

Tudor Place Manuscript Collection
Martha (Williams) Carter Papers
MS-6

Introduction

The Martha (Williams) Carter Papers consist of approximately 1.5 linear feet of material and include primarily correspondence, diaries, and scrapbook material. The financial documents contain a single bank book, canceled checks, and lists of expenses. Martha (Williams) Carter (1827-1899) was the daughter of America (Peter) Williams (1803-1842) and Captain William George Williams (1801-1846). The collection includes correspondence from her grandmother, Martha (Custis) Peter (1777-1854), her father, and from her brother Major Laurence Abert Williams (1832-1879). Laurence Williams later became the father of Anna (Williams) Peter (1872-1961), the wife of the third owner of Tudor Place, Armistead Peter, Jr., (1870-1960).

These papers were a part of the estate Armistead Peter placed under the auspices of the Carostead Foundation, Incorporated, in 1966; the name of the foundation was changed to Tudor Place Foundation, Incorporated, in 1987. Use and rights of the papers are controlled by the Foundation. The collection was processed and the register prepared by James Kaser, a project archivist hired through a National Historical Records and Publications grant in 1992. This document was reformatted by Emily Rusch and revised by Tudor Place archivist Wendy Kail in 2020.

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Biographical Sketch

Martha Custis (Williams) Carter was born in 1827 at Tudor Place to America Pinckney (Peter) Williams (1803-1842) and Captain William George Williams (1801-1846). America (Peter) Williams was one of the three daughters of Thomas Peter (1769-1834) and Martha (Custis) Peter (1777-1854) of Tudor Place. Captain William George Williams, the son of William Williams (1771-1845) of Exeter, England, and Sarah Jane Wingfield (Dates Unknown) of Georgia, graduated from West Point in 1824 as an engineer with the Army Topographical Corps.

Martha (Williams) Carter was the oldest of five children. After the death of her mother in 1842, she and her siblings lived at Tudor Place. As the oldest child she was held responsible for them in many ways; this role lasted throughout her lifetime. Her burden of care increased upon the death of Captain William George Williams in 1846. Letters reveal her efforts to get her brother William Orton Williams (1839-1863) an appointment at West Point; years later he was executed as a Confederate spy by the Union army during the Civil War, but she worked to redeem his honor. When her brother Major Laurence Abert Williams (1832-1879) was discharged in 1863 from the Union army for absence without leave, she tried to have him reinstated; in his final years she provided financial support for him.

During 1852 and 1853 Martha (Williams) Carter travelled in England and on the Continent, where she lived with relatives; this collection contains diaries kept during this period. After her grandmother Martha (Custis) Peter's death in 1854, Martha (Williams) Carter spent little time at Tudor Place, living instead at Arlington House in Virginia, where she helped care for the elderly owners, her great aunt Mary (Fitzhugh) Custis (1788-1853) and great uncle George Washington Parke Custis (1781-1857). She was befriended by Robert E. Lee (1807-1870) and corresponded with him.

In the early 1860s she studied art in Philadelphia, although she returned to Washington in 1862 for the remainder of the War. She married Rear Admiral Samuel Powhatan Carter (1819-1891) in 1877; he had courted her in her youth. Martha (Williams) Carter died in 1899 and the material in this collection extends to that year.

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Scope and Content

The Martha (Williams) Carter Papers consist of correspondence, subject files, literary productions, a few financial records, and scrapbook material. The general correspondence reveals her close involvement with the Custis and Lee families at Arlington House and her attempts to get a West Point appointment for her brother, William Orton Williams. In addition to the general correspondence, there are letters from family members: Martha (Custis) Peter, America (Peter) Williams, Major Laurence Abert Williams, William Williams, and Captain William George Williams. Her letters contain many details about life at Tudor Place and her social activities. The Major Laurence Abert Williams' correspondence describes his activities as a young boy and West Point cadet; some letters were written while he was stationed later in the western territories. His letters from the 1870s detail his unsuccessful attempts to establish himself after the end of his military career; these letters reveal that his wife, Sarah (Law) Williams, had separated from him. Captain William George Williams' correspondence describes her father's activities in the last five years of his life, including descriptions of his travel and family news.

