

Yale University Library
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Guide to the San Francisco Custom House Records

WA MSS S-2436



by Diana Smith and Kathleen T. Burns

February 2003

P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	3
Requesting Instructions	3
Administrative Information	3
Immediate Source of Acquisition	3
Conditions Governing Access	3
Conditions Governing Use	4
Preferred Citation	4
SAN FRANCISCO CUSTOM HOUSE	4
Scope and Contents	4
Collection Contents	6
Series I: Appraiser's Reports, 1851-1861	6
Series II: Coasting Manifests, 1851	7
BOUND FROM SAN FRANCISCO	7
BOUND TO SAN FRANCISCO	7
Series III: Merchandise Entry Papers, 1850-1858	8
IMPORT ENTRIES	8
WAREHOUSE ENTRIES	8
Series IV: Other Documents, 1850-1860	9
Oversize	10
Selected Search Terms	11

Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: WA MSS S-2436

CREATOR: United States Customhouse (San Francisco, Calif.)

TITLE: San Francisco Custom House records

DATES: 1850-1861

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 4.14 linear feet (5 boxes) + 5 rolls, 9 broadside folders

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: Collection consists primarily of printed forms completed in manuscript: appraiser's reports, manifests, certificates of entry, receipts, invoices, oaths and other shipping records that document maritime traffic in San Francisco during the Gold Rush.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.customs>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.customs>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Frederick W. and Carrie S. Beinecke.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The San Francisco Custom House Records are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

San Francisco Custom House Records. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

SAN FRANCISCO CUSTOM HOUSE

In 1846 American troops signalled the occupation of San Francisco by raising an American flag above the former Mexican customhouse. The port, then known as Yuerba Beuna, fell into American control. The military retained jurisdiction over tariff collection and other civic affairs until California's interim government was established in 1849. The administration of dues and the regulation of maritime traffic for the port was eventually transferred to the United States Customs Service, a federal agency established in 1789 as a subordinate body of the Treasury Department.

Through the middle of the 19th century, San Francisco was California's principal commercial port. Customs officials were charged with the regulation of international maritime commerce and were responsible for administering United States customs laws. Responsibilities included collecting duties on imported goods, enforcing export control laws, registering and licensing vessels, and documenting the entry and clearance of merchandise, sailors and passengers.

In June of 1850 the United States Customs Service leased a property in San Francisco from a local merchant. The city-wide fire in May 1851 consumed the building. Shipping records detailing tonnage, merchandise and passenger movements for 1849, 1850, and the first half of 1851 were reported destroyed. Records and goods which survived the fire were temporarily moved to another building until construction of the "Custom-House Block" was complete. In November 1853 Custom House operations relocated to the new structure at the south-east corner of Sansome and Sacramento Streets, where customs officials shared space with the naval department and the United States Post Office. An earthquake on October 17, 1865, caused massive damage to the "Block".

The current U.S. Customs House at 555 Battery Street was constructed after a design competition in 1905. Excavation was completed before the San Francisco earthquake and fire in April 1906 but a shortage of labor and materials delayed completion until 1911.

Scope and Contents

The San Francisco Custom House Records, housed in 5 boxes and comprising 4.14 linear feet, consist of four series: *Appraiser's Reports*, *Coasting Manifests*, *Merchandise Entry Papers*, and *Other Documents*. The collection, which spans the dates 1850-1861, consists of printed forms accomplished in manuscript detailing ship names, captains, ports and dates of departure, cargo, worth of cargo, date of entry into the port of San Francisco, and memos written by appraisers and collectors. The cargo includes foodstuffs, clothing, liquor, lumber and other building supplies, and leisure articles. The ships carrying the cargo hail from parts of the United States and Europe, South America, Asia, the Pacific Islands, and Australia.

[Series I, Appraiser's Reports](#) (1851-1861), housed in box 1, consists of appraisals of cargo entering the port of San Francisco, predominantly in 1851 and 1853. Appraisals were done in the absence of an invoice for goods or when the cargo had been damaged. Included are original invoices, and printed oaths signed by captains or owners swearing that there is no invoice for the goods shipped. The reports are arranged in chronological order.

