

**C.H. Newton and Co.
General Store and Palm Leaf Business
On the Common
Royalston, Massachusetts**

Description of the Collection

The C. H. Newton and Co. collection consists of business papers and letters of a rural Massachusetts general store and palm leaf manufacturing business spanning the period 1853-1869. Between the years of 1853 and 1869 Charles Homer Newton (b. May 13, 1828), and his brother, Phinehas Stewart Newton (b. August 20, 1832) owned a general store and palm leaf hat business on the Common in Royalston, Massachusetts. The business was purchased by C. H. Newton from Joseph Estabrook in 1853. C. H. Newton began as a clerk in Estabrook's store, became his partner, then bought the store and brought in his brother, P. S. Newton, as an associate. Throughout the brothers' partnership, C. H. Newton kept the store, while P. S. Newton traveled rural Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire peddling their goods and trading with rural families. The store was sold in 1870 to Obadiah Walker. After the sale of the business, C. H. Newton moved to Fitchburg, while P. S. Newton maintained the palm leaf side of the business until his death.

The collection does not document the purchase or sale of the business. In 1853, *The Massachusetts Register* shows Estabrook as a palm leaf dealer, and shows both Estabrook and C. H. Newton as owners of the general store. The business papers in the collection address Mr. Estabrook and Mr. Newton in 1853, but in 1854, they address both men with Mr. Estabrook's name crossed out, indicating that C. H. Newton was the sole owner. Thereafter, all correspondence is addressed to C. H. Newton.

The primary importance of this collection is its ability to document the production and distribution of palm leaf hats. The invoices show that C. H. Newton purchased palm leaf from importers in Boston and New York City. The primary raw palm leaf supplier was Perrin & Co. of Boston. The leaf was then contracted to local or regional contractors who bleached or colored, and split the leaf into fine strands for braiding. Leaves were bleached by stacking them around walls of a palm leaf "factory" where brimstone or sulfur was burned. The brimstone or sulfur came in hard roles, did not catch fire and was expected to smolder, enabling the fumes to whiten the leaf. Invoices show that the split leaf was then returned to C. H. Newton who paid the bleachers and splitters for their services. P.S. Newton traveled rural Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire and sold the split leaf to families for women and children to braid into raw forms or "webs" in exchange for money or credit. The braided leaf was then sent to contractors to be pressed into hats and other goods. C. H. Newton would ship finished products to Draper, Clark & Co. in New York City who distributed the goods to stores throughout the country. When splitting leaf, the "butts and tips" were the resultant waste products. These were often sold to contractors to create floor mats.

While this was the basic pattern of Newton's business, other patterns of the palm leaf business existed. It appears that the bleaching/splitting contractors would often complete the

whole process themselves. The contractors found families to do the braiding in their vicinity and would ship finished products to Draper, Clark & Co. in New York. Their invoice/notes to C. H. Newton often stated that they had finished a number of hats and shipped them to Draper and were billing C. H. Newton for their work. Overall, C. H. Newton would contract goods to be made and shipped, collect finished goods to ship, and would receive payment from Draper, Clark & Co. for the goods coming from C. H. Newton or his contractors.

Scope of the Collection

The majority of the collection is dated 1857-1869. The last year of business records in the collection is 1869, and in the last quarter there are only four items. Through the records, one can trace C. H. Newton's participation in the palm leaf industry in rural Massachusetts. The palm leaf portion of the collection primarily contains letters and invoice/notes from palm leaf contractors and from distributors of raw palm leaf or finished products. The vast majority of the collection is comprised of invoices associated with the general store. The account books and day books, though mostly relating to the general store, have sections that include the palm leaf side of the business. A close examination of these books may reveal names of individual families of palm leaf braiders as they traded with P. S. Newton.

The first two of the fourteen boxes are exclusively palm leaf related documents. The first two folders contain letters organized chronologically. While many letters simply report shipments, some letters discuss the craft of creating palm leaf hats, and others report the business situation of the industry as a whole. The letters are followed by three folders of invoice/notes from individual palm leaf contractors. A number of the invoices are annotated by the contractors.

The first three folders of second box of palm leaf papers hold the papers of business firms that work with palm leaf. Three firms (Draper, Clark and Co., Perrin & Co., and Rand & Ellis) are the primary suppliers of raw leaf, distributors of finished palm leaf products, and a business that did splitting, bleaching, or finishing. The folders are arranged alphabetically by firm. The items within are arranged chronologically. The fourth folder contains C. H. Newton transportation bills for shipments of both raw and finished palm leaf products. These bills of lading are primarily railroad freight charges, but there are a few steam boat shipments, as well. The final folder of the palm leaf side of the business is a miscellaneous palm leaf file containing only five items.

The remaining twelve boxes (3 - 14) contain the business papers of the general store. Box 3 contains correspondence, transportation bills, and travel expenses. The fourth box contains forty of P. S. Newton's daybooks which report his business transactions as he peddled and traded goods with families in rural Massachusetts and New Hampshire. There probably is palm leaf information contained in these books, as he traded with families whose women and children braided palm leaf. The fifth through the ninth boxes are the general store's accounts payable files containing invoices and receipts. These are arranged chronologically and span the years 1853-1869. Boxes ten through thirteen are the general store's day books. These are arranged chronologically, and have some palm leaf information intermingled with the general store

records. Box fourteen is miscellaneous, containing a folder of newspapers, one of school book orders, official papers (tax related, licenses, etc.)

