

Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum Record Unit 142

Baptist Society of Edgartown, 1821-1970

By Karin Stanley

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum

Call No.

Title: Baptist Society of Edgartown 1821-1970

Creator: Karin Stanley

Quantity: 1 cubic feet

Abstract: This collection of documents from the Baptist Society of Edgartown consists primarily of bound ledger books. Some ledgers record church business and finances; others record actions taken during covenant meetings and the admission or removal of church members. The collection also includes member lists, church club records, and written histories of the Society.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information: The documents of the Baptist Society of Edgartown were acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum in _____ by _____.

Processing Information: Karin Stanley

Access Restrictions: none

Use Restrictions: none

Preferred citation of publication: Martha's Vineyard Museum, Baptist Society of Edgartown, Record Unit 142.

Index Terms

Baptist Society of Edgartown

Federated Church

Tau Delta Sigma Club

Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor

Edgartown Baptist Church

Edgartown Congregational Church

Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Institutional History

Series II: Membership Records 1810-1970

Series III: Treasury Reports 1854-1940

Series IV: Business Records 1822-1970

Series V: Governance Records (Covenant meetings) 1823-1870

Series VI: Church Clubs 1893-1914

Historical Note

The first Baptist Society on Martha's Vineyard was formed in the town of Tisbury in 1780. Many members of the Congregational Church of Edgartown left their church to join the new Baptist movement in Tisbury. A list of these people, dated 1810, may be found in this collection. Soon this group wished to form their own society in Edgartown. The early sermons were held in homes, eventually attracting more Congregational members. The first years were contentions as opposition to the Baptists was strong. According to Henry F. Norton's *History of the Baptist Society in Edgartown*, "On the evening of Dec. 31, 1808, to avoid paying the annual tribute to the Congregational church, the Baptists went in a body to the town clerk's home just before midnight, awakened him and demanded him to drop the names from the old records, and grant them membership in the Baptist society." This was the beginning of the organized Baptist Society in Edgartown.

In 1811 they joined with the Methodists and erected a meetinghouse on Church Street. By the 1830's it was decided that the Baptists needed to erect a new "commodious house of worship." On Friday, September 6, 1839 "the new and elegant Baptist meeting house" was dedicated. Worship in this church would continue for another 100 years.

Over the years the animosities between the Baptists and the old Congregational church subsided, so much that by 1925 a merger took place. It has been speculated that due to dwindling membership and resources the two organizations joined forces. It appears the Congregational Church invited the Baptists to "unite with them in preaching services and prayer meetings." Later Federated Church records (1945) report, "our churches happily united in a federation by which we conserved our resources, advanced the cause of Christian unity and opened the way for our churches to do the work of the Kingdom in Edgartown more effectively." This merger became the Federated Church. Although the congregations were united, two church buildings continued to be used. Members met for work and worship six months per year in each building. This continued until 1945 when the prospect of prohibitive renovations to the Baptist church united the congregation under one roof, that of the former Congregational church, now the Federated Church.

After 1925 the Baptist Society continued to exist, although work and worship took place side by side with the Congregationalists, with records from both churches merged into papers from the Federated Church. The Federated Church, with its mixed congregation, continues to play an active role in the Edgartown community.

Scope and Content Note

This collection of documents from the Baptist Society of Edgartown primarily consists of ledger books, dating from 1821 through 1935. Some ledgers record church business and finance; others record actions taken during covenant meetings and admission or removal of church members. The collection includes member lists, church club records, and written histories of the Society. Business Records consist of treasurer reports, meeting minutes, and parsonage reports. Governance Records relate some business matters but are more of a record of prayer meetings and social norms of church members and the community. They also include records of admission and dismissals of church members. A history of the Society, written in 1869, provides an excellent over-view of the early church.

Given the fact that the Baptist Society merged with the Congregational Church in 1925, it was decided that Baptist records kept after that date were to be included in the Federated Church collection (RU 341). Please refer to the Federated Church collection. Some of the ledgers in this Record Unit (Baptist Society) span the years prior to and after the merger, since ledgers were placed in this collection if they originated prior to 1925.

Series Descriptions

Series I: Institutional History

Box 1 of 2

Folder 1: Institutional History

Series II: Membership Records, 1810-1970

Box 1 of 2

Folder 2: Congregationalists joining Tisbury Baptist Society 1810

Folder 3: Baptist Church Member List 1914-1970

Folder 4: Certificates of Transfer and Membership 1822-1920

Series III: Treasury Reports, 1904-1940

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Folder 5: Treasury Reports

Series IV: Business Records, 1822-1970

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Folder 6: Donation Receipt 1822

Folder 7: Business Records 1821-1850

Folder 8: Business Records 1850-1876

Folder 9: Business Records 1871-1970

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Folder 1: Business Records 1878-1909

Folder 2: Business Records 1910-1935

Folder 3: Business Records 1917-1934

Series V: Governance Records (Covenant Meetings), 1823-1870

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Folder 4: Governance Records 1823-1845

Folder 5: Governance Records 1844-1870

Series VI: Church Clubs, 1893-1914

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Folder 6: Young Peoples Society of Christian Endeavor Prayer Meetings 1893

Folder 7: Tau Delta Sigma Club Meetings, 1911-1914