

Greater Cape May Historical Society Archives

Abrami Family Collection (AFC)

Creator: Philip and Vera Abrami

Dates: 1810–1951

Extent: 7.5 linear feet, 6 cubic feet

Language: English

Donors: Phil and Anthony Abrami, June 29, 2012

Processors:

Laurie Boyd, Archivist 2012

Barbara Anne Beaucar, MA, CA, 2026

Abstract:

The Abrami Family Collection consists of a small number but a variety of items including personal papers, financial records, books, newspapers, maps, textiles, and objects. The earliest documents include river pilot certificates issued by the Port of Philadelphia in the mid-nineteenth century, and reports on the Columbia House Fire made by operatives working for the Pinkerton National Detective Agency in 1879. There are personal papers associated with the families of Samuel Richardson, a Delaware River pilot, Cape May Mayor Joseph Q. Williams, and Louis William Cox, owner of Frymire's Department Store. The objects in the collection include a pair of nineteenth-century eye glasses and twentieth-century Cape May High school letter sweater.

Biographical/Historical Note:

The collection was donated in the memory of Philip and Vera Abrami, who in 1989, began to find historic documents and other items, some dating back nearly 200 years, scattered about in their summer home on 808 Sewell Avenue in Cape May.

Family names associated with the collection are Richardson, Williams, and Cox, all of which may have been associated through marriage.

The papers most valuable to the Greater Cape May Historical Society's focus on colonial history are those of Samuel Richardson (d. 1850). Born in the late eighteenth century, Richardson's papers reveal that he became one third owner of a pilot schooner, "Jefferson," in 1810, and that the Port of Philadelphia for the Bay and River of Delaware certified him as a First Rate Pilot in 1846–49.

But according to Historical Society President Harry Bellangy, "the most significant piece in the collection is an original copy of the investigative report done by Pinkerton's National Detective Agency, commonly referred to as the 'Pinkerton Report,' on the 1878 Cape May fire."¹ Actually four Pinkerton reports were made by Allan Pinkerton in June and July of 1879 and sent to Cape May's mayor, Joseph Q. Williams (1827-1904).

¹ Cain Chamberlin, *Cape May Star and Wave*, July 4, 2012, front page.

Born in Philadelphia in 1827, Joseph Williams served four terms as mayor of Cape May, and six terms on its City Council. Appointed Commissioner by Senator Sewell and John C. Bullitt with the mandate to improve the city, Williams is credited for developing Cape May's ocean front boulevard. In 1889, the Cape May Fire Department placed Williams's name on its "Honor Roll." Williams died of pneumonia in March of 1904.²

Joseph Williams's daughter, Sarah E. Williams, married Lester L. Cox, and kept a diary about the childhood of their son, Louis William Cox (1914-1991). A life long resident of Cape May, Louis Cox graduated from Cape May High School—the letter sweater in the collection may have belonged to him—and throughout his life remained deeply engaged with his community. One of the founders of the Cape May City Rescue Squad, Cox also served as executive director of both the Men's Republican Club and the Cape May Housing Authority. He was a member of the Kiwanis Club and the First Presbyterian Church.³ Louis Cox and his wife, Adele F. Cox, lived for many years at 808 Sewell Avenue and most likely saved these family heirlooms.

Scope and Content Note:

The collection's series are arranged alphabetically. Folders within each series are arranged chronologically.

There are five folders of **Cox Family** series that consist of an empty wallet, insurance papers, and receipts but also included is a diary noting the childhood activities of Louis William Cox, lists of members of the Cape Island Presbyterian Church, various Bible quotes, and lists of Mayflower descendants. (AFC.COX)

There are three folders for the **Legal** series that contain a blank City of Cape Island bond certificate, a dividend certificate, and a paper note for fifty-cents issued by the Corporation of Fredericksburg, 1861. (AFC.LEG)

There are only two maps in the **Maps** series, one is an accordion fold out New Jersey highway map that also contains a guidebook, and a framed 1951 reproduction of a "Map of the 'Town' or Portsmouth as it appeared in 1729." (AFC.MAPS)