Many of the subject files are scrapbooks or letters received by family members. Two subject files contain important correspondence related to events in the lives of her two brothers, and one file holds correspondence received from Captain William George Williams over a period of twenty-seven years and material related to his estate. One subject file contains correspondence, copies of correspondence, notes, and printed material related to the dismissal of Major Laurence Abert Williams from the Army and his attempt to be reinstated and put on its list of retired officers; another file includes correspondence of William Orton Williams and material related to his death.

Literary productions consist of notes, diaries, and diary excerpts. The notes detail her speculations on religion. Her diaries and diary excerpts record her activities and thoughts as she traveled in England and on the Continent during 1852 and 1853. Most of the other material was written while she was living in Philadelphia studying art during 1862 and during the first year of her marriage to Samuel Powhatan Carter in 1877. There are a few financial records, a significant amount of scrapbook material, some address lists, and printed material. The scrapbook material includes letters written by historical figures or members of the Peter or Williams families, news clippings with information about family members, and address lists.

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Series Description

CORRESPONDENCE

Series

CORRESPONDENCE

Ca. 1838-1852

Arranged chronologically

Includes letters from Dr. Austin Flint, a family friend, and letters related to the death of her father, Captain William George Williams. An undated letter from George Washington Parke Custis, and a joint letter from Robert E. Lee and Mary (Custis) Lee discussing activities at Arlington House, including a visit from Rembrandt Peale.

CORRESPONDENCE

1856-1857

Arranged chronologically

These letters evidence Martha (Williams) Carter's attempt to get her brother, William Orton Williams, into West Point, including letters of introduction, letters discussing his chances of appointment, and letters to Martha (Williams) Carter from William Orton Williams. A note from George Washington Parke Custis.

CORRESPONDENCE

1861-1866

Incoming and outgoing

Arranged chronologically

Contains social correspondence, including a letter from her cousin Martha (Kennon) Peter. One letter dated 24 May 1861 assures Carter that she will be able to get to Georgetown and Arlington House although Union troops control the area. An outgoing letter to Benson J. Lossing discusses William Orton Williams' death.

CORRESPONDENCE

1873-1899; ND

Arranged chronologically

Social correspondence including a Christmas sachet from her cousin Martha (Kennon) Peter.

CORRESPONDENCE: MARTHA (CUSTIS) PETER.

1841-1856; ND

Arranged chronologically

Consists of significant letters by Martha (Custis) Peter. Included are a description of events surrounding William Henry Harrison's arrival in Washington for his inauguration, and detailed letters describing life at Tudor Place, and social activities.

CORRESPONDENCE: AMERICA (PETER) WILLIAMS

1841

Arranged chronologically

These letters were written while Captain William George Williams was stationed at Mackinac Island, Michigan. His wife, America (Peter) Williams, counsels her daughter to work hard at her studies, particularly piano lessons and French, and comments unfavorably on her spelling and handwriting. One letter gives instructions about gloves and yard goods that Martha (Williams) Carter should purchase.

CORRESPONDENCE: AMERICA (PETER) WILLIAMS AND CAPTAIN WILLIAM GEORGE WILLIAMS

1841

One letter written from Mackinac Island. America (Peter) Williams describes the journey and the large number of Indians near where they were living. Captain William George Williams discusses a proposed trip up the Straits of Mackinac as far as Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, and counsels his daughter to pay great attention to her education and take great care when she writes to her grandmother.

CORRESPONDENCE: MAJOR LAURENCE ABERT WILLIAMS.

