or the Elizabeth Islands, is included in each series.

#### Administrative Information

**Acquisition Information:** The Lighthouse Collection was acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum by many donors throughout the twentieth century.

**Processing Information:** Julia Novakovic

**Access Restrictions:** none

**Use Restrictions:** none

**Preferred citation for publication:** Martha's Vineyard Museum, Lighthouses Collection, Record Unit 212.

#### Index Terms

- Lighthouses
- Martha's Vineyard
- Gay Head Lighthouse
- Edgartown Lighthouse
- Cape Poge Lighthouse
- East Chop Lighthouse
- West Chop Lighthouse
- Cuttyhunk Lighthouse
- Tarpaulin Cove Lighthouse
- Vineyard Sound Light Vessels
- Holmes Hole Beacon Lights
- Fresnel Lens
- Pease, Joseph Thaxter

## Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Lighthouse Reference

Subseries A: General

Subseries B: Martha's Vineyard

Series II: Gay Head Lighthouse

Subseries A: Reference

Subseries B: Letters

Subseries C: Bills and Receipts

Subseries D: Newspaper and Magazine Articles

Subseries E: Relocation of Lens to Edgartown [DCHS] in 1952

Subseries F: Logbooks

Series III: Fresnel

Subseries A: Biographical Information

Subseries B: Publications

Series IV: Edgartown Lighthouse

Subseries A: Reference

Subseries B: Bills and Receipts

Subseries C: Newspaper and Magazine Articles

Subseries D: Guestbooks

Series V: Cape Poge Lighthouse

Subseries A: Reference

Subseries B: Bills and Receipts

Subseries C: Newspaper and Magazine Articles

Subseries D: Logbooks

Series VI: East Chop Lighthouse

Subseries A: Reference

Subseries B: Documents

Subseries C: Newspaper and Magazine Articles

Series VII: West Chop Lighthouse

Subseries A: Reference

Subseries B: Letters

Subseries C: Bills and Receipts

Subseries D: Newspaper and Magazine Articles

Series VIII: Holmes Hole Beacon Lights

Series IX: Elizabeth Islands Lighthouses

Subseries A: Cuttyhunk Lighthouse

1. Reference

2. Bills and Receipts

Subseries B: Tarpaulin Cove Lighthouse

1. Reference

2. Bills and Receipts

Series X: Cape Cod Lighthouses

Series XI: Vineyard Light Vessels

Subseries A: Reference

Subseries B: Documents

Subseries C: Bills and Receipts

Subseries D: Newspaper and Magazine Articles

Series XII: Administrative Papers  
    Subseries A: Letters  
    Subseries B: Bills and Receipts  
Series XIII: Miscellaneous

### **Historical Note:**

In 1796, a man from Nantucket petitioned the new American republic to build a lighthouse at Gay Head on the Vineyard Sound. President John Adams granted this proposal in 1799 and the first lighthouse on the Island was built. Over the next seventy years, four more of these beacons were constructed along the coast of Martha's Vineyard: at Cape Poge, West Chop, Edgartown, and East Chop. These structures utilized different energy sources over the past two centuries to light the way for ships, including sperm whale oil, reflecting lamps, Fresnel lenses of various orders, and eventually electricity and solar power. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S. Coast Guard Service became the authority for lighthouses in America, and soon replaced lightkeepers with automatic beacons. West Chop was the last Island light to become automated in 1976. In 1994, the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society acquired stewardship of the Gay Head, Edgartown, and East Chop lighthouses. The Coast Guard still maintains the light signals.

### **Scope and Content Note:**

The Lighthouses Collection is a compilation of published pamphlets, newspaper and magazine articles, 19<sup>th</sup> century bills and receipts, lighthouse journals, and research notes. The 2.5 cubic feet of information is an artificial collection, created by many donors during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A summarized history and a timeline for each lighthouse, on Martha's Vineyard or the Elizabeth Islands, is included in each series. The Gay Head Lighthouse, perhaps the most famous of the Island lighthouses, makes up a large portion of this assemblage. A letter in 1799 by President John Adams wrote about the construction of this light. In addition to the information and history of the Gay Head Lighthouse, there is also a section on the relocation of the 1856 Fresnel Lens from Gay Head to the Dukes County Historical Society campus in Edgartown in 1952.

Also of note are the Keepers' Journals within the Cape Poge section of this collection; they begin in 1872 and end in 1916, documenting daily occurrences, repairs, weather, and other events that happened at the lighthouse. There are also two keepers' journals from Gay Head along with visitor registers. Additionally, this collection comprises the lighthouses of Cuttyhunk and Tarpaulin Cove on the Elizabeth Islands, as well as Chatham and Nobska on Cape Cod.