There is one folder in the **Miscellaneous** series consisting of an undated advertisement for cigars and a two sheets of Cape May Hotel stationery, and one archival box holding an oversized and illegible certificate for membership in "The Cape _ Sabbath _," that is dated 1859 and signed by Thomas H. Hughes. (AFC.MISC)

The **Newspaper** series holds one archival storage box of very fragile, acidic, and worn pages from *Harper's Weekly*, 1863, *The Mechanic*, 1879, and the *Public Ledger*, 1908. The page from the *Ledger* is so acidic that it cannot be easily read. None of these newspapers seem to contain anything relevant to the history of Cape May. (AFC.NEWS)

² Obituary, Joseph Q. Williams, March 1904. Unidentified newspaper.

³ Obituary, Louis William Cox, Sr., *Cape May Star and Wave*, 18 July 1991. See also online sources: Find a Grave and Family Search for names of parents, spouse, and children.

There is only one extant object in the **Objects** series, a pair of wire rimmed glasses in a case that are believed to be from the nineteenth century. (AFC.OBJ)

There are four folders in the **Pinkerton National Detective Agency** series. They contain detailed reports from Allan Pinkerton sent to Mayor Joseph Q. Williams, and date from June 10, June 30, July 3, and July 10, 1879. The first report is thirteen pages long followed an additional five, six, and four pages of reports by Pinkerton operatives investigating the New Columbia House fire of 1878. (AFC.PINK)

The **Samuel Richardson** papers series contain eight folders several of which hold early nineteenth-century Delaware River pilot certificates, a bill of sale for a schooner dated 1810, and a paper booklet itemizing in pencil all the "goods and chattels" belonging to Samuel Richardson made by Muray, William Stites, and L.L. Macey, administrators to his estate. (AFC.RICH)

The **Textiles** series includes one archival storage box housing a Cape May High School letter sweater in excellent condition. The date is unknown. (AFC.TEX)

The **Joseph Q. Williams** papers series includes six folders that include a letter from the Cape May Fire Department in 1889, an acidic obituary from an unknown newspaper, a bank book, and two folders dealing with his estate and property. (AFC.WILL)

Collection Inventory:

Cox Family papers (COX)

AFC.COX.1 Louis William Cox's wallet, n.d.

Includes a brown leatherette wallet for "Valuable Papers" which is largely empty except for a blank check from the Merchant's National Bank. The wallet is imprinted in gold with name George Ogden & Son, Lumber and Mill Work, Cape May, NJ.

AFC.COX.2 Diary and notes by Louis William Cox's mother, Sarah, 1916—1921

Includes a brown leatherette notebook with entries about Louis's development most likely made by his mother ; "rolls" of the Communicant members of the Cape Island Presbyterian Church 1851—1876 taken from a 1886 publication; a list of Mayflower descendants ; additional notes about the church ; Bible quotes.

AFC.COX.3 Lester Cox, 1924

Includes insurance papers for a 1924 Ford sedan.

AFC.COX.4 Lester Cox, 1939

Includes receipts for payment of water and sewer taxes.

AFC.COX.5 Notice to Supreme Court of New Jersey by Louis and Sarah Cox, 1942

Includes legal papers requesting compensation for lands to be taken for public use, namely the Cape May County Airport. The notice also includes the names of Awilda Matthews and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Keeler

Legal papers and certificates (LEG)

AFC.LEG.1 Blank \$100 bond certificate, n.d.

AFC.LEG.2 Fifty-cent Note by the Corporation of Fredericksburg, 1861

AFC.LEG.3 Dividend Certificate, 1939-40

Includes a dividend certificate from the Prudential Insurance Company of America.

Maps and Guides (MAPS)

AFC.MAPS.1 Mendenhall's Guide and Road Map of NJ, n.d.

Includes one large fold-out accordion map of New Jersey attached to a folder that also has a guide book inserted at the back.

AFC.MAPS.2 "Map of 'Town' or Portsmouth as it appeared in 1729," 1951

Includes one framed map behind glass.

Miscellaneous (MISC)

AFC.MISC.1 Domingo Viana Cigars and Hotel Cape May stationary, n.d.

Includes a card advertising cigars and three sheets of stationary from the Hotel Cape May.