1841-1873; ND

Arranged chronologically

These letters cover almost the entirety of Major Laurence Abert Williams' life; the first was written when he was an eight years old and the last six years before his death. Letters from 1841 through 1850 were written while he was in school in Troy and Buffalo, New York, as well as at Mr. Hallowell's School, Alexandria, Virginia, Georgetown College, and West Point, New York. Letters from 1854 through 1859 were from various western forts where he was stationed: including Fort Bridger, Wyoming; Fort Gibson, Oklahoma; Fort Vancouver, Washington; and Fort Scott in the "polygamous region" known as Utah [Kansas]. One brief letter dates from the time of the Civil War. Letters written during the 1870s outline schemes for getting various appointments, note receipt of money sent by his sister, and resent the tone of her letters.

CORRESPONDENCE: CAPTAIN WILLIAM GEORGE WILLIAMS AND
LAURENCE ABERT WILLIAMS

1842-1844

Arranged chronologically

Most of these letters were written from Buffalo, New York, by her father. They describe events in the household, Major Laurence Abert Williams' schooling, and note her father's the artistic endeavors.

CORRESPONDENCE: WILLIAM WILLIAMS

1842-1844

Arranged chronologically

Letters written by her grandfather to Martha (Williams) Carter while she was in residence at Tudor Place.

CORRESPONDENCE: CAPTAIN WILLIAM GEORGE WILLIAMS

1841-1846

Arranged chronologically

Letters written by Martha (Williams) Carter's father in the five years before his death, while his children were living at Tudor Place, when he was stationed in various places: Buffalo, New York; Mackinac Island, Michigan; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Green Bay, Wisconsin; Matamoros and Camargo, Mexico. Subjects include family news, travel, and discussions of military orders. There are descriptions of a new technology, the use of a steamboat on Lake Huron, for military work. There are many references to Britannia (Peter) Kennon, including her wedding and the birth of her daughter, Martha Custis Kennon. The final letters discuss his last approach, Monterrey, Mexico.

OUTGOING CORRESPONDENCE

1842-1886

Arranged chronologically

Includes a letter to Martha (Williams) Carter's grandfather, William Williams; a letter to an unknown recipient describes the death of Martha (Custis) Peter; a letter to the Secretary of War requests an appointment to West Point for her brother William Orton Williams.

SUBJECT FILES

Series

ADMIRAL SAMUEL POWHATAN CARTER

1878-1899

Incoming and outgoing

Arranged chronologically

Draft of a letter of recommendation to the president on behalf of General Don Carlos Buell; another letter discusses the possession of a portrait of Ferdinand Hassler painted by Captain William George Williams.

Series

DISMISSAL OF MAJOR LAURENCE ABERT WILLIAMS
1871-1879

Incoming and outgoing

Arranged by type and then chronologically

Includes correspondence, copies of correspondence, notes and printed material relating to Martha (Williams) Carter's role in aiding her brother, Major Laurence Abert Williams, in his effort to be restored to the Army and put on its list of retired officers.

AMERICA (PETER) WILLIAMS

1820-1841; ND

Incoming and outgoing

Arranged chronologically

Letters collected by Martha (Williams) Carter by and to her mother, America (Peter) Williams, letters to Mrs. James Gibson, and letters from Captain William George Williams.

COLUMBIA (WILLIAMS) UPSHUR

1865-1872

Consists of a scrapbook of newspaper clippings kept by her sister Columbia (Williams) Upshur; articles concern members of the Williams and Peter families.

CAPTAIN WILLIAM GEORGE WILLIAMS

1820-1847; ND

Arranged by type and then chronologically

Includes incoming and outgoing correspondence, a letter of recommendation to John C. Calhoun requesting Captain William George Williams an appointment to West Point written by Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and a series of letters written from Georgetown College by Major Laurence Abert Williams in which he expresses his desire to leave the school for another. Correspondence, receipts, and financial records, related to the settlement of Captain William George Williams' estate.

Series

WILLIAM ORTON WILLIAMS

1858-1866

Divided into correspondence and other material related to William Orton Williams' death. Includes letters of recommendation on his behalf for an appointment at West Point, and a detailed letter in which he outlines his reasons for resigning from the Union army in 1861. Materials include a letter written by a chaplain who had interviewed him before his death, a copy of a letter written by him immediately before his death, and letters from Benson J. Lossing to Martha (Williams) Carter.