Box and Folder List

Box 1

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
1	1857-1864	Correspondence- Palm leaf Related	50
2	1857-1864	Correspondence- Palm leaf Related	87
3	1854-1863	Bills/Receipts/Notes from Palm leaf contractors	45
4	1864-1865	Bills/Receipts/Notes from Palm leaf contractors	24
5	1866-1869	Bills/Receipts/Notes from Palm leaf contractors	50

Box 2

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
1	1856-1866	Draper, Clark & Co.	9
2	1853-1869	Perrin & Co.	32
3	1860-1868	Rand & Ellis (C.F. Ellis)	40
4	1853-1869	Transportation Bills and Receipts- Palm Leaf	181
5	Undated	Miscellaneous Palm Leaf items	5

Box 3

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
1	1855-1869	General Store Correspondence	67
2	1853-1869	General Store Transportation	159
3	1853-1856	Travel Expenses	5

Box 4

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
	1856-1866	P.S. Newton Day Books; Store Inventories	40

Box 5

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
1	1850	General Store Accounts Payable	2
2	1853	General Store Accounts Payable	30
3	1854	General Store Accounts Payable	10
4	1855	General Store Accounts Payable	26
5	1856	General Store Accounts Payable	28
6	1857	General Store Accounts Payable	22
7	1858	General Store Accounts Payable	76
8	1859	General Store Accounts Payable	45

Box 6

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
1	Jan-Mar. 1860	General Store Accounts Payable	15
2	Apr-Jun. 1860	General Store Accounts Payable	37
3	Jul-Sep. 1860	General Store Accounts Payable	16
4	Oct-Dec. 1860	General Store Accounts Payable	21
5	Jan-Mar. 1861	General Store Accounts Payable	15
6	Apr-Jun. 1861	General Store Accounts Payable	28
7	Jul-Sep. 1861	General Store Accounts Payable	27
8	Oct-Dec. 1861	General Store Accounts Payable	14
9	Jan-Mar. 1862	General Store Accounts Payable	13
10	Apr-Jun. 1862	General Store Accounts Payable	12
11	Jul-Sep. 1862	General Store Accounts Payable	4
12	Oct-Dec. 1862	General Store Accounts Payable	16

Box 7

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
1	Jan-Mar. 1863	General Store Accounts Payable	13
2	Apr-Jun. 1863	General Store Accounts Payable	25
3	Jul-Sep. 1863	General Store Accounts Payable	24
4	Oct-Dec. 1863	General Store Accounts Payable	13
5	Jan-Mar. 1864	General Store Accounts Payable	8
6	Apr-Jun. 1864	General Store Accounts Payable	24
7	Jul-Sep. 1864	General Store Accounts Payable	7
8	Oct-Dec. 1864	General Store Accounts Payable	24
9	Jan-Mar. 1865	General Store Accounts Payable	0
10	Apr-Jun. 1865	General Store Accounts Payable	28
11	Jul-Sep. 1865	General Store Accounts Payable	22
12	Oct-Dec. 1865	General Store Accounts Payable	11

Box 8

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
1	Jan-Mar. 1866	General Store Accounts Payable	11
2	Apr-Jun. 1866	General Store Accounts Payable	16
3	Jul-Sep. 1866	General Store Accounts Payable	36
4	Oct-Dec. 1866	General Store Accounts Payable	36
5	Jan-Mar. 1867	General Store Accounts Payable	28
6	Apr-Jun. 1867	General Store Accounts Payable	65
7	Jul-Sep. 1867	General Store Accounts Payable	51
8	Oct-Dec. 1867	General Store Accounts Payable	49

Box 9

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
1	Jan-Mar 1868	General Store Accounts Payable	34

2	Apr-Jun 1868	General Store Accounts Payable	31
3	Jul-Sep 1868	General Store Accounts Payable	57
4	Oct-Dec 1868	General Store Accounts Payable	54
5	Jan-Mar 1869	General Store Accounts Payable	37
6	Apr-Jun 1869	General Store Accounts Payable	38
7	Jul-Sep 1869	General Store Accounts Payable	45
8	Oct-Dec 1869	General Store Accounts Payable	4
9	Undated	General Store Accounts Payable	12

Box 10

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
	1840-1856	C.H. Newton Day Books	4

Box 11

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
	1856-1860	C.H. Newton Day Books	3

Box 12

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
	1859-1864	C.H. Newton Day Books	4

Box 13

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
	1866-1868	C.H. Newton Day Books	2

Box 14

Folder	Date Range	Contents	Number of items
	1852-1853	Newspaper Subscription Book	1
1	1900-1904	Newspapers	5
2	1854-1862	Schoolbook Orders	23
3	1859-1869	Official Papers	37
4		Miscellaneous	21