

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



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

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  
Thornton Presentation Drawing [Box]

Drawing, framed	c. 1808-1816
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