

# Codman Connections: Portrait of a Family and its Papers

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In 1978-1979, SPNEA undertook a sixteen-month effort to collect, arrange, and describe the Codman Family Manuscripts Collection, a group of papers that came to the Society in 1969 when it acquired the Codman House in Lincoln, Massachusetts. This undertaking was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Twenty-six Codman and Codman-related manuscript collections are represented, covering the period 1715-1969, and are estimated to contain 100,000 items. This paper will provide a genealogical basis for the collection, identify some of the kinds of documents it contains, and describe the system by which they were organized and made available for research.

Three hundred fifty-four years ago, in the year 1637, Robert Codman and his mother embarked from Surrey, England, and set sail for Salem, at that time barely settled. Codman bought five and one-half acres from the town and not long afterwards, ten acres in Salisbury on the Merrimack River. Robert was a mariner engaged in the coastwise trade as far south as Virginia. He settled on Martha's Vineyard in 1654 and had three sons: Joseph, James and Stephen. Joseph, also a mariner, predeceased his father Robert who died in 1678. Stephen sold the Vineyard land in 1678 to Nathaniel Starbuck of Nantucket, which has since born the name "Starbuck Point."

Stephen removed to Charlestown, married Elizabeth Randall and had nine children. His tombstone, which can be seen in Charlestown today, suggests that he was not the happiest of men when he died in 1706: "My dear children seven/ By me in graves do lie/ All you that live remember/ That you must also die." Stephen's widow

Elizabeth died two years later, leaving an orphaned son John, aged eight, third generation and the first to bear that name. It is from him that the present Codman family descends.<sup>1</sup>

Born in Charlestown in 1698, John Codman was variously a saddler, sea captain, and merchant. He married Parnell Foster, whose great-grandmother was Mary Chilton, first woman to step off the Mayflower. John Codman served as a captain in the local militia, held a commission under the king and was an officer of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company. In 1749 a fire broke out in John's Charlestown warehouse, and it was suspected that it had been set by some disgruntled slaves who chafed under his rigorous discipline. Three household slaves, Mark, Phillis, and Phoebe, later were thought to have aided Codman's field hands in setting the fire. The case was not to rest there. In 1755 Mark, still in Codman's employ, obtained some arsenic from the slave of a medical doctor. Phillis and Phoebe slipped it at intervals into Captain John's food. He died on 1 July 1755, lingering fifteen hours after the last dose. The conspirators were tried and found guilty. Phillis, who confessed to the crime, was burned at the stake in Cambridge, the only such burning ever recorded in American annals. Mark was hanged on chains on a gibbet, and later displayed on the Charlestown Common, where Paul Revere was to see his remains nearly twenty years later.

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Arson and arsenic were a doubtful inheritance for fourth-generation John Codman, born in Charlestown in 1720 and the second to bear that name. He was swept up in the religious fervor of the evangelicals, George Whitfield and Gilbert Tennent, and joined the church at the age of twenty. He married Abigail Asbury, became a Charlestown selectman and found himself on a committee of inspection for the non-importation agreement. After the Boston Tea Party, we find his name on Charlestown's Committee of Correspondence, and in 1774, he helped torch British tea in Charlestown's public market. The British torched his home, along with the rest of Charlestown, and he fled the city.

In 1755, the same year the first John Codman was murdered, there was born the third John Codman, a member of the fifth generation (fig. 15). He would become in time the most illustrious Codman to bear that name. He attended Dummer Academy in Byfield, and was twenty when the Revolution broke out. We can only speculate whether he engaged in privateering at that time, but it seems only natural that he should have chosen to follow the sea in the footsteps of his father and grandfather before him. At an early age he was apprenticed to Deacon Isaac Smith of Boston. Later, in 1781, he formed a business with Deacon Smith's son, William, under the name Codman and Smith. The firm was a great success. They traded with Spain, Holland, Portugal, France, and the French West Indies. Laden with codfish, Codman's ships embarked from Boston and Salem to the south and to Europe. In the south the codfish would be exchanged for rye, corn, wheat, and barrels which were in turn exchanged in Europe for Madeira, capers, and currants. By 1786 he was exporting oil and Honduras logwood to Amsterdam, Scandinavia, and Russia. His partnership with Smith ended in 1790, and the following year John Codman took his brother Richard into the firm. Here in Boston, John owned and operated ropewalks

