Inventory for
Manuscript Collection

PMM 64
James Henry Cunningham
Family Papers
1844-1863

½ box
0.25 linear feet
Accession No. LB2004.4

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PMM 64
James Henry Cunningham Family Papers

Cunningham, James Henry, 1825-1891
A. Cunningham & Sons
Papers, 1844-1863
½ box (0.25 linear feet)
Merchants in Boston, Massachusetts
Three account books and one log-book related to the Cunningham family’s extensive maritime ventures. The Cunninghams were merchants and shipowners, active in early nineteenth century Boston, who specialized in the Mediterranean fruit trade and other long-distance routes. This collection records the fruit trade and other cargo ventures; their interest in new markets in South America and California; the charter and purchase of a variety of vessels, many built in Maine; and investments in new industries like railroads.
In English.
Emily Lewis; Gift; 2004; LB2004.4
Finding aid available; folder level control

Subject Headings:
Cunningham, James Henry, 1825-1891
Cunningham, Horace, 1826-1906
NEWSBOY (brig)
Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)
Freight and freightage
Fruit trade
Investments
Merchants
Shipping
Ships

Local Subject Headings:
Cape Horn trade
Transatlantic trade

Acquisition:
This collection was given to the Penobscot Marine Museum by Emily Lewis.

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

Condition:
The bindings are very fragile on all the volumes. Some covers and signatures are detached. All covers are heavily worn.

Historical Note:
The Cunningham family of Boston were prominent merchants in the early nineteenth century. Andrew Cunningham (1786-1861) and his brother Charles (1791-1871) founded the firm A. & C. Cunningham in 1822. They specialized in the Mediterranean fruit trade, carrying oranges and lemons from Italian and Sicilian ports. They also frequently arranged cargoes of wine, fruit, and whale oil from the Azores, hemp from Russia and the Baltic, and logwood from
Honduras, and were active in the West Indies, South American, South African, and China trades as well. In addition to arranging cargoes, the firm owned and managed a sizeable fleet of vessels.

Charles Cunningham retired from business in 1849. Two of Andrew’s sons, James Henry Cunningham (1825-1891) and Charles West Cunningham (1819-1875), became partners in the firm, which was then renamed A. Cunningham & Sons. This was one of several merchant firms founded by the younger generation of the Cunningham family in the early 1850s. Charles Cunningham’s son, Frederic (b. 1826), went into business with his cousin, Charles W. Dabney Jr., as Dabney & Cunningham. This firm specialized in the Mediterranean and Azorean fruit trade and owned, among other vessels, the Thomaston-built brig NEWSBOY. Another of Andrew Cunningham’s sons, Horace (1826-1906), went into business on his own and invested in a variety of commercial ventures.

Scope and Content:

This collection contains three account books and a log-book documenting a wide range of the Cunningham family’s merchant ventures. These are not formal ledgers. Instead, they include a variety of notes, accounts, and narratives on matters of business and personal interest to a family with wide ranging maritime and commercial investments.

The earliest of these volumes, kept by James Henry Cunningham, primarily contains detailed, though fragmentary, notes on the development of maritime trade. Some of this is directly related to cargoes and ships owned by the Cunningham firm. However, the bulk of the volume relates to the maritime world at large, including notes on the cargo capacity, speed, and sale price of a wide range of vessels, a detailed description of trading in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and lists of some of the first vessels employed in the California Gold Rush.

The remaining volumes are more focused in scope. A second account book, kept by Horace Cunningham, records Horace’s “adventures,” namely, the expenses and profits of specific lots of cargo. Horace Cunningham apparently operated on a smaller scale than his brothers, but was active in a variety of overseas markets. A log-book from the half-brig NEWSBOY, operated by Dabney & Cunningham, contains a daily record of round trip voyages from Boston to Messina and Faylor. Finally, a personal account book kept James Henry Cunningham in the 1850s contains a diary and a detailed record of his investments, a majority of which were in railroads and other western concerns.

Box and Folder List:

Volume 1
Memo book, James Henry Cunningham, 1844-1848
“Remarks upon the Customs & Trade of Rio de Janeiro,” 1846
Notes on cargo capacity, voyage lengths, and sale prices of various vessels
Expenses, profits, and ship repair, A. Cunningham & Sons
Personal expenses, 1847-1848

2
Account book, James Henry Cunningham, 1852-1864
Investment accounts for self and others
Accounts for the estate of Stephen Winchester
Accounts, Atlas Bank
Diary, 1854-1855

3  Account book, Horace Cunningham, 1853-1862
   Invoices for goods shipped by or to Horace Cunningham, 1854-1859
   Accounts for individual “Adventures” in cargo, 1853-1862
   Specifications and notes on activities, ship TALLY HO

4  Log-book, half-brig NEWSBOY, 1854-1855
   Voyage from Boston to Messina and return
   Voyage from Boston to Fayal, Azores, and return