

**Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum
Record Unit 394
Literary Societies of Martha's Vineyard 1837-1890
By Betsy Campbell**

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum

Call No.

Title: Literary Societies of Martha's Vineyard, 1837-1890

Creator:

Quantity: .5 cubic feet

Abstract: This collection includes three bound volumes relating to the literary societies of Martha's Vineyard. These ledgers contain membership lists, constitutions, by-laws and the recorded minutes of meetings of The Edgartown Lyceum 1837 - 1853, a later organization of the same name which met from 1876 - 1890, and the Cottage City Literary Society 1880-1884. The collection also includes selected transcripts of meetings of the first Edgartown Lyceum.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information:

Processing Information: Betsy Campbell

Access Restrictions: none

Use Restrictions: none

Preferred Citation of Publication: Martha's Vineyard Museum, Literary Societies of Martha's Vineyard, Record Unit 394.

Index Terms

Edgartown Literary Societies

Edgartown Lyceum

Cottage City Literary Society

Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Edgartown Lyceum, 1837-1853

Series II: Edgartown Lyceum, 1876-1890

Series III: Cottage City Literary Society and Cottage City Lyceum, 1880-1884

Historical Note

The original Edgartown Lyceum was founded in 1837 by a group of men whose goal was "the improvement of the intellect and cultivation of faculties by which mind can communicate with mind." The group met regularly from 1837 to 1853. Programs included lectures and debates on social, moral, political and philosophical topics. Local issues were not chosen as subjects for debate. Instead, topics were of national or historic interest. After each debate a vote was taken to choose the winning side. The first president of the organization was David Davis, also tax collector for the town of Edgartown.

In 1876 a new Edgartown Lyceum was formed. This group patterned itself on the earlier club of the same name. The structure, by-laws, and program format of the two groups are very similar. Debate topics covered a wide range of concerns. For example: "Is it possible that the United States will sink into decay which befell the nations of antiquity?" "Should capital punishment be abolished?" "Would the condition of society and of women be improved by placing the two sexes on an equality with respect to civil rights and duties?" The club disbanded in 1890.

The Cottage City Literary Society was founded in 1880 for "mutual improvement and social intercourse." Membership included men and women. Programs consisted of vocal and instrumental music, poetry readings, recitations, lectures, choral singing and charades. This society met during October and November 1880. In December 1883, the Cottage City Lyceum was organized with much the same membership as the earlier literary society. The first meeting was held at The Wesley House, November 7, 1883 with fifty-three people in attendance. The last recorded meeting was in February 1884.

Scope and Content Note

The .5 cubic foot collection includes three bound volumes. One volume records the organizational details, membership lists and minutes of meetings of the Edgartown Lyceum 1837-1853. A second volume contains similar records for the later Edgartown Lyceum which met from 1876-1890. A third volume contains records of the Cottage City Literary Society and The Cottage City Lyceum. This book was also used to record the minutes of the Sunday School Board of Cottage City 1888-1892. A pamphlet containing a Fourth of July poem written by David Davis is filed separately. Selected transcripts of the meetings of The Edgartown Lyceum are in a separate folder.

Series Descriptions

Series I: Edgartown Lyceum, 1837-1853

Folder 1: David Davis poem, 1836

Folder 2: Bound Volume, 1837-1853

Folder 3: Loose Paper Found in Bound Volume

Folder 4: Selected Typed Transcripts of Bound Volume

Series II: Edgartown Lyceum, 1876-1890

Folder 5: Bound Volume, 1876-1890

Series III: Cottage City Literary Society, 1880-1884

Folder 6: Bound Volume, 1880-1884