and a ship chandlery. Windfall profits were realized on United States bond purchases through the hard money fiscal policies of Alexander Hamilton in the 1790s, and this enabled him to invest heavily in Boston real estate.<sup>2</sup>

Codman had married Margaret Russell in 1781, daughter of the Honorable James and Katherine Graves Russell. The marriage made him the brother-in-law of Chambers Russell II, with whom he enjoyed a close relationship. The second son of John and Margaret, Charles Russell Codman, was named in his honor. The Russells were a politically prominent family in Boston, and Chambers Russell had acquired much of his wealth and a farm in Lincoln from his grandfather Charles Chambers. Codman had been appointed co-executor of his brother-in-law's estate. When Chambers Russell II died in 1790, John Codman saw in the Lincoln farm an opportunity to create for himself and as an inheritance for his children a country seat in the English tradition. Improvements to the Lincoln property were made in 1791 and 1792 with expenses charged to the Russell estate. But in 1794 Codman undertook at his own expense several major improvements, including the erection of a farmhouse, the establishment of a working farm with cattle and swine, and the hiring of a full-time farm manager.

Wintering at his city mansion on Hanover Street in Boston, Codman and his family began to spend their summers in Lincoln. From 1797 to 1798 he invested more than \$15,000 to federalize the old Russell mansion. The alterations are sometimes attributed to Charles Bulfinch.<sup>3</sup> He also altered the landscape to conform to his idea of an English country seat, including a large pleasure pond. He continued to maintain a residence in Boston, and was for many years a member of Boston's Brattle Street Church. He was also a charter member of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture (1792), the Society for the Information and Advice of Immigrants

(1793), and the Boston Chamber of Commerce (1794). It was his service in the Massachusetts House of Representatives and later in the Senate which earned him the title "the Honorable John Codman."

Richard Codman, John's younger brother, who was graduated from Harvard in 1782, represented the firm of John and Richard Codman in France, where he was to spend much of his life. He owned several châteaux in and around Paris, and his extravagances in decorating and maintaining them drained virtually all of the firm's foreign assets. Brother Richard's commercial as well as social indiscretions caused John nothing but anguish, and John was forced to go to France to save the firm from bankruptcy. The contrast between the two brothers is nowhere better illustrated than in their social politics: while John was signing a petition to Congress against Sunday mail delivery, Richard was signing one favoring a theater in downtown Boston, an opprobrious act in 1791.<sup>4</sup>

Charles Russell Codman was only nineteen when his father, John Codman III, died in 1803 and left him the Lincoln estate. In 1807 he sold the house and the several hundred acres attached, and began to travel extensively in Europe. He became a serious wine connoisseur while in Tours, and spent time with his uncle James Russell in Bristol, England. He married Anne McMaster of Nova Scotia in 1825, settled in France, and befriended such luminaries as Sir Walter Scott and General Lafayette. They had two surviving children, Charles Russell Codman, born in 1829, and James McMaster Codman, born in 1831.

After Anne's death in 1831, Charles Russell Codman returned to Boston, served as Senior Warden of Trinity Church, and in 1836 married Sarah Ogden of Ogdensburg, New York. He had met her in 1835 while she was wintering with her Boston cousins, Daniel and Caroline Webster. She was the eldest daughter and the second of eleven children of Judge David A. Ogden and Rebecca Cornell Edwards. Her father was

deeply involved in the development of northeastern New York near the Saint Lawrence River. It was he who founded Ogdensburg, New York, in 1811.

