Descriptive Summary
Creator: U.S. Customs House, Fairfield district
Title: Records of the U.S. Customs House, Fairfield district
Dates: 1793-1881
Quantity: 102 volumes, some bound, some housed in archival boxes
Abstract: Capturing the seafaring trade of Fairfield County, this collection from the U.S. Customs House represents some of the earliest material held by the Bridgeport History Center. The various licenses and accounts provide a year-by-year look into trade conducted along the Long Island Sound.
Language: English
Repository: Bridgeport History Center

Biographical information
Customs houses served as a port of entry and a means to track trade and collect revenue. This meant recording which ships were coming in and out, what was aboard them, and information about the vessel itself. Samuel Smedley served as the Customs House collector from 1789-1817 in Fairfield.

Over the years, Fairfield County became a very busy port, and the records that were created by customs officials reflect that fact. Material was organized by the customs house by the size of the vessel (over or under 20 tons). The house also regulated the fishing trade along the Long Island Sound.

Additional research is being conducted at this time.

Scope and Content note:
Most documents within the bound volumes of this collection are ship licenses, and name captains, what they were carrying, and information about the vessel itself. Information on steamboats appears at the end of the collection, as steamship lines began to flourish in the area towards the end of the 19th century. Between the license bonds for ships over and under 20 tons, there is a nearly century long uninterrupted record of commercial activity carried out along the coast of Fairfield County.

Arrangement Note:
The collection is arranged into 5 series, some with several sub-series. It is clear from the titles of bound volumes and the forms within that at some point, license bonds gained a distinction between vessels over 20 tons and under 20 tons. This is reflected in arrangement.

Series 1, License bonds, are essentially permission to be employed and carrying on trade. These
bonds were issued for only a year, and named owners, ship names, and eventually made a distinction between size. Subseries A represents license bonds for vessels employed in carrying on coasting trade for one year, whereas subseries B and C represent license bonds for ships over and under 20 tons, respectively. This distinction was made as trade grew, and there are many more bonds for over 20 ton vessels.

Series 2, List of renewed licenses granted, contains exactly that.

Series 3, contains subseries A, Enrollment bonds for ships and vessels employed in the coasting trade and fisheries, and subseries b, Abstracts of licenses granted to enrolled vessels in the district of Fairfield for carrying on the coasting trade. The abstracts served as a quick way to look up enrollment information.

Series 4, Accounts, contains account information but the documentation begins only begins in 1869. They vary from being kept daily, weekly, quarterly, or daily.

Series 5, other, contains the correspondence between the office of Commissioner of Customs, Treasury Department, and Collector of Customs,

Administrative information:
Provenance: Unknown

See also
Ships’ Papers Collections (MS 36), Fairfield Museum and History Center, Fairfield, Connecticut.

Preferred Citation:
Records of the U.S. Customs House, Fairfield district (BHC-MSS 0071) Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

Names and Subject Tracings
Corporate names
United States. Collector of Customs (Fairfield, Conn.)

Subject tracings
Bonds
Bridgeport, Conn.
Customhouses
Fairfield, Conn.
Trade regulation

Detailed box and folder listing

Series I
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Box 4, License bonds for vessels employed in carrying on coasting trade for one year, 1803-1804
Box 5, License bonds for vessels employed in carrying on coasting trade for one year, 1804-1808
Box 6, License bonds for vessels employed in carrying on coasting trade for one year, 1808-1813
Box 7, License bonds for vessels employed in carrying on coasting trade for one year, 1818-1819
Box 8, License bonds for vessels employed in carrying on coasting trade for one year, 1819-1822
Box 9, License bonds for vessels employed in carrying on coasting trade for one year, 1822-1825
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License bonds for vessels employed in carrying on coasting trade for one year, 1832-1836
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Box 12, License bonds for vessels employed in carrying on coasting trade for one year, 1857-1859
Box 13, License bonds for vessels employed in carrying on coasting trade for one year, 1865-1869
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Box 14, License bonds for vessels above 20 tons employed in carrying on coasting trade for one year, 1797-1799
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Box 22
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