LITERARY PRODUCTIONS

Series

NOTES

1846-1895; ND

Includes notes on religion, and the death of Captain William George Williams.

DIARY

Sep-Dec 1852

Describes a trip to England and the Continent, beginning with Martha (Williams) Carter's trip from Washington to New York City in the company of Major Laurence Abert Williams, and including an account of the voyage to Liverpool, a stay in London, the Channel crossing to Boulogne sur Mer, and a visit with relatives in Paris during which time an Empire under Napoleon 3rd was instituted.

DIARY: PARIS JOURNAL, VOLUME 3RD

Feb-Mar 1853

Details Martha (Williams) Carter's stay in Paris. The volume is almost entirely occupied by accounts of sight-seeing trips of churches, paintings, and gardens interspersed with observations upon the misconceptions of Catholicism. There are accounts of conversations in which she vaunts the superiority of the United States and tries to correct misperceptions about slavery, as Uncle Tom's Cabin had recently been published in 1852.

DIARY: PARIS JOURNAL, VOLUME IV

Mar-May 1853

Continues Martha (Williams) Carter's account of her stay in Paris and accounts of trips to famous sites, including Versailles. In addition to churches, paintings, and gardens, she describes "mesmerism" at the Palais Royal. When an Abbé befriends her, she again discusses Catholicism.

DIARY: VOLUME V3RD

Jul-Aug 1853

Begins four weeks into a voyage back to the United States that lasted approximately eight weeks. Martha (Williams) Carter details the bad weather and discusses her fellow passengers. Occasionally she refers to the emigrants in steerage. During the course of the voyage she befriends a young German man and then agonizes that she encouraged his friendship.

When she sees the New York papers as the ship is making its approach to the harbor, she reads that Mount Vernon is to be sold.

DIARY ENTRIES

1859-1859; ND

Arranged chronologically

Scattered entries written in 1858 and 1859 torn out of diaries or were

never entered. Written at Arlington House, New York, and Philadelphia.

DIARY

1862

Kept in an appointment calendar, this diary briefly describes Martha (Williams) Carter's activities. Almost half of the year she was in Philadelphia studying art, but she returned to Tudor Place in June and her diaries give some insight into the war and a brief description of her visit to Arlington House.

DIARY

1878

Written during the first year of Martha (Williams) Carter's marriage to Samuel Powhatan Carter, this diary reveals her social activities. Many relatives are noted, the couple's search for a house, and a summer trip on the coast of New England as part of his duties on the Light House Board are described.

FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS

Series

BANK BOOK: NATIONAL UNION BANK OF MARYLAND

1874-1876

Records less than twenty-five transactions.

ACCOUNTS

1876; ND

Three lists of expenses.

CANCELED CHECKS: NATIONAL UNION BANK OF MARYLAND

1874-1875

Arranged chronologically

Checks primarily made out to Martha (Williams) Carter and Abel B.

Upshur, her brother-in-law.

SCRAPBOOK MATERIAL

Series

SKETCHBOOK

1872; 1874

Sketchbook of pencil drawings made while visiting Berkeley Springs, Virginia.

SCRAPBOOK: BOOK OF EXTRACTS

ND

Copies of letters relevant to family history, recipes, and other miscellany.

SCRAPBOOK: VALUABLE AND INTERESTING LETTERS

ND

Letters relating to family history collected by Martha (Williams) Carter.

SCRAPBOOK

1846

A copybook of poems and a newspaper clipping announcing the marriage of Britannia Peter to Commodore Beverley Kennon.

SCRAPBOOK MATERIAL: POETRY

ND

Includes several pro-Southern Civil War era verses.

SCRAPBOOK MATERIAL: ABEL B. UPSHUR OBITUARY

1895

Copy of an obituary of Abel B. Upshur, her brother-in-law.

