

Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum
Record Unit 55
Emma Mayhew Whiting Collection, 1680-1946
By Linda M. Wilson

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum

Call No.

Title: The Emma Mayhew Whiting Collection, 1680-1946

Creator: Linda M. Wilson

Quantity: 2.25 cubic feet

Abstract: This collection of personal papers, hand-written genealogy notes, whaling history research notes, and more than 90 original documents dating from 1680 spans Emma Mayhew Whiting's adult life on Martha's Vineyard. There are as well copies of her poems and non-fiction writings published in various national and local venues.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information: The Emma Mayhew Whiting Collection, 1680-1946, was acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum as a donation from her son Everett Whiting.

Processing Information: Linda M. Wilson

Access Restrictions: none

Use Restrictions: none

Preferred Citation for Publication: Martha's Vineyard Museum, The Emma Mayhew Whiting Collection, 1680-1946, Record Unit 55.

Index Terms

Whiting, Emma Mayhew

Whiting, Johnson

Whiting, Everett

Martha's Vineyard Authors

Martha's Vineyard Poets and Poetry

Whaling Wives

Mayhew, Caroline

Hough, Henry Beetle

Genealogy

Deeds

Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Correspondence, 1911-1946

Series II: Publications, 1922-1937

Series III: Original Documents, 1680-1919

Series IV: Research

Series V: Oversized Documents

Biography/Historical Note:

Emma Mayhew Whiting spent her entire life on Martha's Vineyard. She was born in Chilmark in 1876 and died on the Island in 1947 at the age of 69. She married Johnson Whiting in 1901. He farmed and raised sheep at their property in West Tisbury. Mrs. Whiting was known as a historian and writer and for her genealogy research.

Mrs. Whiting began research on the wives of whaling captains in the 1930's. When she died in 1947, she had completed sufficient research for a book and had written several drafts of chapters. Henry Beetle Hough continued her efforts and brought the book to publication under the title *Whaling Wives* in 1952. He described her work as "a cherished enterprise...alive and suggestive." She authored the second publication of the Dukes County Historical Society in 1924. It was titled *Vineyard Indian Relics*. Another publication from 1937 was *Letters Home*, an annotated collection of letters written to Dionis Coffin Allen Adams by her sons and daughter-in-law between 1805 and 1829.

She was a charter member of the Dukes County Historical Society and served as librarian and genealogist for the Society for many years. She was active in other community organizations including the Agricultural Society and the annual summer fair, reveling in the return of the fair at the end of World War II, and the Martha's Vineyard Hospital. She conducted extensive genealogical research in the Society's collections and she was known for her poetry on Vineyard topics and on historical themes. In 1948 her husband Johnson Whiting published a book of her poems written over the course of some 50 years as a memorial to her. A copy is in the collection of the Huntington Library as are her other publications. Her obituary in the *Vineyard Gazette* described her as "...not only the most widely known of Island women of this or any generation..." but unique "...by virtue of her special knowledge, personality and her activities." Mr. Hough once described her as "the most distinguished woman the Vineyard has produced."

Scope and Content Note: The Emma Mayhew Whiting Collection is a mix of business correspondence, research notes and public documents that represent the broad interests of Mrs. Whiting who spent her entire life on Martha's Vineyard.

Of particular interest are the documents, primarily deeds, dating from 1680. More than 90 originals exist and there are copies of others missing from the collection. There are hand-written deeds for land transactions between some of the Island's oldest families. Mayhew, Daggett, Allen, Butler, Manter, Athearn, Cottle, Chase, Coffin, Lambert, and Dunham are all represented in the deeds. Several deeds include the names or marks of Native Americans who sold land to Island families. One deed dated 1698 is written on parchment. All these documents were removed from a scrapbook, now housed separately, that belonged to Mrs. Whiting. The missing documents include the bill of sale for a Negro slave woman which was witnessed by Manesseh Cutler, a deed for the sale of land on "Sengecontocket ...southeast by a swamp and upland of Isaac Norton..." and a grant to Islanders from the "...Queen Sachem of all wrecks and whales which may be cast on shore...."

Mrs. Whiting's propensity for recycling every scrap of paper that passed through her hands has resulted in hand-written notes on the versos of a wide variety of ephemeral material without the presence of any organized transcription or index. Three notebooks of research for *Whaling Wives* are included as well as the draft chapters for the book. Among the research notes for *Whaling Wives* is a group of letters from Lloyd C. M. Hare, Berkeley, California, who supplied information about Caroline Mayhew, wife of Captain William Mayhew, who sailed with her husband in the 1830's and 1840's. Mrs. Whiting's hand-written annotations appear on the letters. In the letters Mr. Hare rails against the W.P.A. publication, *Whaling Captains*, as "...a disgusting example of slipshod work for which they should have been ashamed...." Examples of her poetry and published articles of historical interest are in the collection and there is an unpublished manuscript dated 1940 which purports to be the memoirs of Willis Howes of Vineyard Haven. Pages from her personal copy of Banks' *History of Martha's Vineyard, vol. 1*, with marginalia are also present. The collection was presented to the Society by her son Everett Whiting.

Series Descriptions

Series I: Correspondence

Box 1 of 3

Folder 1: Business Correspondence, 1911-1946

Series II: Publications, 1922-1937

Box 1 of 3

Folder 2: History Booklets

Folder 3: Poetry

Series III: Original Documents, 1680-1907

Box 1 of 3

Folder 4: Letters, 1796-1919

Folder 5 : Receipts and Bills, 1797-1892
Folder 6: Bill of Sale for the Ship *Loan*, 1824
Folder 7: Agreement to Form the Congregational Union Society, Chilmark, 1813
Folder 8: Wills, 1712-1907
Folder 9: Legal Documents, 1719-1807
Folder 10: Court Decisions, 1699-1723
Folder 11: Deeds, 1680-1682
Folder 12: Deeds, 1700-1719
Folder 13: Deeds, 1720-1729
Folder 14: Deeds, 1730-1748
Folder 15: Deeds, 1750-1774
Folder 16: Deeds, 1775-1798
Folder 17: Deeds, 1800-1819
Folder 18: Deeds, 1821-1829
Folder 19: Deeds, 1839-1864
Folder 20: Deed Fragments, Undated-1839
Folder 21: Brochures, Programs, Flyers, 1921-1982

Series IV Research

Box 1 of 4

Folder 22: Research Notes for *Whaling Wives*

Box 2 of 4

Folder 1 : Research Notebooks for *Whaling Wives*

Folder 2: Miscellanea from Research Notebooks for *Whaling Wives*

Folder 3: Small Research Notebooks for *Whaling Wives*

Folder 4: Unbound Research Notebook for *Whaling Wives*

Folder 5: Drafts of Chapters for *Whaling Wives*

Folder 6: History of Willis Howes, unpublished manuscript, c.1940?

Folder 7: Genealogy Research Notes

Folder 8: Genealogy Notebooks

Folder 9: Unbound Genealogy Notebooks

Box 3 of 4

Folder 1: Copies of Original Documents, 1680-1748

Folder 2: Copies of Original Documents, 1750-1799

Folder 3: Copies of Original Documents, 1800-1899

Folder 4: Copies of Missing Original Documents, 1696-1769

Folder 5: Obituary, 1947

Folder 6: Newspaper Clippings, 1922-1982

Series V Oversized Documents

Box 4 of 4

Folder 1: Deed on Parchment, 1698

Folder 2: Deed, 1777

Folder 3: Land Division, 1779

Folder 4: Deed, 1833