AFC.MISC.2 Certificate for membership in "The Cape ____ Sabbath ____," 1859

Signed by Thomas H. Hughes.

Newspapers (NEWS)

AFC.NEWS.1 *Harper's Weekly*, February 7, 1863

Includes one page from the paper.

AFC.NEWS.2 *The Mechanic*, October 9, 1879

Includes two pages from the paper.

AFC.NEWS.3 *Public Ledger*, August 22, 1908

Includes one page from the paper.

Objects (OBJ)

AFC.OBJ.1 Glasses, n.d.

Includes 1 pair of glasses believed to be from the nineteenth century.

AFC.OBJ.2 Silhouette portraits, n.d.
Includes two Richardson family shadow/silhouette black and white portraits
(missing)

Pinkerton National Detective Agency (PINK)

AFC.PINK.1 Allan Pinkerton, June 10, 1879
Includes a thirteen page report made by operative E.J.D. regarding the New Columbia House Fire.

AFC.PINK.2 Allan Pinkerton, June 30, 1879
Includes a six page report made by operative C.H.E regarding the New Columbia House fire.

AFC.PINK.3 Allan Pinkerton, July 3, 1879
Includes a five page continuation of the report made by C.H.E. regarding the New Columbia House fire.

AFC.PINK.4 Allan Pinkerton, July 10, 1879
Includes an additional, five page continuation of the report made by C.H.E. regarding the New Columbia House fire.

Samuel Richardson papers (RICH)

AFC.RICH.1 Purchase of the pilot schooner "Jefferson, 1810
Includes formal handwritten sales record showing Samuel Richardson as 1/3 owner of the schooner.

AFC.RICH.2 Receipt from Mrs. Richardson, 1853
Includes one receipt from Mrs. Richardson for three dollars received by J.T. Price possibly for R. Bryan.

AFC.RICH.3 Booklet on Pilot Regulations, 1846
Includes one leather bound booklet of the rules and regulations published by the Board of Wardens, Port of Philadelphia, and the regulations of Pilots and Pilotages covering the port and harbor of Philadelphia and the Schuylkill River. The inside fly leaf holds Samuel Richardson's signature.

AFC.RICH.4 River Pilot Certification, 1846
Includes the certification of Samuel Richardson as a First Rate Pilot by the Port of Philadelphia for the Bay and River of Delaware.

AFC.RICH.5 River Pilot Certification, 1847
Includes the certification of Samuel Richardson as a First Rate Pilot by the Port of Philadelphia for the Bay and River of Delaware.

AFC.RICH.6 River Pilot Certification, 1848

Includes the certification of Samuel Richardson as a First Rate Pilot by the Port of Philadelphia for the Bay and River of Delaware.

AFC.RICH.7 River Pilot Certification, 1849

Includes the certification of Samuel Richardson as a First Rate Pilot by the Port of Philadelphia for the Bay and River of Delaware.

AFC.RICH.8 Estate Inventory, 1850

Includes a paper booklet itemizing all the "goods and chattels" belonging to Samuel Richardson made by Muray, William Stites, and L.L. Macey, administrators.

Textiles (TEX)

AFC.TEX.1 Cape May High School Letter sweater, n.d.

Joseph Q. Williams papers (WILL)

AFC.WILL.1 Advertisement, n.d.

Includes a scrap of cardboard that may have been an advertisement for Mr. Williams.

AFC.WILL.2 Cape May Fire Department, 1889

Includes a letter informing Joseph Williams that his name is being placed on an "Honorable Roll." It is signed by Jas. J. Doaks, secretary.

AFC.WILL.3 Obituary, 1904

Includes a newspaper obituary for Joseph Q. Williams, who served four terms as Cape May's mayor.

AFC.WILL.4 Bank book, 1903

Includes a bank book with the New Jersey Trust and Safe Deposit Company.

AFC.WILL.5 Sarah E. Williams, 1903

Includes one check from the Security Trust Company dated March 31, 1903 and made out to Sarah Williams as an "heir at law."

AFC.WILL.6 Tax Sale Certificate, 1941

Includes a tax sale certificate for land once owned by the Joseph Q. Williams estate.