

PENOBSCOT MARINE MUSEUM

Inventory for
Manuscript Collection

PMM 12

Coombs Photographs and Papers

1844 - 1969

12 linear feet

Accession No. LB2000.52.1-18; LB2000.4.3

Stephen Phillips Memorial Library

Penobscot Marine Museum

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PMM 12

Coombs Photographs and Papers

Coombs, Charles R., 1862-1940

Coombs, Robert H., 1828-1897

Papers and photographs, 1844-1969

12 linear feet

Family of sea captains, undertakers, and amateur photographers from Belfast, Maine.

Photographs, business records and family papers from the Coombs family of Belfast, Maine. Manuscripts include accounts from the ship CORA, a guest book for the family camp at Tilden Pond, and ledgers for the Coombs funeral home. Photographs, which have been individually cataloged and digitized, focus on family life, hunting and sailing trips, and scenes and buildings in Belfast.

In English

Museum Purchase; 2000; LB2000.52. John Arrison; Gift; 2000 and 2021; LB2000.4 and R2021.1.

Finding aid available; folder level control

Subject Headings:

Coombs, Robert Hudson, -- 1828-1897.

CORA (ship)

Charles R. Coombs Funeral Home (Belfast, Me.)

Coombs family -- Photograph collections.

Ship captains -- Maine -- Belfast.

Funeral homes -- Maine -- Belfast.

Undertakers and undertaking -- Maine -- Belfast.

Coombs family.

Funeral homes.

Ship captains.

Merchant mariners

Wages

Undertakers and undertaking.

Vacation homes

Maine -- Belfast.

Maine -- Tilden Pond (Waldo County)

Local Subject Headings:

Cape Horn trade

China trade

Acquisition:

This collection was purchased from the estate of Horace Coombs, son of Charles R. Coombs.

Restrictions

This collection is open for research. There are no special restrictions.

Condition:

This collection is mostly in good condition. The covers are missing from the crew account book of the CORA, endpapers are detached, and there is some mold damage. Most of the pages bearing slop accounts were cut from the slop account book before it arrived at PMM.

Processing Note:

Photographs have been individually cataloged and are stored separately from manuscript material. Digital copies of the photographs may be viewed online: <<<https://penobscotmarinemuseum.org/charles-r-coombs/>>>

Historical Note:

Robert Hudson Coombs (1828-1897) was a sea captain from Belfast, Maine. He started his career at sea in the 1840s. He took command of the new Belfast-built ship CORA in 1869, frequenting global ports like Callao, Hong Kong, Rangoon, Calcutta, Antwerp, and Liverpool. When Coombs retired from sea in 1880, he purchased a furniture and undertaking business and operated it as R. H. Coombs & Son, in partnership with his son, Charles R. Coombs (1862-1940). Charles took over the business after his father's death and concentrated on the funeral home business. Coombs Funeral Home remained a highly-respected Belfast business until Charles's son, Horace, retired in 1969.

Charles R. Coombs was an active and respected citizen of Belfast. He participated in Belfast governance, including serving as mayor, and was active in the Lions, the Masonic orders, and Odd Fellows. He loved sailing and hunting and, as a side business, he was an accomplished taxidermist. He apparently took up the hobby of photography around 1892. His favorite subjects were Belfast buildings, houses, and street scenes; family, friends, and their animals; and hunting and sailing trips. In the 1900 Maine Register, an advertisement for R. H. Coombs & Son, Undertakers, also added other businesses: "and Dealers in Furniture, Cameras, and Photographic Supplies. Views of Belfast and vicinity for sale. Taxidermy work done in an artistic and thorough manner."

Charles R. Coombs's son, Horace M. Coombs (1910-2000) was the third generation to manage the Coombs funeral home. He also maintained an active interest in local and family history, including researching materials in this collection.

Scope and Content:

This collection contains both manuscripts and photographs from the Charles R. Coombs family of Belfast, Maine. Manuscripts come from three generations of the family; the earliest are letters to and from Robert H. Coombs while at sea in the mid-1840s. Coombs's subsequent command of the CORA is more completely documented: the collection contains an account book listing the ship's profits and expenses in port; a book listing money owed and paid to every crewmember shipped between 1869 and 1880; and a fragment of a more detailed slop account book listing advances and shipboard purchases of tobacco and similar goods by sailors aboard the CORA. Two of these were subsequently re-used by the family: the crew account book by Coombs' granddaughter, Hattie (b. 1881), who copied poems and listed books she had read; and the slop book as a scrapbook for information on horses and the "wind puff cure." The final volume from Robert H. Coombs is a guest book for the family camp on Tilden Pond in Belmont, Maine.

Most of the remaining manuscripts relate to the family funeral home. Three ledgers list the business's finances and clients from 1934 to its closure in 1969. There are also notes on the business from Charles R. and Horace M. Coombs, as well as some notes on local history by Horace. Finally, there are a few letters to a Mrs. O.A. Hopkins about dividends from shares in schooners.

The photographs have been individually cataloged and digitized, and may be searched online. The collection comprises six albums and over 700 glass plate negatives of scenes of Belfast, Coombs family life, and hunting and sailing trips taken by the family.

Box and Folder List:

Box	Folder	
1	1	Robert H. Coombs, correspondence and accounts, 1844-1882
	2	Ship CORA, account book, 1880
	3	Ship CORA, crew account book, 1869-1880 Re-used as a copy book by Hattie Coombs, 1896
	4	Ship CORA, slop accounts, 1880 Re-used as a scrapbook and record of "wind puff cures"
	5	Guest book, Ten Oaks, Tilden Pond, 1885-1900
	6	Charles R. Coombs, note and photograph, c. 1900
[not boxed]		Funeral home ledger, 1934-1953
[not boxed]		Funeral home ledger, 1952-1968
[not boxed]		Funeral home ledger, 1968-1969
	7	Loose pages removed from funeral home ledger, 1967-1968
	8	Horace M. Coombs, notes and correspondence on local history
[not boxed]		<i>Ships and Shipping: a Collection of Pictures Including Many American Vessels Painted by Antoine Roux</i> by Alfred Johnson (Salem, MA: Marine Research Society, 1925), presented to Horace M. Coombs by M. Maud Matthews, 1925
	9	Mrs. O.A. Hopkins, correspondence on schooner dividends, 1887-1888