

Tudor Place Manuscript Collection
Thomas and Martha (Custis) Peter Papers
MS-2

Introduction

Correspondence, subject files, financial documents, and legal documents compose the Thomas and Martha (Custis) Peter Papers. Documents generated by Thomas Peter (1769-1834) deal with financial transactions and horse breeding; Martha Custis Peter (1777-1854) correspondence is also included. The material spans the period from 1796 to 1848.

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

Thomas Peter (1769-1834) was the oldest son of Robert Peter (1726-1806) and Elizabeth (Scott) Peter (1744-1821). He inherited his father's sharp business sense as a merchant and land speculator, and received a sizable land inheritance from his father's estate, approximately 4,100 acres valued at \$95,877. Thomas Peter married Martha Parke Custis (1777-1854), a granddaughter of Martha Washington (1731-1802), on January 6, 1795, the 35th anniversary of George and Martha Washington's wedding.

After their marriage Thomas Peter and Martha (Custis) Peter resided in a house built by Thomas Peter's father Robert Peter on K Street [Wapping Street]. General George Washington (1732-1799), Martha (Custis) Peter's step-grandfather, was often a guest of the Peters, and he spent his last night in 1799 in the Federal City at their home. In 1805 Thomas and Martha (Custis) Peter purchased eight and one-half acres of land in Georgetown Heights from Francis Lowndes (1751-1815) of Bladensburg, Maryland, a purchase enabled by an \$8,000 legacy that Martha (Custis) Peter received from General George Washington. Dr. William Thornton (1759-1828), architect of the first U.S. Capitol, designed their home, Tudor Place, overlooking the Potomac River. The Peters lived at Tudor Place but also resided periodically at their farm, Oakland, in Seneca, Montgomery County, Maryland, and frequently visited their farm, Effingham, in the Federal City.

From 1801 until his death in 1834, Thomas Peter served seven terms as a Justice of the Peace for the County of Washington in Maryland; in 1802 he was one of twelve citizens elected to the first City Council of Washington, where he was commissioned to represent Georgetown in the Levy Court. A director of the Bank of Columbia and a vestryman of St. John's Protestant Episcopal Church in Georgetown, he enjoyed horse racing as a favorite hobby. When Martha Washington died in 1802, Thomas Peter was appointed one of the executors of her will; at a private estate sale he purchased approximately 750 objects from Mount Vernon for Tudor Place. Thomas Peter died at the age of sixty-five; he was buried at Montevideo, the estate his son John Parke Custis Peter (1799-1848) built on his father's Oakland property in Seneca.

Martha (Custis) Peter (1777-1854) was one of four grandchildren of Martha Washington (1731-1802) and step-granddaughter of General George Washington (1732-1799). She was born in 1777 in the Blue Room at Mount Vernon, the only grandchild to be born at Washington's home. Her father was John Parke Custis (1754-1781), Martha Washington's son from her first marriage, and her mother was Eleanor Calvert Custis (1757/8-1811). Named for her grandmother, it was rumored that by disposition she was the granddaughter most like her grandmother.

After her father John Parke Custis' death from camp fever in 1781, her mother married Dr. David Stuart (1753-Ca.1814) in 1783. Martha (Custis) Peter and her older sister, Eliza Parke Custis (1776-1832), grew up at Hope Park, Fairfax County, Virginia, the estate of their mother and stepfather. Martha (Custis) Peter's two younger siblings, Eleanor Parke Custis (1779-1852) and George Washington Parke Custis (1781-1857), remained at Mount Vernon and were raised by their grandparents.

At Hope Park on January 6, 1795, at the age of seventeen, Martha Parke Custis married Thomas Peter. George Washington's gift to her upon this occasion was a miniature portrait cased in a gold locket, still held in the Tudor Place collection. The Peters had ten children, five of whom survived to

adulthood: Columbia Washington Peter (1797-1820); John Parke Custis Peter (1799-1848); George Washington Peter (1801-1877); America Pinckney Peter (1803-1842); and Britannia Wellington Peter (1815-1911). Martha (Custis) Peter remained a staunch Federalist all her life, was socially prominent due to her ancestry, and hosted and entertained many important figures during her lifetime. She died in 1854 and was buried in Seneca, Maryland, the Montevideo farm of her son John Parke Custis Peter, where her husband Thomas Peter and her daughter Columbia Washington Peter were buried.