Sarah Ogden Codman gave birth to four children, among them Frances Anne, Ogden, and Richard. Frances was to marry the Boston architect John Hubbard Sturgis, who would later have a strong influence on their nephew Ogden Codman, Jr. Richard Codman attended Harvard, class of 1864, and embarked in 1865 on an extended European tour. It was through Sarah's eldest son, Ogden, that the eighth and last generation of Lincoln Codmans descends.

Born in 1839, Ogden was schooled in Jamaica Plain and New Bedford before attending Harvard. He left before completing his degree and journeyed to India. Upon his return in 1861, he married Sarah Fletcher Bradlee, eldest daughter of James Bowdoin Bradlee and Mary Perrin May Bradlee. In 1862, Ogden repurchased the Lincoln estate which had been owned by his father and grandfather before him, and named it "The Grange." He settled down to life there as a gentleman farmer, while Sarah preferred to spend much of her time in Boston with her Bradlee relations. Ogden and Sarah did live abroad for several years in Dinard, France, where there was a thriving expatriate American community. Their two youngest children were born there. She eventually bore Ogden six children, and in later years Sarah took a strong interest in war relief work.

Sarah's father, James Bowdoin Bradlee, was the second son of Josiah and Lucy Hall Bradlee, born in 1813, and named in honor of Massachusetts Governor Bowdoin Bradlee. Both James and his brother Frederick were apprenticed into their father's China trade business, but neither took to it strongly. James's considerable wealth derived from speculation in gold stocks, Boston real estate, and the dowry which made both possible that came when he married Mary Perrin May in 1837. She bore him

seven children. He purchased 34 Beacon Street in 1848, a house which had been designed and built by architect Cornelius Coolidge and in which the Hubbard and Russell families had lived.<sup>5</sup> Sarah's mother, Mary Perrin May, was born in 1815, the daughter of Perrin May and Delia Scarborough. Perrin May was engaged in the China trade, and was renowned for the grapes and pears he grew in his Washington Street garden. His daughter Mary was a first cousin once removed to the wife of William Dawes, and also related to Louisa May Alcott.

Many Codman and Bradlee family connections remained close. Mary Bradlee, the eldest daughter of James Bowdoin Bradlee and Mary Perrin May Bradlee, traveled to Europe in the early 1860s with her brother-in-law Ogden and sister Katherine Bradlee Crowninshield. In 1867 she became engaged to a handsome young French colonel, Louis Dieudonné Gaillard, whom she married in 1868. Gaillard was to receive the three highest Legion of Honor awards for his bravery in battle in Vietnam (then Annam) and the Crimea.

Mary's younger sister Alice Bradlee married Theodore Chase, Jr. in 1868. Chase was the great-grandson of Colonel Timothy Bigelow, a Worcester blacksmith who in 1775 had been instrumental in removing the *Massachusetts Spy* and its editor, Isaiah Thomas, from Boston and went on to distinguish himself in the Revolution. Chase was in Paris during the Paris Commune of 1871, and his brother-in-law Louis Gaillard was with the nationalist forces attempting to reconquer the city from the communards.

Frances Bowdoin Bradlee was the youngest daughter born to James and Mary Bradlee, and never married. She took a liking, however, to her sister's children, especially Ogden Codman, Jr., the first-born of Ogden and Sarah Bradlee Codman. It was Frances who provided Ogden, Jr. with a loan with which he began his architectural practice. Ogden's younger

brothers, Thomas and Hugh, were also involved in the arts. Both active in the American Fund for French Wounded, Tom was an accomplished photographer, and manager of the family's financial affairs, while Hugh, a concert violinist, enjoyed a distinguished concert career in Boston. There were two younger sisters, Alice, an amateur artist, and Dorothy, all of whom lived at various times at the Lincoln estate. Alice studied at the school of the Museum of Fine Arts and exhibited her work at the Copley Society of Boston. Dorothy lived a sedentary life and spent her time collecting postcards and seashells. It was Ogden, Jr. who arranged in 1920 for the family estate in Lincoln to pass to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities upon the death of the last Codman heir. With Dorothy Codman's death on 6 June 1968, that legacy was fulfilled.