## Series Descriptions

### Series I: Lighthouses Reference

#### Subseries A: General

This Subseries contains information on the general history of lighthouses from across the globe. A lengthy article from *National Geographic* in 1913 gives great descriptions of notable lighthouses along the American coastline. A bound copy of "Instructions to Light-Keepers" explains the expectations of keepers, their salaries, and reference and directions for special signals, storms, and other events.

Box 1 of 5

Folder 1: General History and Information on Lighthouses

Folder 2: "Instructions to Light-Keepers, July 1881," by U.S. Lighthouse Board.

#### Subseries B: Martha's Vineyard Lighthouses

This Subseries contains newspaper articles and other information relating to all five of the Vineyard lighthouses: Edgartown, Gay Head, Cape Poge, East Chop, and West Chop. *Shoreline Sentinels*, a publication of the MVHS, gives a brief history and chronology, as well as illustrations, of each lighthouse.

Box 1 of 5

Folder 3: Lighthouses on Martha's Vineyard: Overview

### Series II: Gay Head Lighthouse

This Series contains information on the history of the Gay Head Lighthouse and its famous Fresnel Lens. The first subseries holds pamphlets, timelines, and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Lighthouse Service description of the Gay Head Light Station from 1922. The second subseries has letters regarding the lighthouse's history, including one from John Adams in 1799 concerning the building of a light at Gay Head. Receipts and bills from the Gay Head Lighthouse [1810-1849] are contained in the third subseries. The fourth subseries includes newspaper and magazine articles on the lighthouse.

The majority of the Gay Head series comes from the next subseries: the relocation of the 1856 Fresnel Lens from Gay Head to the Dukes County Historical Society in 1952.

Within this section, there are the plans for relocation, newspaper and magazine articles documenting the controversy surrounding this move, two donor registers, publications by the Dukes County Historical Society in the 1950s concerning its new exhibit, and an inspection report on the condition of the lens in 2000.

Finally, four logbooks complete this series: two visitor registers and two keepers' journals. Visitors Logs from 1873-1877 and then 1878-1889 document the names of guests who came to see the famous Gay Head Lighthouse. Also, the light-keepers

maintained records of daily occurrences in their journals; this subseries holds two such journals from Gay Head, dated 1889-1900 and 1908-1916.

### **Subseries A: Reference**

Box 1 of 5

Folder 4: Gay Head Lighthouse: General Information and History.

### **Subseries B: Letters**

Box 1 of 5

Folder 5: Gay Head Lighthouse: Letters, 1799-1982.

### **Subseries C: Bills and Receipts**

Box 1 of 5

Folder 6: Gay Head Lighthouse: Bills and Receipts, 1810-1849.

### **Subseries D: Newspaper and Magazine Articles**

Box 1 of 5

Folder 7: Gay Head Lighthouse: Newspaper and Magazine Articles, 1799-2001.

### **Subseries E: Relocation of Lens to Edgartown [DCHS] in 1952**

Box 1 of 5

Folder 8: Gay Head Lighthouse: Plans for Relocation to DCHS, 1952.

Folder 9: Gay Head Lighthouse: Newspaper Articles regarding Relocation of Lens to DCHS, 1950-1957.

Folder 10: Gay Head Lighthouse: Children's Register, transcription, 1952.

Folder 11: Gay Head Lighthouse: Lens Fund Contributors, transcription, 1951-1952.

Folder 12: Gay Head Lighthouse: DCHS Publications and Data on Lens.

Folder 13: Gay Head Lighthouse: Inspection Report for Fresnel Lens at MVHS, 2000.

### **Subseries F: Logbooks**

Box 2 of 5

Folder 1: Gay Head Lighthouse: Visitors Log, 1873-1877.

Folder 2: Gay Head Lighthouse: Visitors Log, 1878-1889.

Folder 3: Gay Head Lighthouse: Journal of Lighthouse, 1889-1900.

Folder 4: Gay Head Lighthouse: Journal of Lighthouse, 1908-1916.

## **Series III: Fresnel**

This Series contains periodical and book excerpts on Augustin Fresnel, the creator of the famous Fresnel Lens. The first subseries holds biographical information and explanations regarding the "science of the lens." The next section houses a publication by Fresnel himself from a reading at the Academy of Sciences in Paris in 1822. This book

is in French, and explicates his research and reasoning behind the creation of this important optical and luminous device.

### **Subseries A: Biographical Information**

Box 2 of 5

Folder 5: Fresnel: Biographical Information and Science of the Fresnel Lens.

