

**Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum
Record Unit 335**

Osborn Family Papers, 1834-1923

By Linda M. Wilson

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum

Call No.

Title: The Osborn Collection

Creator: various

Quantity: 1 cubic foot

Abstract: The Osborn Family Papers consist of miscellaneous personal, legal, and business papers from three members of the Osborn family: Abraham (1798-1865), Samuel, Jr. (1823-1895), and Henry L. (1848-1881), of Edgartown, MA. The documents date from the 1834 to 1923.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information: The Osborn Family papers were acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum in _____ by _____.

Processing Information: Linda M. Wilson

Access Restrictions: none

Use Restrictions: none

Preferred citation for publication: Martha's Vineyard Museum, Osborn Family Papers, 1834-1923, Record Unit 35.

Index Terms:

Osborn, Abraham

Osborn, Henry L.

Osborn, Samuel Jr.

Eunice Adams

Almira

Clarice

Hattie Smith

Europa

Perry

Splendid

George A. Hayden

Bramin

Emma Jane

George and Mary

Ocmulgee
Mary Frazier
Whaling
Abbott vs. Osborn

Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Family Papers

Subseries A: Miscellaneous Document, 1923

Subseries B: Assorted Legal Papers, 1855-1892

Series II: Abraham Osborn, 1798-1865

Series III: Samuel Osborn, Jr., 1823-1895

Series IV: Henry L. Osborn, 1848-1881

Series V: Business Papers, 1862-1904

Series VI: Parental Permissions, 1876-1879

Series VII: Ships' Papers

Subseries A: *Eunice Adams*

Subseries B: *Almira*

Subseries C: *Clarice*

Subseries D: *Hattie Smith*

Subseries E: *Europa*

Subseries F: *Perry*

Subseries G: *Splendid*

Subseries H: *George A. Hayden*

Subseries I: *Bramin*

Subseries J: *Emma Jane*

Subseries K: *George Mary*

Subseries L: *Ocmulgee*

Subseries M: *Mary Frazier*

Series VIII: Reference

Historical Note:

Abraham Osborn, 1798-1865, was a ship's owner and agent and master mariner who spent his life in Edgartown, MA. He was the son of Henry Osborn. His business interests ranged far and wide however and many voyages from his fleet originated in New Bedford, MA. He was the principal owner of the *Ocmulgee* which was captured and destroyed by the Confederate Privateer *Alabama* in 1862. He served as Captain for one voyage of the *Almira* between 1824 and 1826. Besides whaling, he pursued many different business interests including the sending of a ship and crew to the California

gold fields, successfully selling shares in whaling voyages, and pursuing legal recourse to recoup losses from the U.S. government as well as foreign entities.

Samuel Osborn, Jr., 1823-1895, was the grandson of Henry Osborn and began his business career with a clothing store on lower Main Street in Edgartown, Massachusetts. By 1870 his interest had turned to the family tradition of managing the whaling fleet from Edgartown harbor. His holdings increased and by 1880 he was known as the largest individual owner of whaling vessels and property in the United States. With such a large fleet of vessels, he naturally was involved in some remarkable maritime disasters and law suits. He was relentless in pursuing satisfactory settlements in the case of the *Ocmulgee* and the *Mary Frazier* (ultimately never settled with the Portuguese government). He had the satisfaction of working to achieve a \$125,000. settlement for the owners of the five vessels lost in the Arctic ship disaster of 1871. It was his ship the *Europa* that jettisoned its cargo of whale oil to make room for the survivors of this maritime disaster.

Henry L. Osborn, 1848-1881, grandson of Henry Osborn, appears to have been less involved in the family maritime enterprises than his cousin Samuel Jr. and his uncle Abraham. Little is known about his life other than his affection for travel and fine clothing. He died in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Scope and Content Note:

The collection of records in Record Unit 235 has been “artificially” created. There is no original order to these documents. Rather, it is assumed that the organization’s librarians, interns, and volunteers have brought these records together at some point. The institution’s own records do not shade any light on when and why the collection was originally formed. What is known is that the MVM was founded in 1922. And, the organization began to collect documents in 1923. Thus, the formation of this record unit can only be dated to sometime between 1923 and the present day. The processing of this collection in 2006 has largely kept this artificial collection together.

This wide ranging compilation of documents provides material relating the voyages of 13 different ships under the purvey of the Osborn Family of Edgartown including receipts and bills, some of which are in Portuguese, for individual whaling voyages; various maritime documents including certifications from U.S. Consulates around the world; permissions for young boys to join whaling voyages; legal papers relating to the Ocmulgee incident; notes for loans and estate settlements; documentation for the sale and settlement of shares in individual voyages; and several personal letters begging patience for failure to pay personal debts. The bills and receipts provide a detailed look at the provisioning, maintenance and repair of merchant and whaling ships and the financial operations of maritime businessmen in one family. Researchers will want to

refer to Record Unit 39, The Gold Rush and the Vineyard and Record Unit 7, Whaling for related material.

Series Descriptions

Series I: Family Papers

Subseries A: Miscellaneous Documents

Box 1 of 1

Folder 1: D.A.R. Application 1923

Subseries B: Assorted Legal Documents, 1855-1892

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Folder 2: Settlements, Estate of Abraham Osborn, 1871-1877

Folder 3: Assorted Legal Papers, 1855-1880

Folder 4: Assorted Papers, Abbott vs. Osborn, 1892

Folder 5: Legal Papers, *Hattie Smith*, 1883

Series II: Abraham Osborn, 1798-1865

Box 1 of 1

Folder 6: Miscellaneous Papers, 1798-1865

Series III: Samuel Osborn, Jr., 1823-1895

Box 1 of 1

Folder 7: Miscellaneous Papers , 1823-1895

Series IV: Henry L. Osborn, 1848-1881

Box 1 of 1

Folder 8: Miscellaneous Papers, 1848-1881

Series V: Business Papers, 1862-1904

Box 1 of 1

Folder 9: Receipts, 1904

Folder 10: Bills, 1862-1863

Folder 11: Miscellaneous Business Papers, 1867-1884

Series VI: Parental Permissions, 1876-1879

Box 1 of 1

Folder 12: Parental Permissions, 1876-1879

Series VIII: Ships' Papers

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Folder 13: *Eunice Adams*, 1886-1894
Folder 14: *Almira*, 1834-1867
Folder 15: *Clairce*, 1878
Folder 16: *Hattie Smith*, 1862-1886
Folder 17: *Europa*, 1853
Folder 18: *Perry*, 1874-1880
Folder 19: *Splendid*, 1839-1855
Folder 20: *George A. Hayden*, 1904-1905
Folder 21: *Bramin*, 1848-1849
Folder 22: *Emma Jane*, 1879-1885
Folder 23: *George and Mary*, 1840
Folder 24: *Ocmulgee*, 1861
Folder 25: *Mary Frazier*, 1876-1889

Series VIII: Reference

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Folder 26: Articles on Osborn Family genealogy and business history