The extent of manuscript material relating to the Codman family at their ancestral home was not immediately apparent when the Society took possession of the house in 1969. Architectural drawings by Ogden Codman, Jr. which were found during the initial inventory were removed to the Society's headquarters in Boston, but the great bulk of family papers was not uncovered until nearly three years after R. Curtis and Barbara C. Chapin became resident overseers of the house in 1970. In the attic they found neatly tied document bundles from the last two decades of the eighteenth century. These were found to contain correspondence, financial records and legal papers of John Codman III, the first Codman to own the house and the merchant chiefly responsible for establishing the Codman fortune. Account books, bills of lading, and various shipping papers were uncovered, showing Codman's commercial activities, along with bills paid which document the extensive alterations Codman made to the house he had acquired from the estate of his brother-in-law, Chambers Russell II. In all, more than 5,000 manuscript items were found relating

to John Codman and spanning the years 1782-1803. The scope of these papers was sufficiently extensive for the Chapins to undertake a major study of the federalization of the house, an investigation which led to the discovery of additional manuscript collections.

John Codman III's first wife, Margaret Russell Codman, had inherited the papers of her father, James Russell, upon the latter's death in 1798, which included an account book for the Lincoln farm. It was through her father that Margaret Codman also inherited the papers of her brother, Dr. Charles Russell, who had owned and lived in the Lincoln house from 1767 to 1776. Among his papers is a medical account book he kept in the 1760s which affords an interesting glimpse into medical practices of the time.

At least two Russell family manuscript collections had thus come to light which, together with the papers of John Codman III and portions of other Codman and Codman-related collections, suggested that a more thorough search might turn up equally valuable and early material. The search promised not only to shed light on the Codman and Russell families, but also on the history of the house itself and its more than 200 years of occupancy.

Efforts to obtain funding to further identify manuscript collections were begun, and in 1973 the Ella Lyman Cabot Trust awarded Barbara C. Chapin a grant to arrange and inventory the papers of John Codman III. A private benefactor connected with the Codman family also provided the means to organize and describe 200 letters associated with Sarah Ogden Codman (1800-1844). These projects generated additional interest in the Codman papers, fueled by still more discoveries of manuscript material by the resident overseers. In 1976 an initial proposal was sent to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a thorough investigation into papers and documents suspected to be elsewhere in the forty-room estate.

With the support of several scholars especially interested in the Codman manuscripts and who had constituted themselves as a council of advisers, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded SPNEA a grant of \$42,742.00 in May 1978. A full-time archivist was engaged in August of that year, and work commenced on assigning provenance to every document found during a room-by-room search of the house. Twenty separate collections were thus identified.

The Society had not been faced previously with such a large accumulation of manuscript material. It was necessary to design a system of arrangement and description that would not only bring the papers under physical and intellectual control, but would also provide the basis by which collections associated with other Society properties could be organized. A decision was made to divide each collection into series by kind: correspondence, diaries, financial records, legal records, literary papers, maps and drawings, photographs, printed matter, and scrapbooks.<sup>6</sup> Each of these series was in turn divided into subseries (e.g., in a financial records series, subseries may include accounts settled, bills paid, inventories, etc.). To further facilitate research, the subseries themselves were divided into chronological, subject-oriented, sub-subseries.

Fifty cubic feet of manuscripts were moved from the Codman House to the Society's Boston headquarters in November 1978 where, for the next thirteen months, a staff of eighteen people (all but one of whom were part-time), systematically arranged and described what eventually became twenty-six manuscript collections.<sup>7</sup> (A list of these collections is reproduced in Appendix A.) As the papers were boxed and shelved, a guide was prepared for each family member's collection, consisting of three parts: a biographical sketch, a scope and content note describing the papers, and an inventory listing the papers themselves. (A sample inventory page is reproduced in Appendix B.)

