

Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum
Record Unit 79
Edgartown School Records, 1792-1926
By Linda M. Wilson

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum

Call No.

Title: Edgartown School Records, 1792-1926

Creator: Linda M. Wilson

Quantity: 1 cubic foot

Abstract: Documents in this artificially compiled collection span over 200 years of material dealing with the schools in Edgartown. Within the various series can be found a variety of administrative school records. Of note is the organization of early Island school districts, each with its own school committee but administered from Edgartown.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information: The documents in this collection were acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum from many sources on the Island.

Processing Information: Linda M. Wilson

Access Restrictions: none

Use Restrictions: none

Preferred citation for publication: Martha's Vineyard Museum, Edgartown School Records, 1792-1926, Record Unit 79.

Index Terms

Edgartown, Massachusetts – Schools

Schools – Martha's Vineyard

Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Correspondence

Series II: Administrative Papers

 Subseries A: School Committee Papers, 1792-1847

 Subseries B: Annual Reports, 1850-1856

 Subseries C: Deed, 1833

 Subseries D: Finances, 1892-1851

 Subseries E: Curriculum Materials

 Subseries F: Reports and Awards

Series III: School Papers

Series IV: Student Publications, 1856-1926

Series V: Reference

History Note

Early educational efforts on Martha's Vineyard go back to two Edgartown residents, the Missionary Mayhews, namely Thomas Senior and Junior. Their requests for payment for "teaching and instructing the Indians att the Vineyard...." were sent to The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in London, England, in the 1650's. They also hired Peter Folger to assist for a number of years as a "teacher and Schoolmaster to the Indians there."

Even earlier Charles E. Banks' *History of Martha's Vineyard* cites a 1652 deed that refers to a "school house" in Edgartown. Peter Folger, the same teacher hired by the Mayhews to help them educate the Indians, was the first schoolmaster. Through the years others would serve as "skoollemaster of Edgartown" and were paid in pounds, as much as 60 pounds per year in 1747 according to Banks.

By 1750 the growth of the town necessitated the division of school funds to individual schools in widely separated districts all of which were funded through Edgartown. In 1850 there were schools at Pohoganut, the Plains, on Chappaquiddick, in Clevelandtown, Holmes Hole, and Farm Neck. In the town proper there were the North and South Grammar Schools. And in 1856 the South School offered the equivalent to high school courses.

In 1809 four Wampanaog women on Chappaquiddick petitioned the governor to provide a school for Indian children. Joseph Thaxter wrote a letter in support of their petition.

The town always had a mix of public and private academies for schooling children. Leavitt Thaxter, son of the famed Parson Thaxter and born on the Island, chose teaching as a career and in 1825, with the help of his father, erected his own building and opened Thaxter's Academy. Several Nantucket students attended this Academy and boarded with town residents. As part of the curriculum the students worked on their penmanship and mathematical calculations from manuscript books of startling beauty in the 1830's.

Another educational effort was established by David Davis in the 1830's. Known as Davis Academy, it served as a public space for lectures and concerts as well as a school. The Museum owns a schoolmaster's desk, a leather spanker, and a school bell from Davis Academy.

There are references to an old red schoolhouse on Pease Point Way early on and to Richard L. Pease as a young teacher there. And Henry Baylies (1822-1893) in his memoirs describes Maria Norton and Margarett Arey Vinson who "kept juvenile schools in a little old shop back of Capt. Chase Pease's, in the vestry of the now town

hall, and in the east front room....” He also mentions Rev. Franklin Fish who taught at “...what I have styled the Congregationalist Academy.”

By and large teachers’ salaries remained meager through the years. B.R. Bigalow, an Edgartown teacher in 1845, records in his diary his decision to leave the Island when the School Committee failed to increase his \$40.00 per month salary.

Scope and Content Note:

Record Unit 79 consists of a broad range of documents including school committee reports and papers dating from 1792. There are numerous bills and receipts for school operations, salary requests, tuition bills and receipts, undated rules and regulations and descriptions of curriculum, student attendance registers, report and promotion cards, awards, weekly reports, programs and invitations, and student publications. Of note is one hand-written publication titled *The Casket* dated 1856. Other 20th century publications include *The Corner Clippings* and *The Only Edgartown*. There is also an early undated printed catalog of books belonging to the school district library. Related material may be found in Record Units for Private Schools and Academies and The Wampanoags and Martha’s Vineyard and in issues of the *Intelligencer*.

Series Descriptions

Series I: Correspondence

Box 1 of 2

Folder 1: Correspondence, 1855-1856

Folder 2: Undated Correspondence

Series II: Administrative Papers

Subseries A: School Committee Papers

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Folder 3: School Committee Papers, 1792-1847

Subseries B: Annual Reports

Box 1 of 2

Folder 4: Annual Reports, 1850-1856

Subseries C: Deeds

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Folder 5: Deed, 1833

Subseries D: Finances

Box 1 of 2

Folder 6: Tuition Bills and Receipts, 1802-1854

Folder 7: Salary Requests, 1802-1821

Subseries E: Curriculum Materials

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Folder 8: Curriculum and Rules and Regulations, Undated

Folder 9: Annals of Education, 1842

Series F: Reports and Awards

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Folder 10: Student Awards and Weekly Reports, 1824-1830

Folder 11: Attendance Records, Undated

Folder 12: Attendance Records and Lists of Students, 1840-1861

Folder 13: *Catalog of Books Belonging to the Town School District Library*, Undated

Series III: School Papers

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Folder 14: Programs and Invitations, 1879-1985

Folder 15: Student Compositions, 1905-1906

Folder 16: Copybooks, 1893-1896

Folder 17: Promotion and Discharge Cards, 1921

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Folder 1: Report Cards, 1920-1921

Folder 2: Class Notes, by Bertha Lee Mayhew, 1913

Series IV: Student Publications, 1856-1914

Folder 3: *The Casket*, 1856

Folder 4: *Corner Clippings*, 1901-1926

Folder 5: *The Only Edgartown*, 1914

Series V: Reference

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Folder 6: Reference