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Scope and Content

The Thomas and Martha (Custis) Peter Papers represent a highly fragmentary documentary record. The correspondence indicates that Thomas Peter had a great interest in horses and horse racing and was consulted in this capacity. Many citizens asked Martha (Custis) Peter for relics of George Washington. The subject file in the collection that contains material concerning the settlement of the estate of Robert Peter, Jr., indicates the role Thomas Peter played as one of his brother's executors. Thomas Peter's account book and property book provide fragmentary information about the extent of his wealth since they cover a limited period of time; the account book provides a list of the slaves Martha (Custis) Peter received as a dowry from her father's estate. Deeds and plats in the collection reveal the extent of Thomas Peter's land holdings and provide information on the purchase of the Tudor Place property and its disposition upon his death.

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Series Description

CORRESPONDENCE

Series

CORRESPONDENCE: THOMAS PETER

1798-1829

Arranged chronologically

Includes letters from General George Washington concerning tobacco notes to be sold by Thomas Peter on Washington's behalf and letters from Henry Clay concerning a brood mare.

CORRESPONDENCE: MARTHA (CUSTIS) PETER

1813-1848

Arranged chronologically

Incoming and outgoing correspondence, including a formal letter of thanks from the Washington Benevolent Society of Boston for General George Washington's gorget. Also includes a letter of thanks from Charles Payne for a cup and saucer used by General George Washington, two letters from Laurence Abert Williams written from West Point, New York, and a letter from Martha (Custis) Peter to Mrs. James Gibson of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

SUBJECT FILES

Series

ESTATE OF ROBERT PETER, JUNIOR

1804-1814

Arranged by type and then chronologically

Includes correspondence regarding land settlements and property taxes, as well as bills and receipts for accounts unsettled at the time of Robert Peter, Jr.'s, death, for funeral expenses, and for the sale of land and slaves held to settle the estate. Contains letters testamentary and records of the estate account at the Columbia Bank.

LEGAL DOCUMENTS

Series

DEEDS

1803-1823

Arranged alphabetically

Deeds and deed extracts establishing ownership of the land on which Tudor Place was built.

PROMISSORY NOTE: MARTHA (CUSTIS) PETER

1846

Promissory note for two-thousand dollars with interest issued to sons John Parke Custis Peter and George Washington Peter in payment for services as administrators of Thomas Peter's estate.

FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS

Series

ACCOUNT BOOK

1796-1799

Includes list of slaves received as dowry of Martha (Custis) Peter.

PROPERTY BOOK

1808-1810

Listing of property received by Thomas Peter from the estate of Robert Peter, Jr. The location, extent, and value of each piece of land is given. A separate section lists the property located in the city of Washington.

STUD BOOK

1797-1800

An incomplete listing of offspring of two mares, *Atlanta* and *Juno*.

BILLS AND RECEIPTS

1800-1823

Arranged chronologically

Thirteen receipts from Aquila Johns in reference to property in Seneca, Maryland, a receipt for pew rent, a receipt for the funeral expenses of Elizabeth (Scott) Peter, and a receipt for mail received during October through December of 1800.

SCRAPBOOK MATERIAL

Series

NEWSPAPER CLIPPING: OBITUARY OF THOMAS PETER

1834

Brief notice of Thomas Peter's death.

PAMPHLET: *STUD BOOK OF VIRGINIA HORSES*

1826

"A stud book comprising most of the Virginia horses, mares, &c. previous to the revolution. . ." inscribed to Thomas Peter.

MAPS AND LISTS

Series

PLAT: BELT'S BUCKLE and SWEEPSTAKES

1810

Plat map executed by William Boyd for Thomas Peter.

LIST OF SQUARES AND LOTS SOLD IN WASHINGTON CITY
1808-1810

Includes a list of rental properties. The amount of the rent, a brief description of the property, and the name and race of the renter is often given.

MUSIC BOOK

1783

Six Favourite Sonatas for the Piano Forte or Harpsichord, with an accompaniment obligato for a Violin, composed by Luigi Boccherini and arranged by Guisepppe Diettenhofer. [Inscribed: *Patty Custis*]

PRESENTATION DRAWING

c. 1808-1816

Presentation Drawing thought to have been given to the Peters by Dr. William Thornton, whose designs inspired the Center Block of Tudor Place. Framed. [Obverse: "Tudor Place, the seat of Thomas Peter, Esquire, Georgetown, Columbia" below watercolor of house. Verso: Tentative floorplan with caption]