The manuscripts are remarkably diverse, too extensive and varied to permit more than a few general observations about them here.<sup>8</sup> The research potential in the papers is staggering, not only for the history of a half-dozen prominent families and important individuals such as John Codman III and Ogden Codman, Jr., but also for New England social history in general. What is perhaps most impressive is the degree to which the Codmans consciously preserved their correspondence, their diaries, their financial and legal records, and, indeed, all of their documents. To be sure, much has been lost, but few other New England families have systematically left such a quantity of records for posterity. The collection now housed at SPNEA headquarters consists of nearly 200 linear feet of manuscripts. While some of the collections are quite small with just a few pieces of correspondence, others include dozens of bound volumes and thousands of individual manuscripts. The largest single collection is that of Thomas Newbold Codman, with ninety volumes and 9,010 items. Several hundred correspondents may be represented in the letters of a single collection. It is estimated that there are more than 100,000 items in all of the bound volumes and loose manuscripts, including nearly 10,000 photographic materials and 2,000 architectural drawings. They range in date from 1715 to 1968.

Two individuals stand out as most re-

sponsible for the aggregation of this material at the Codman House in Lincoln: Ogden Codman, Sr. and his wife, Sarah Fletcher Bradlee Codman. When, in 1862, Ogden Codman repurchased the Lincoln estate his father had sold in 1807, Ogden brought with him the papers of his father, mother, and brother, as well as those of his grandfather John Codman III. Since John Codman III had possessed papers of his father-in-law, brother-in-law, a sister-in-law, and two of his own brothers, this means that as early as 1862 there were ten collections of family papers in the Lincoln house.

His marriage to Sarah Fletcher Bradlee in 1861 was, in time, to account for nine additional collections from the Bradlee side: Sarah's parents, three sisters, a brother-in-law, and the Bigelow-Chase family papers that came to Sarah's sister Alice after Theodore Chase, Jr.'s death. Ogden's and Sarah's own children would account for five additional collections. Ogden, Jr. would add the papers of his wife and her first husband, for a total of twenty-six manuscript collections.

The Codman family tree has branched far and wide since its planting in Salem in 1637. The Codmans are now in their twelfth generation; eight of those generations are represented in the manuscripts now at the Harrison Gray Otis house. They remain a remarkable set of documents.

**APPENDIX A**

**Codman Family Members  
Represented in the Codman Family  
Manuscripts Collection**

James Russell (1715-1798) Papers 1759-1797	Alice Bowdoin Bradlee Chase (1846-1925) Papers 1868-1923
Dr. Charles Russell (1738-1780) Papers 1764-1771	Frances Bowdoin Bradlee (1849-1930) Papers 1870-1925
Timothy Bigelow (1739-1790) Papers 1775-1800	Ogden Codman, Sr. (1839-1904) Papers 1852-1904
John Codman III (1755-1803) Papers 1782-1803	Sarah Fletcher Bradlee Codman (1842-1922) Papers 1856-1922
Stephen Codman (1758-1844) Papers 1811-1841	Ogden Codman, Jr. (1863-1951) Papers 1868-1950
Hannah Robinson Codman (1768-1819) Papers 1805-1818	Leila Griswold Webb Codman (1856-1910) Papers 1889-1910
Richard Codman (1762-1806) Papers 1789-1807	Henry Walter Webb (1852-1900) Papers 1861-1900
Charles Russell Codman (1784-1852) Papers 1829-1846	Alice Newbold Codman (1866-1923) Papers 1882-1923
Sarah Ogden Codman (1800-1844) Papers 1811-1841	Thomas Newbold Codman (1868-1963) Papers 1875-1961
James Bowdoin Bradlee (1813-1872) Papers 1835-1871	Hugh Codman (1875-1946) Papers 1883-1945
Mary Perrin May Bradlee (1815-1877) Papers 1823-1877	Dorothy Sarah Frances May Codman (1883-1968) Papers 1883-1967*
Louis Dieudonné Gaillard (1824-1888) Papers 1842-1887	
Mary May Bradlee Gaillard (1840-1903) Papers 1849-1901	
James McMaster Codman (1831-1917) Papers 1892	
Theodore Chase, Jr. (1832-1895) Papers 1842-1893	

\*This is reprinted from "Codman Family Manuscripts Collection: A Guide and Inventory" (SPNEA Archives.)