SCRAPBOOK MATERIAL: NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS

Scattered

Includes obituaries of Major Laurence Abert Williams, General Robert E. Lee, and other family members.

SCRAPBOOK MATERIAL: NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS

June 18, 1887

Newspaper Supplement to *The Westminster Times*.

SCRAPBOOK MATERIAL: PRESSED PLANTS

ND

Includes a piece of boxwood from Mount Vernon.

SCRAPBOOK MATERIAL: PRESSED FLOWERS

1847-1861; ND

Pressed flowers from Arlington, Niagara Falls, and the P ere la Chaise Cemetery near Paris.

LISTS

Series

ADDRESS BOOK

ND

Includes addresses of friends and relatives.

PRINTED MATERIAL

Series

MEMORIAL BOOKLET: MRS. TILLINGHAST

1860

Rebecca (Power) Tillinghast was the wife of Robert L. Tillinghast who

represented Rhode Island in Congress 1837-1843.

BROCHURE

1875

Advertisement for water from Red Spring, Saratoga, New York.

HAWES, LUCY WILLIAMS: BUFFALO FIFTY YEARS AGO

1886

Mentions members of the Williams family.

CONGRESSIONAL ROSTERS

1874-1875

Lists of members of Congress with diagrams.

PRINTED MATERIAL: JOHN HENRY UPSHUR

1864

John Henry Upshur's response to a court of inquiry called to investigate charges against him of leaking information.

ENVELOPES

Series

ENVELOPES

Ca.1875-1880; ND

Envelopes unmatched to correspondence.

MS-6
Box 1

Folder		
1	Correspondence	1844; 1847 1852
2	Correspondence	1856-1857
3	Correspondence	1861-1866
4	Correspondence	1873; 1876- 1877; 1899; ND
5	Correspondence: Martha (Custis) Peter	1841-1856
6	Correspondence: Martha (Custis) Peter	ND
7	Correspondence: America (Peter) Williams	1841
8	Correspondence: America and Captain William George Williams	1841
9	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1841
10	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1842
11	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	Ca.1842
12	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1843
13	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1844
14	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	Ca.1844-1846
15	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1847
16	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1848
17	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	Ca.1848-1852
18	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1849
19	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1850
20	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1854-1855

21	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1856-1857
22	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1858-1859
23	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1862; 1867-1868
24	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1870
25	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1871
26	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	Mar-May 1872
27	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	Jun-Jul 1872
28	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	Sep-Nov 1872
29	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	Dec 1872
30	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	1873

MS-6
Box 2

Folder		
1	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	Ca.1870s
2	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams	ND
3	Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams and Captain William George Williams	1842-1844
4	Correspondence: William Williams	1842-1844
5	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Sep 10, 1841
6	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Jun-Jul 1842
7	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Aug-Dec 1842
8	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Jan-Jun 1843
9	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Aug-Nov1843
10	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Jan-May 1844
11	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Jun-Aug 1844
12	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Sep-Dec 1844
13	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Jan-Feb 1845
14	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Apr-May 1845
15	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Jun-Jul 1845
16	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Sep-Oct 1845
17	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Nov-Dec 1845
18	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Jan-Jul 1846
19	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	Aug-Sep 1846
20	Unmatched Envelope	May/Jun ND

MS-6
Box 3

Folder		
1	Correspondence: Outgoing	1842; 1854; 1857; 1886
2	Correspondence: Outgoing	1883-1884
3	Correspondence: Admiral Samuel Powhatan Carter	1878; 1879; 1886; 1889
4	Correspondence: Dismissal of Laurence Abert Williams from the Army	1862; 1876; scattered
5	Correspondence: Dismissal of Laurence Abert Williams from the Army	1876
6	Notes: Dismissal of Laurence Abert Williams from the Army	1875
7	Printed Material: Dismissal of Laurence Abert Williams:	1876-1879
8	Label: Dismissal of Laurence Abert Williams	ND
9	Correspondence: America (Peter) Williams	1820-1841; ND
10	Scrapbook: Columbia (Williams) Upshur	1865-1872
11	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams	1820-1845
12	Correspondence: Captain William George Williams, Laurence Abert Williams	1845; 1846
13	Correspondence: Estate of Captain William George Williams	1847
14	Estate Receipts: Captain William George Williams	1847
15	Poem: Captain William George Williams	ND
16	Military Order: Captain William George Williams	Sep 11, 1846
17	Account Book: Captain William George Williams	1846-1847
18	Receipt: Captain William George Williams	1845
19	Newspaper Clipping: Captain William George Williams	ND
20	Correspondence: William Orton Williams	1858; 1860; 1861