[Series II, Coasting Manifests](#) (1851-1853), housed in box 2, consists of over 100 manifests for cargo laden at the Port of San Francisco, and destined for domestic points along the west coast, including San Diego, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Sacramento, Stockton, Benicia, Astoria, and Portland. Over half of the manifests are dated August 1851. Cargo includes foodstuffs, clothing, ballast [on ships outbound from San Francisco], liquor, and building materials. The series is organized into manifests for ships bound from San Francisco and bound to San Francisco. Within these subseries, they are arranged chronologically.

[Series III, Merchandise Entry Papers](#) (1850-1858), housed in box 3, is organized in two subseries: Import Entries and Warehouse Entries. Each subseries is arranged chronologically by date of entry. Import Entries consists of over 100 certificates, predominantly from 1851, documenting the declaration and taxation of cargo shipments from foreign ports. Oaths signed by the owner or consignee are printed on the verso. Entry documents for domestically produced merchandise returning from abroad are also present. Warehouse Entries consists of seven entry certificates documenting the deposit of imported goods, mostly liquors and foodstuffs, into warehouses in 1850 and 1851. The entries include details about the valuation of merchandise upon withdrawal.

[Series IV, Other Documents](#) (1851-1860), housed in box 4, includes inspectors' returns, various kinds of manifests, passenger returns, receipts, vessel certificates, and other documents. The series is arranged alphabetically by type of material, and most documents are dated 1850 and 1851. Also present is a carte-de-visite photograph of an unidentified man, a document granting power of attorney to N. M. Roberts for the shipping firm of Falkner, Bell & Co., and an earlier description of the Custom House Records which outlines the collection's potential for social and economic research. Oaths, certificates and invoices which have become detached from their parent documents are housed as fragments (folder 43).

[Oversize](#) contains material from Series I-IV, and is organized in box order.

Collection Contents

Series I: Appraiser's Reports, 1851-1861

0.42 linear feet (1 box)

Series I, *Appraiser's Reports*, is arranged in chronological order.

b. 1, f. 1	Reports	1851 Jan-Feb
b. 1, f. 2	Reports	1851 Mar
b. 1, f. 3	Reports	1851 Apr
b. 1, f. 4	Reports Stored also in: Oversize, box 5, folder 52	1851 May
b. 1, f. 5	Reports	1851 Jun
b. 1, f. 6	Reports	1851 Jul
b. 1, f. 7	Reports	1851 Aug
b. 1, f. 8	Reports Stored also in: Oversize, box 5, folder 53	1851 Sep
b. 1, f. 9	Reports	1851 Oct
b. 1, f. 10	Reports	1851 Nov
b. 1, f. 11	Reports	1851 Dec
b. 1, f. 12	Reports	1852
b. 1, f. 13	Reports	1853 Feb
b. 1, f. 14	Reports	1853 Mar-Apr
b. 1, f. 15	Reports	1853 Jun
b. 1, f. 16	Reports	1853 Jul
b. 1, f. 17	Reports	1853 Aug
b. 1, f. 18	Reports	1853 Sep-Oct
b. 1, f. 19	Reports	1853 Nov-Dec
b. 1, f. 21	Reports Includes an appraisal of personal effects. Stored also in: Oversize, box 5, folder 54	1854-61

Series II: Coasting Manifests, 1851*0.92 linear feet (1 box)*

Series II, *Coasting Manifests*, is organized into manifests for ships bound from San Francisco and bound to San Francisco. Within these subseries, they are arranged chronologically.

BOUND FROM SAN FRANCISCO

b. 2, f. 21	Manifests	1851 May-Jun
b. 2, f. 22-24	Manifests Stored also in: Oversize, broadside folder 59	1851 Aug
b. 2, f. 25	Manifests	1851 Sep
b. 2, f. 26-27	Manifests	1853 Aug

BOUND TO SAN FRANCISCO

b. 2, f. 28	Manifests Stored also in: Oversize, broadside folder 60	1851 Jan-Jul
b. 2, f. 29	Manifests	1851 Aug-Sep
b. 2, f. 30	Manifests	1851 Oct-Dec

Series III: Merchandise Entry Papers, 1850-1858*1.67 linear feet (1 box)*

Series III, *Merchandise Entry Papers*, is organized into two subseries: Import Entries and Warehouse Entries. Material within each subseries is arranged chronologically.

