

Tudor Place Manuscript Collection
Commodore Beverley Kennon Papers
MS-8

Introduction

Commodore Beverley Kennon (1793-1844) was appointed a Midshipman in 1809 and was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the United States Navy in 1813. He achieved the rank of Captain in 1837 and was given the command of the Washington Navy Yard as Chief of Bureau in 1841 with the designation of Commodore. After the death of his first wife, he met Britannia Wellington Peter (1815-1911) in 1841 at the Octagon House; they were married in 1842. The couple lived at the United States Navy Yard in Washington, where he was the commanding officer. A daughter, Martha Custis Kennon (1843-1886), was born of the union in 1843 at Tudor Place. Commodore Beverley Kennon was killed in the explosion of the cannon "Peacemaker" during demonstrations aboard the *U.S.S. Princeton* in 1844.

The collection includes correspondence with Robert Beverley of Blandfield, Essex County, Virginia, a copy of Commodore Beverley Kennon's will, a poem about his naval career, and his presentation letter and commission as Master Commandant.

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

Commodore Beverley Kennon (1793-1844) was born in Mecklenburg County, Virginia, the son of Elizabeth Beverley (Munford) Kennon (1762-Ca.1825/1830) and General Richard Kennon (1759-1805) of Fine Wood. General Richard Kennon had served with distinction in the Revolutionary War, where he was a member of General George Washington's staff; he was later named first governor of Louisiana by Thomas Jefferson.

Commodore Beverley Kennon had a distinguished naval career. He was appointed a Midshipman in May 1809. He accepted this appointment on August 5, 1809, and was ordered to serve on the *U.S.S. Essex* in 1810 and in 1811 on the *U.S.S. Congress*. He was promoted to Lieutenant in 1813. He was commissioned a Commander on April 24, 1826; from 1829-1830 he was on duty at the Naval Rendezvous, Norfolk Station, Virginia. In 1830-1831 he commanded the Sloop *Vandalia* in the squadron of Commodore Stephen Cassin on the coast of Brazil; by 1833 he was back on duty in Norfolk at the Navy Yard. He was promoted to Captain on February 9, 1837, and in December 1838 ordered to the *U.S. Frigate Macedonian*, the flagship of Commodore William B. Shubrick, in the Gulf of Mexico and West Indies. He served in this capacity until April 1840, when he was granted permission to return to his home in Virginia. On April 27, 1841, Captain Kennon was appointed to command the Navy Yard at Washington, and in 1843 was commissioned Chief of the Bureau of Construction, Equipment, and Repair. He held the rank of Post Captain, the highest rank in the Navy at that time, but with the designation of Commodore.

Commodore Beverley Kennon met Britannia Wellington Peter (1815-1911) at a reception at the Octagon House in Washington, D.C., in honor of the marriage of Miss Ann Ogle Tayloe and Henry H. Lewis, United States Navy, in 1841. The Commodore and Britannia Peter were married in the Drawing Room at Tudor Place on December 8, 1842. The couple resided at the Washington Navy Yard. Their daughter, Martha Custis Kennon, was born in 1843. The Commodore was killed when a large cannon exploded aboard the *U.S.S. Princeton* in the Potomac River. Secretary of State Abel P. Upshur (1790-1844), Secretary of the Navy Thomas W. Gilmore (1802-1844), former Secretary of the Navy David Henshaw (1791-1844), ex-senator of New York David Gardiner (1784-1844), and the former United States Minister to the Netherlands Virgil Maxcy (1784-1844), were also killed in the explosion. After her husband's death Britannia (Peter) Kennon returned to Tudor Place to live, where she shepherded the lives of her daughter and her husband's two sons from his earlier marriage to Elizabeth Dandridge Claiborne (1808-1832), Beverley Kennon II (1830-1890) and William Dandridge Claiborne Kennon (1832- 1872).

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Series Description

CORRESPONDENCE

Series

OUTGOING CORRESPONDENCE

1821-1822

Includes letters to Robert Beverley of Blandfield of Essex County, Virginia, discussing marriage between Commodore Beverley Kennon and Robert Beverley's daughter, post-matrimonial arrangements, conditions in Norfolk, land investments in southern Ohio.

OUTGOING CORRESPONDENCE

1823-1832

Includes four letters written to Robert Beverley, two letters to John Boyle, and one letter to Commodore David Porter. One letter to Robert Beverley, dating from 1823, concerns the death of Commodore Beverley Kennon's wife. Other letters to Robert Beverley report on conditions in Norfolk, family news, and a naval mission to Chile. To Commodore David Porter is a letter of transmittal originally enclosed with a transfer request of one of Commodore Beverley Kennon's subordinates. Two letters to John Boyle, chief clerk of the Navy Department, are letters of transmittal that originally accompanied material Commodore Beverley Kennon wanted forwarded to his brother Dr. George Kennon.

LEGAL DOCUMENTS

Series

WILL: Manuscript, Copy

1844

Notes bequests to his sons Beverley Kennon II and Dandridge Claiborne Kennon, Britannia (Peter) Kennon, and Martha (Kennon) Peter. Provides details about objects and property.

1828

Presentation letter and commission as Master Commandant

SCRAPBOOK MATERIAL

Series

POEM

Poem written by William Mumford for his sister, Mrs. Elizabeth Beverley (Mumford) Beverley, in honor of her sons Lieutenant Beverley Kennon and Dr. George Kennon.

MS-8
Box 1

Folder

1	Correspondence: Commodore Beverley Kennon to Robert Beverley	1821-1822
2	Correspondence: Commodore Beverley Kennon to Robert Beverley	1823-1832
3	Estate of Beverley Kennon: Photocopy, Will and Codicil	Jan 1, 1844; Jan 3, 1844
4	Poem: Commemorative Poem by William Mumford	ND

MS-8
Oversized

Archival Cabinet B

Estate of Beverley Kennon: Official Copy of Will and Codicil; Photocopy	Jan 1, 1844; Jan 3, 1844
Letter of Presentation as Master Commandant and Commission as Master Commandant [Removed to Commission Box]	Apr 1828