MS-2
Box 1

| Folder | | |
|--------|---|------------------|
| 1 | Correspondence: George Washington | 1798 |
| 2 | Correspondence: Henry Clay | 1827; 1829 |
| 3 | Correspondence: Washington Benevolent Society Committee | 1813 |
| 4 | Correspondence: Charles Payne | Ca.1830 |
| 5 | Correspondence: Laurence Abert Williams | 1848 |
| 6 | Outgoing Correspondence: Martha (Custis) Peter to Mrs. James Gibson | Dec 14, 1820 |
| 7 | Robert Peter, Jr., Estate: Correspondence | 1809-1810 |
| 8 | Robert Peter, Jr., Estate: Property Taxes | 1804-1823 |
| 9 | Robert Peter, Jr., Estate: Funeral and Burial Expenses | 1809 |
| 10 | Robert Peter, Jr., Estate: Sale of Land and Slaves | 1809-1813, ND |
| 11 | Robert Peter, Jr., Estate: Bills and Receipts | 1807-1808 |
| 12 | Robert Peter, Jr., Estate: Bills and Receipts | 1808; 1809 |
| 13 | Robert Peter, Jr., Estate: Bills and Receipts | 1808; 1809; 1810 |
| 14 | Robert Peter, Jr., Estate: Bills and Receipts | 1811 |
| 15 | Robert Peter, Jr., Estate: Bills and Receipts | 1812-1814 |
| 16 | Deed: Tudor Place, George Washington Parke Custis | 1823 |
| 17 | Deed Extracts: Francis Lowndes, Seller | 1805; 1809 |
| 18 | Promissory Note: Thomas Peter Estate | 1846 |
| 19 | Account Book | 1796-1799 |
| 20 | Property Book | 1808-1810 |
| 21 | Stud Book | 1797-1800 |
| 22 | Bills and Receipts | 1800-1822 |

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| 23 | Receipt: Funeral Expenses of Elizabeth (Scott) Peter | 1823 |
| 24 | Pamphlet: <i>Stud Book [The Stud of a Gentleman in the South of Virginia]</i> | 1826 |
| 25 | Newspaper Clipping: Obituary, Thomas Peter | 1834 |
| 26 | Pamphlet: Sampson, Ashley. <i>Eulogy on the Life and Character Of La Fayette</i> | 1834 |
| 27 | Visitors Book Pages | 1837 |
| 28 | Thomas and Martha (Custis) Peter: Note for Day Book | 1826 |
| 29 | <i>The National Intelligencer</i> : Death of Columbia Peter | Dec 8, 1820 |
| 30 | Receipt: Estate of David Peter | Jun 19, 1828 |
| 31 | Answer to the Various Claims of Mr. Dunlop Against the Misses Peters under the Will of the Late Robert Peter | Oct 23, 1809 |
| 32 | Wrapper: Papers Relating to James Dunlop | ND |
| 33 | Papers Relating to James Dunlop as Guardian of His Children | 1812; ND |
| 34 | Bond: James Dunlop to Robert Peter | Oct 11, 1794 |
| 35 | One Share of Stock in the Potomac Company from the Estate of George Washington to Martha (Custis) Peter, Legatee | Nov 16/17, 1802 |
| 36 | Correspondence: America Pinckney Peter to Thomas Peter | Dec 7, 1820 |

MS-2
Oversized

Archival Cabinet B

| | | |
|---|---|------------|
| 1 | Correspondence: Letters of Testament to Thomas Peter | 1811 |
| 2 | Robert Peter, Junior: Account with Columbia Bank | 1809-1811 |
| 3 | Deeds: Granted by Francis Lowndes | 1803, 1805 |
| 4 | Plat: <i>Bells Buckle and Sweepstakes</i> | 1810 |
| 5 | List of Squares & Lots Sold, City of Washington | 1808-1810 |
| 6 | <i>National Intelligence</i> : Wrapper for Reports & Papers of Robert Peter, Junior | 1830 |
| 7 | Music Book: <i>Six Favourite Sonatas for the Piano Forte or Harpsichord, with an accompaniment obligato for a Violin</i> , composed by Luigi Boccherini and arranged by Guiseppe Diettenhofer [Inscribed: <i>Patty Custis</i>] | 1783 |

Mapcase 2, Drawer 4

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|---|------|
| Map: <i>Plan of the City of Washington</i> (Thackara & Vallance); case | 1792 |
| Map: <i>A New and Correct Plan of the Cities of London, Westminster, etc.</i> | 1791 |

House Vault: MS2_HV
Thornton Presentation Drawing [Box]

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|-----------------|--------------|
| Drawing, framed | c. 1808-1816 |
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