

REGISTER

William P. Bass Collection, 1975-1988 Bulk, 1975-1984

Size: 2 Manuscript Boxes
Accession #: 1164

Processed: October 2007
By: Rebecca Parmer

Acquisition: Materials donated to the USS Constitution Museum by Commander Tyrone Martin, USN, 1989.

Access: Unrestricted

Copyright: Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be discussed with the curatorial staff.

Preface

The USS Constitution Museum serves as the **memory** and **educational voice** of USS CONSTITUTION, by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the stories of “Old Ironsides” and the people associated with her. We seek to create a positive, memorable experience for both children and adults by inspiring within them a love for the freedom that CONSTITUTION symbolizes. We will share CONSTITUTION’s contributions with a global audience, and we will strive to be the best museum possible based on scholarship and innovative ways of sharing CONSTITUTION’s stories.

The necessary staff for this project was made available through an internship program in cooperation with the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College, Boston MA.

Biographical Sketch

William Bass, a retired electrical engineer from Melbourne, Florida, began his work on *Constitution: Super Frigate of Many Faces, Second Phase, 1802-07*, in 1975. At the time, Bass was in the middle of constructing a 1:96 scale model of “Old Ironsides” as a Bicentennial project for his local library. In his desire to be as accurate and close to the original ship as possible, Bass contacted the then-commander of USS *Constitution*, Commander Tyrone Martin, to obtain information as to the ship’s appearance during her primary engagement phase, 1803-1815. Commander Martin, who had begun research on this same subject only a few months prior, sent Bass his notes and some guidance as to where Bass might begin his own research; after that, according to Commander Martin, “it was off to the races.” A lengthy period of correspondence between Mr. Bass and Commander Martin followed, as the pair traded notes, research material, and drawings, culminating in the publication of Bass’ book in 1981.

Though Bass began his research with the ship's second commission (her second "phase"), due largely to the greater availability of materials and documentation, he continued to research and gather information with the intent to publish a monograph on the ship's first commission (her first "phase"). Unfortunately, due to the lack of primary sources and documentation available, he was only able to produce a "dummy" monograph, which consisted of a few completed sections and the remainder merely outlined. Bass offered this monograph to the USS Constitution Museum to be sold in the Museum store, but was unable to come to an agreement. At this point, his correspondence with Commander Martin came to an end, and it is unknown whether Bass continued his research.¹

Scope and Content

The William P. Bass collection consists of Bass' correspondence from 1975-1984, mainly with Commander Tyrone Martin, and comprises 19 folders in two boxes. Fifteen folders are of Bass' correspondence with Martin, two folders are of Tyrone Martin's correspondence with others from 1981 to 1988, one folder includes photographs, and the last folder contains an incomplete manuscript of Bass' book.

This collection was donated by Commander Tyrone Martin in 1989, and largely retains the same order in which it came. Items are arranged chronologically by date within the initial series delineated by Commander Martin, and drawings and sketches are included with their original correspondence.

¹ Special thanks to Commander Tyrone Martin for providing additional information about William Bass.

Series List

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|------|--|------------------------|
| I. | Correspondence, 1975-1984 | Box 1, 2; Folders 1-15 |
| II. | Correspondence: Tyrone Martin with others, 1981-1988 | Box 2, Folders 16-17 |
| III. | Photographs, 1975-1984 | Box 2, Folder 18 |
| IV. | Manuscript | Box 2, Folder 19 |

Series Descriptions

Series I: Correspondence, 1975-1984

This correspondence, arranged chronologically and comprising 15 folders, is primarily research-related, and consists of notes, photocopied pages from primary and secondary sources, transcriptions from journals and letters of sailors, tracings, and technical drawings. Photographs originally attached to letters have been removed and placed into a separate series for the sake of preservation; a separation sheet has been included where this occurs.

Boxes 1 and 2, Folders 1-15

Series II: Correspondence: Tyrone Martin with others, 1981-1988

This series comprises two folders and pertains to Commander Martin's own research on the history of the USS *Constitution*. This correspondence generally consists of research requests and information shared between Commander Martin and various researchers, historians, and archivists, though some fan mail regarding Martin's book *A Most Fortunate Ship: A Narrative History of Old Ironsides* (Naval Institute Press, 1980, 1997) is also included.

Box 2, Folders 16-17

Series III: Photographs, 1975-1984

Included in one folder are 24 photographs from 1975-1984, arranged chronologically—16 of model ships, four of Bass' workshop, and four of details from various paintings of USS *Constitution*.

Box 2, Folder 18

Series IV: Manuscript

The last folder contains an incomplete manuscript of Bass' book, *Constitution: Super Frigate of Many Faces, Second Phase, 1802-07*, sent by Mr. Bass to Commander Martin for review.

Box 2, Folder 19