IMPORT ENTRIES

b. 3, f. 31	Entries	1850
b. 3, f. 32	Entries Stored also in: Oversize, broadside folder 61	1851 Jan-May
b. 3, f. 33	Entries Stored also in: Oversize, broadside folder 62 and rolled storage folder 68	1851 Jun
b. 3, f. 34	Entries Stored also in: Oversize, broadside folder 63 and rolled storage folder 69	1851 Jul
b. 3, f. 35	Entries Stored also in: Oversize, broadside folder 64 and rolled storage folder 70	1851 Aug
b. 3, f. 36	Entries Stored also in: Oversize, broadside folder 65 and rolled storage folder 71	1851 Sep
b. 3, f. 37	Entries Stored also in: Oversize, broadside folder 66 and rolled storage folder 72	1851 Oct
b. 3, f. 38	Entries	1851 Nov
b. 3, f. 39	Entries	1851 Dec
b. 3, f. 40	Entries	1852, 1858

WAREHOUSE ENTRIES

b. 3, f. 41	Entries	1850-51
-------------	---------	---------

Series IV: Other Documents, 1850-1860*0.21 linear feet (1 box)*Series IV, *Other Documents*, is arranged alphabetically by type of material.

b. 4, f. 42	Carte-de-visite photograph of unidentified man by Bradley & Rulofson	n.d.
b. 4, f. 43	Document fragments	1851-53, n.d.
	Inspectors' returns Stored in: Oversize, box 5, folder 55 and Oversize, broadside folder 67	1851
	Manifests	
b. 4, f. 44	Export Stored also in: Oversize, box 5, folder 56	1851 Aug
b. 4, f. 45	Inward Stored also in: Oversize, box 5, folder 57	1850-51
b. 4, f. 46	Passenger	1851 May
b. 4, f. 47	Master carpenter's certificates With certificates of admeasurement.	1855 Jan, Aug
b. 4, f. 48	Power of attorney granted to N. M. Roberts for Falkner, Bell & Co.	1860 Feb 3
b. 4, f. 49	Receipt for return of seamen	1851 May 29
b. 4, f. 50	Receipt for State Marine Hospital benefits	1851 June 27
b. 4, f. 51	Related material Typescript description of collection and routing slip.	n.d.
	Return of passengers Stored in: Oversize, box 5, folder 58	1851 Jul-Aug

Oversize*0.92 linear feet (1 box)*

Oversize contains material from Series I-IV, and is organized in box order.

b. 5 (Oversize), f. Reports (from Series I) 52	1851 May
b. 5 (Oversize), f. Reports (from Series I) 53	1851 Sep
b. 5 (Oversize), f. Reports (from Series I) 54	1859
b. 5 (Oversize), f. Inspectors' returns (from Series IV) 55	1851
b. 5 (Oversize), f. Manifests, Export (from Series IV) 56	1851
b. 5 (Oversize), f. Manifests, Inward (from Series IV) 57	1850-51
b. 5 (Oversize), f. Return of passengers (from Series IV) 58	1851 Jul-Aug
b. bsd, folder 59 Manifests (from Series II)	1851 Aug
b. bsd, folder 60 Manifests (from Series II)	1851 Jun
b. bsd, folder 61 Entries (from Series III)	1851 May
b. bsd, folder 62 Entries (from Series III)	1851 Jun
b. bsd, folder 63 Entries (from Series III)	1851 Jul
b. bsd, folder 64 Entries (from Series III)	1851 Aug
b. bsd, folder 65 Entries (from Series III)	1851 Sep
b. bsd, folder 66 Entries (from Series III)	1851 Oct
b. bsd, folder 67 Inspectors' returns (from Series IV)	1851
b. roll, f. 68 Entries (from Series III)	1851 Jun
b. roll, f. 69 Entries (from Series III)	1851 Jul
b. roll, f. 70 Entries (from Series III)	1851 Aug
b. roll, f. 71 Entries (from Series III)	1851 Sep
b. roll, f. 72 Entries (from Series III)	1851 Oct

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Customs administration -- California -- San Francisco -- History -- 19th century
Harbors -- California -- San Francisco -- Port charges
Shipping -- California -- San Francisco

Geographic Names

San Francisco (Calif.) -- Commerce

Genres / Formats

Bills of lading
Passenger lists
Receipts (financial records)
Ships' papers

Corporate Body

United States Customhouse (San Francisco, Calif.)