### **Subseries B: Publications**

Box 2 of 5

Folder 6: Fresnel: "Mémoire sur Un Nouveau Système d'Éclairage des Phares" ["Report on a New System of Lighting Lighthouses"], Augustin Fresnel, 1822.

### **Series IV: Edgartown Lighthouse**

This Series contains information on the history of the Edgartown Lighthouse. The first subseries holds pamphlets, timelines, and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Lighthouse Service description of the Edgartown Light Station from 1931. Receipts and bills from the Edgartown Lighthouse [1845-1847] are contained in the second subseries. The third subseries includes newspaper and magazine articles on the Edgartown Lighthouse and the Children's Memorial located there. Finally, a guestbook of visitors' names from 1893-1894 completes this series.

#### **Subseries A: Reference**

Box 3 of 5

Folder 1: Edgartown Lighthouse: General Information and History.

#### **Subseries B: Bills and Receipts**

Box 3 of 5

Folder 2: Edgartown Lighthouse: Bills and Receipts, 1845-1847.

#### **Subseries C: Newspaper and Magazine Articles**

Box 3 of 5

Folder 3: Edgartown Lighthouse: Newspaper and Magazine Articles, 1938-2002 and undated.

#### **Subseries D: Guestbooks**

Box 3 of 5

Folder 4: Edgartown Lighthouse: Visitors Register, 1893-1894.

### **Series V: Cape Poge Lighthouse**

This Series contains information on the history of the Cape Poge Lighthouse. The first subseries holds pamphlets, timelines, and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Lighthouse Service description of the Cape Poge Light Station from 1929. Receipts and

bills from the Cape Poge Lighthouse [1845-1847] are contained in the second subseries. The third subseries includes newspaper and magazine articles on the Cape Poge Lighthouse. The majority of this series is the collection of journals from Cape Poge, ranging from 1872-1916. These records were kept by the light-keepers there, marking daily events, repairs, weather, ships, and more.

### **Subseries A: Reference**

Box 3 of 5

Folder 5: Cape Poge Lighthouse: General Information and History.

### **Subseries B: Bills and Receipts**

Box 3 of 5

Folder 6: Cape Poge Lighthouse: Bills and Receipts, 1845-1847.

### **Subseries C: Newspaper and Magazine Articles**

Box 3 of 5

Folder 7: Cape Poge Lighthouse: Newspaper and Magazine Articles, 1801-1999.

### **Subseries D: Logbooks**

Box 3 of 5

Folder 8: Cape Poge Lighthouse: Journal of Lighthouse, 1872-1881.

Folder 9: Cape Poge Lighthouse: Journal of Lighthouse, 1881-1889.

Box 4 of 5

Folder 1: Cape Poge Lighthouse: Journal of Lighthouse, 1889-1894.

Folder 2: Cape Poge Lighthouse: Journal of Lighthouse, 1895-1898.

Folder 3: Cape Poge Lighthouse: Journal of Lighthouse, 1898-1902.

Folder 4: Cape Poge Lighthouse: Journal of Lighthouse, 1902-1906.

Folder 5: Cape Poge Lighthouse: Journal of Lighthouse, 1906-1912.

Box 5 of 5

Folder 1: Cape Poge Lighthouse: Journal of Lighthouse, 1912-1916.

### **Series VI: East Chop Lighthouse**

This Series contains information on the history of the East Chop Lighthouse. The first subseries holds pamphlets, timelines, and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Lighthouse Service description of the Edgartown Light Station from 1927. A transfer of sale for the lighthouse from Silas Daggett to the United States government is housed in the second Subseries. The third subseries includes newspaper and magazine articles on the East Chop Light.

### **Subseries A: Reference**

Box 5 of 5

Folder 2: East Chop Lighthouse: General Information and History.

### **Subseries B: Original Documents**

Box 5 of 5

Folder 3: East Chop Lighthouse: Transfer of Sale from Silas Daggett to U.S. Government, 1876.

### **Subseries C: Newspaper and Magazine Articles**

Box 5 of 5

Folder 4: East Chop Lighthouse: Newspaper and Magazine Articles, 1926-1994.

### **Series VII: West Chop Lighthouse**

This Series contains information on the history of the West Chop Lighthouse. The first subseries holds pamphlets, timelines, and summaries of its history. The second section houses letters regarding construction and repair on the lighthouse from 1846. Receipts and bills from the West Chop Lighthouse [1845-1847] are contained in the third subseries. The last subseries includes newspaper and magazine articles on the lighthouse.