21	Correspondence: William Orton Williams:	1863; 1864; 1866
22	Note: Table Rock, Niagara Falls	1847
23	Note: America (Peter) Williams' Wedding Stocking	ND
24	Notes: Genealogical	1895; ND
25	Note: Death of Captain William George Williams	1846
26	Note: Martha Washington to Mrs. Fairfax, Copy	ND
27	Notes: Religion and Morals	ND
28	Directions: Making and Laying on Green Water Color	Jan 10, ND
29	Diary	Sep-Dec 1852

MS-6
Box 4

Folder		
1	Diary: Paris, Volume III	Feb-Mar 1853
2	Diary: Paris, Volume IV	Mar-May 1853
3	Diary: Paris, Volume VIII	Jul-Aug 1853
4	Diary Entries	1858; 1859; ND
5	Diary	1862
6	Diary	1878
7	Bank Book: National Union Bank of Maryland	1874-1876
8	Account	1876; ND
9	Canceled Checks: National Union Bank of Maryland	1874-1875
10	Sketchbook; Calling Card	1862; 1874
11	Book of Extracts	ND
12	Correspondence: Invitation, Menu, Program	Scattered
13	Correspondence: General Winfield Scott, General George McClellan	1857; 1862; 1876
14	Correspondence: Eleanor Parke (Custis) Lewis	ND; 1842; 1847; 1850; 1857
15	Autograph Book: Columbia Wingfield (Williams) Upshur	ND
16	Poetry	ND
17	Obituary: Abel B. Upshur	1895
18	Newspaper Clippings, Copies	Scattered
19	Newspaper: <i>Jubilee Supplement to the Westminster Times</i> [London]	Jun 18, 1887

MS-6
Box 5

Folder		
1	Pressed Plants	ND
2	Pressed Flowers	1847; 1854; 1857; 1861; ND
3	Address Book	ND
4	Memorial Booklet: Mrs. Rebecca (Power) Tillinghast	1860
5	Brochure	1875
6	Hawes, Lucy Williams. <i>Buffalo Fifty Years Ago</i>	1886
7	Congressional Rosters	1874-1875
8	Printed Extract: John Henry Upshur	1864
9	Envelopes: Unmatched to Correspondence	Ca.1875-1880
10	Envelopes; Wrapper	ND
11	Drawing: <i>Volusia</i> , Captain William George Williams	Ca.1833
12	Sketches: Untitled, Major Laurence Abert Williams	Ca.1850s
13	Correspondence: Estate of Martha (Williams) Carter, Copies	1899
14	Sketch: After Horatio Greenough	ND
15	Sketch: Cherub	ND
16	Newspaper Clippings	ND
17	Invitation: United States Naval Academy	Dec 28, ND
18	Cards: Calling Cards	ND

MS-6
Box 6

Manuscript Lake Harbor Reports: *Survey and Map of Buffalo Harbor;* 1846
Survey of Buffalo Harbor
Map of Buffalo Harbor by Captain William George Williams
Profile of Buffalo Harbor by Captain William George Williams

MS-6
Box 7

Book of Extracts Aug 2, 1849

MS-6
Box 8

Letterbook: *Valuable and Interesting Letters* ND

MS-6
Oversized

Archival Cabinet B

Commission as Captain, William George Williams 1834
[Removed to Commission Box]