**APPENDIX B****Sample Inventory Page of the Codman Family Manuscripts Collection****CORRESPONDENCE:**

<i>Subseries</i>	<i>Sub-Subseries and Dates</i>	<i>Box &amp; Folder No.</i>
1. Letters Received	1795-1800	2.18

**FINANCIAL RECORDS:**

1. Account Books	Ships 1773-1784, 1777-1779 Petty Cash 1802 Receipts 1802, 1803 William Bond 1792	2.19 2.20 2.21 2.22
2. Account of Sales	General 1789, 1790-1801 D'Allarde 1793 Le Couteleux 1793	2.23-3.35 3.36 3.37
3. Accounts Settled	1782-1799 Lane, Son and Fraser 1784-1788, 1793, 1797 J. Van Heukelon 1785-1790	3.38-7.88 8.89-8.91 8.92

Myers, Depenau and Myers 1785-1788, 1790, 1791, 1797, 1798, 1800	8.93-8.99
Josiah Elliot 1787-1790	8.100
Josiah Vose 1791-1797	8.101
Isaac Goodenough 1794-1797, 1799	9.102-9.103
Porter, Brown, Wilson 1796	9.104
Swan 1797, 1798	9.105
Ropewalk 1790-1798	9.106-9.115
Memorandums 1791-1795, 1798, undated	9.116-9.117
Whale Oil undated	9.118
<b>4. Bills of Lading</b>	<b>10.119-10.122</b>
<b>5. Bills Paid</b>	
General 1781, 1783, 1784, 1787, 1788, 1790-1795, 1797-1800	10.123-12.156
Whale Oil 1797	12.157*

\*This is a partial inventory of John Codman's papers, reprinted from "Codman Family Manuscripts Collection: A Guide and Inventory," SPNEA.

## NOTES

1. Cora Codman Wolcott, *The Codmans of Charlestown and Boston: 1637-1929* (Brookline, Massachusetts: By the Author, 1930), is the source for much of this information on the early Codmans.
2. For this information I am indebted to Barbara C. Chapin, "John Codman Merchant Document Collection" (unpublished typescript, 1973, SPNEA).
3. This has been documented by R. Curtis Chapin, "The Federalization of the Codman House" (M.A. thesis, Goddard College, 1973). See Chapin, this issue.
4. Richard Codman employed J.-B. P. Le Brun, the Bernard Berenson of his day, to make the most of opportunities which arose after the French Revolution to obtain the works of old masters. Some of these descended through John and Richard's brother Stephen to Stephen's great-granddaughter, Martha Codman Karolik. See Cora Codman Wolcott, "A History of the Codman Collection of Pictures" (unpublished typescript, 1935, SPNEA), and Elizabeth Redmond, this issue.
5. Adjacent to the Francis Parkman House, this is today the home of the publishing firm Little, Brown.
6. These series constitute the ten basic kinds of personal manuscripts, and may be recalled with the acronym "CDFL LAMPPS." The "A" is for audio-visual, a kind not found in the Codman papers.
7. Ten staff members were volunteers who received academic credit for their work. I should like to especially thank the following individuals for their contributions: Hilda L. Armour, Dorothy B. Aronson, Thomas M. Bowman, Elizabeth H. Carroll, Frieda Cohen, Elizabeth S. Cornell, Alan Emmet, Amy E. Grooms, Janet S. Hollyday, Laurie L. King, Deborah A. Padock, and Carolyn Singer.
8. More than 200 pages have been devoted to their description in "Codman Family Manuscripts Collection: A Guide and Inventory" (unpublished typescript, 1979, SPNEA).