### **Subseries A: Reference**

Box 5 of 5

Folder 5: West Chop Lighthouse: General Information and History.

### **Subseries B: Letters**

Box 5 of 5

Folder 6: West Chop Lighthouse: Letters regarding West Chop Lighthouse, 1846.

### **Subseries C: Bills and Receipts**

Box 5 of 5

Folder 7: West Chop Lighthouse: Bills and Receipts, 1845-1847.

### **Subseries D: Newspaper and Magazine Articles**

Box 5 of 5

Folder 8: West Chop Lighthouse: Newspaper and Magazine Articles, c.1950-1995.

### **Series VIII: Holmes Hole Beacon Lights**

This Series contains information on the history of the beacon lights used in the Holmes Hole harbor from 1854-1860.

Box 5 of 5

Folder 9: Holmes Hole Beacon Lights: General Information and History.

## **Series IX: Elizabeth Island Lighthouses**

### **Subseries A: Cuttyhunk Lighthouse**

This Subseries contains information on the Cuttyhunk Lighthouse [located on Cuttyhunk Island of the Elizabeth Islands], as well as bills and receipts pertaining to upkeep of the lighthouse and salaries of its keepers from 1845-1847.

Box 5 of 5

Folder 10: Cuttyhunk Lighthouse: General Information and History.

Folder 11: Cuttyhunk Lighthouse: Bills and Receipts, 1845-1847.

### **Subseries B: Tarpaulin Cove**

This Subseries contains information on the Tarpaulin Cove Lighthouse [located on Naushon Island of the Elizabeth Islands], as well as bills and receipts pertaining to upkeep of the lighthouse and salaries of its keepers from 1845-1847.

Box 5 of 5

Folder 12: Tarpaulin Cove Lighthouse: General Information and History.

Folder 13: Tarpaulin Cove Lighthouse: Bills and Receipts, 1845-1847.

## **Series X: Cape Cod Lighthouses**

This Series contains information on the Chatham and Nobska Lighthouses, two important beacons along the coastline of Cape Cod.

Box 5 of 5

Folder 14: Chatham Lighthouse: General Information and History.

Folder 15: Nobska Lighthouse: General Information and History.

## **Series XI: Vineyard Light Vessels**

This Series contains information on the light vessels that served in the Vineyard Sound and other waters surrounding the Island for more than a hundred years. The first Subseries holds general information and diagrams of these vessels. The second Subseries houses bills and receipts pertaining to the upkeep and salaries of the keepers of the light vessels. Newspaper and magazine articles on the Vineyard Light Vessels complete this series.

### **Subseries A: Reference**

Box 5 of 5

Folder 16: Vineyard Light Vessels: General Information and History.

### **Subseries B: Bills and Receipts**

Box 5 of 5

Folder 17: Vineyard Light Vessels: Bills, Receipts, and Petition, 1841-1847.

### **Subseries C: Newspaper and Magazine Articles**

Box 5 of 5

Folder 18: Vineyard Light Vessels: Newspaper and Magazine Articles, 1955-1991.

### **Series XII: Administrative Papers**

This Series contains papers from Joseph Thaxter Pease, the Superintendent of Lighthouses for the district including Martha's Vineyard. The first subseries holds his professional correspondence with the government and some of the Island's light-keepers from 1842-1849. Also, bills and receipts pertaining to the upkeep of lighthouses as well as keepers' salaries are housed in the second section.

#### **Subseries A: Letters**

Box 5 of 5

Folder 19: Administrative Papers, District of Edgartown: Letters to Superintendent Joseph Thaxter Pease, 1842-1849.

#### **Subseries B: Bills and Receipts**

Box 5 of 5

Folder 20: Administrative Papers, District of Edgartown: Bills and Receipts from Superintendent Joseph Thaxter Pease, 1843-1855.

Folder 21: Administrative Papers, District of Edgartown: Payroll from Third Quarter of 1846.

### **Series XIII: Miscellaneous**

This Series contains an assortment of items. The first folder houses receipts and bills of various lighthouse and buoy repairs. Also included in this series is a visitors register to an unidentified lighthouse [although it may be from Edgartown]. Finally, a set of lecture note cards by an unknown author are held in the last folder, giving the reader a good overall history of both worldwide and Martha's Vineyard lighthouses.

Box 5 of 5

Folder 22: Miscellaneous: Receipts and Bills, Upkeep of Lighthouses on MV, 1845-1847.

Folder 23: Miscellaneous: Unknown MV Lighthouse Visitors Register, 1862-1864.

Folder 24: Miscellaneous: Set of Lecture Note Cards on Lighthouses, General and MV.