

**Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum  
Record Unit 281  
The Noah Pease Letters, 1794-1827**

By  
Linda M. Wilson

**Descriptive Summary**

**Repository:** Martha's Vineyard Museum

**Call No.**

**Title:** The Noah Pease Letters, 1794-1827

**Creator:** Linda M. Wilson

**Quantity:** .5 cubic foot

**Abstract:** This collection of letters written by and to Noah Pease, a master mariner and devoted family man, between 1794 and 1827 provides insight into his life as the progenitor of a distinguished Vineyard family in the period following the Revolutionary War. The letters are revealing as well of the life of a woman raising her family alone while her husband was away at sea.

**Administrative Information**

**Acquisition Information:** The Noah Pease Letters, 1794-1827, were acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum in 1981 from Julien Vose Weston.

**Processing Information:** Linda M. Wilson

**Access Restrictions:** none

**Use Restrictions:** none

**Preferred citation for publication:** Martha's Vineyard Museum, The Noah Pease Letters, 1794-1827, Record Unit xxx.

**Index Terms**

Pease, Noah (1754-1841)

Pease, Hannah Dunham (1776-1813)

Pease, Isaiah (1786-1862)

**Series and Subseries Arrangement**

Series I: Letters Written by Noah Pease

Series II: Letters Written to Noah Pease

Series III: Letter Written to Polly Pease

Series IV: Transcripts of the Letters

Series V: *Intelligencer*, November 1996

Series VI; Reference

## **Biography/Historical Note:**

The historical context for this collection of letters begins with the period immediately following the Revolutionary War. A group of Boston investors, perhaps speculators is a better term, chartered the brig *Ceres* with the idea of making a fine fast profit selling American goods to the French. Their timing could not have been worse. France was in the middle of its own Revolution which had torn the country apart. Inflation was rampant, and the value of paper currency had fallen. Furthermore, November was the wrong time of year for a comfortable north Atlantic sailing. Nevertheless, Captain Abner Dunham with Noah Pease as his First Mate set sail from Boston in November of 1794.

What follows is a series of dramatic and colorful letters about this difficult trip that reveals his eye for detail and his attention to his absent family back in Edgartown.

Noah Pease and his wife, Hannah Dunham, had settled in Edgartown and raised their family there. Much of Pease's life was spent at sea which left his wife to manage alone not only the "good health" and "wellfare" of the children but "for money & other necessaries." She dealt with a lot from what the letters reveal. In fact, their eighth child was born during the voyage to France.

A year later in April of 1796 Pease was once again at sea and worried sick about the health of his children back in Edgartown. He walked the streets of New York hoping to find "...some one that has Come from the Vineyard – yet no one can I se." He had no way of knowing that before the end of the month two of his children would be dead. In a letter from Hannah, Pease learns of the loss of the children and is reassured by Hannah that she can continue on "for a comfortable living" if he takes on another voyage. Which he does.

But beginning in 1806, the letters find Noah Pease back in Edgartown permanently and writing to his sons who are at sea themselves. Isaiah seems to have been his favorite. His letters to Isaiah recount numerous illnesses, deaths, and financial disasters among Edgartown's finest but little detail about his life on the Island. His account books located elsewhere in the Archives reveal that he became a shoemaker and among the final letters are orders for shoes placed by George Osborn, one of the Edgartown Osborns, who wrote from Charleston, South Carolina, and included the shipping news from the South with his orders.

## **Scope and Content Note:**

This collection consists of 30 hand-written letters dated between 1794 and 1827. There is a copy of a 31st letter. Each letter has been transcribed. An extensive biographical article

on the life of Noah Pease appeared in the November 1996 issue of the *Intelligencer*. Many of the letters in this collection were quoted in the article. Related material may be found in Noah Pease's account books in the Museum Archives.

## **Series Descriptions**

### **Series I: Letters Written by Noah Pease**

#### **Subseries A: Letters Written to Hannah Pease**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 1: November 21, 1794

Folder 2: March 10, 1795

Folder 3: March 13, 1795

Folder 4: March 27, 1795

Folder 5: April, 1796

Folder 6: April 16, 1796

Folder 7: April 23, 1796

Folder 8: November 15, 1796

#### **Subseries B: Letters Written to the Pease Children**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 9: To Sprowel, November 25, 1794

Folder 10: To Ruhamah, November 25, 1794

Folder 11: To Sprowel, May 27, 1796

Folder 12: To Isaiah, July 8, 1806

Folder 13: To Isaiah, September 23, 1807

Folder 14: To Isaiah, October 3, 1807

Folder 15: To Isaiah, June 5, 1809

Folder 16: To Isaiah, January 29, 1812

Folder 17: To Isaiah, n.d.

Folder 18: To Isaiah, September 3, 1813

Folder 19: To Isaiah and Polly, October 3, 1813

Folder 20: To Isaiah, n.d.

Folder 21: To Isaiah, August 31, 1818

Folder 22: To Isaiah, September 5, 1818

### **Series II: Letters Written to Noah Pease**

#### **Subseries A: Letter Written by Hannah Pease**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 23: April 26, 1796

#### **Subseries B: Letter Written by Richard Faxon, Jr.**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 24: December 17, 1815

**Subseries C: Letter Written by Lot Norton**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 25: November 25, 1819

**Subseries D: Letter Written by Samuel Coffin**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 26: April 18, 1820

**Subseries E: Letters Written by George Osborn**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 27: March 7, 1820

Folder 28: February 29, 1824

Folder 29: April 3, 1827

**Series III: Letter Written to Polly Pease**

**Subseries A: Letter Written by Pamela Luce**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 30: n.d.

**Series IV: Reference**

Folder 31: Transcripts of the Letters

Folder 32: *Intelligencer*, November 1996

Folder 33: Copies