

Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum Record Unit 117

Martha's Vineyard Railroad Collection

By Julia Novakovic & Norma Hagen

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum

Call No.

Title: Martha's Vineyard Railroad Collection

Creator: various

Quantity: .5 cubic feet

Abstract: The Martha's Vineyard Railroad Collection houses information on the Martha's Vineyard Railroad [1872-1896] and the Trolley Lines that ran on the Island from the mid-19th century until 1917. Among the materials in this compilation are organizational records, business correspondence, newspaper and magazine articles, timetables, tickets, and maps.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information: The Martha's Vineyard Land Transportation Collection at the Martha's Vineyard Museum was acquired by various donors throughout the 20th century.

Processing Information: Norma Hagen and Julia Novakovic

Access Restrictions: none

Use Restrictions: none

Preferred citation for publication: Martha's Vineyard Museum, Martha's Vineyard Railroad Collection, Record Unit 117.

Index Terms

- Martha's Vineyard Railroad Company
- Railroad
- Locomotive
- Trolley
- "Street Railway"
- "Horse Railroad"
- Martha's Vineyard Street Railway Inc.
- Cottage City Street Railway Company

Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Martha's Vineyard Railroad

Subseries A: Organizational Records

Subseries B: Business Publications

1. Maps

- 2. Publications
- 3. Tickets and Timetables
- Subseries C: Newspaper Articles
- Subseries D: Publications
- Subseries E: Miscellaneous
- Series II: Trolleys on Martha's Vineyard
 - Subseries A: "Horse Railroad"
 - 1. Newspaper Articles
 - 2. Tickets
 - Subseries B: "Street Railway"
 - 1. Correspondence
 - 2. Maps
 - 3. Newspaper Articles
 - 4. Miscellaneous

Historical Note:

Martha's Vineyard Railroad, 1872-1896: The Martha's Vineyard Railroad [MVRR] was founded in 1872, and it began operations on the Island in 1874. It ran from the Oak Bluffs Wharf along the shore to Edgartown, then to the Mattakeeset Lodge and South Beach at Katama. The railroad was a single track that was nine miles long. The train itself consisted of a locomotive [the *Active* was the longest-running during the 22 years the MVRR operated], two to three passenger cars, and a baggage car. Four stops along the line were available to passengers: Oak Bluffs Wharf, Edgartown Depot, Mattakeeset Lodge, and South Beach. There were turnarounds for the train in Oak Bluffs and Katama. During its initial construction, many errors were made in the building of the tracks and the bridge across the Sengekontacket Pond; the tracks often washed out during storms. The company was close to collapse more than a few times during its existence, and stockholders and creditors managed to float the MVRR Company along for a few years. In 1892, the fire that burnt down the Sea View House also destroyed the ferry pier and the railroad turnaround. Without the funds to rebuild the wye, the train ran backwards to Katama from Oak Bluffs. Two years later, the railroad shut down due to a decline in passengers and funding.

Martha's Vineyard Trolley Lines, 1870-1917: The first trolley line on the Island was completed in 1871 as a horse car line from the Highland Wharf in Oak Bluffs that wrapped around the Methodist campground. Reportedly, the "horse railroad" line ran directly from the wharf to the campground so that people attending the camp meetings could avoid the "sinful" parts of Oak Bluffs. Within the Cottage City Street Railway Company's first year in operation, they made a decent profit. The lines operated only during the summer tourist season. Subsequently, more streetcar line companies popped up around the Island: the Martha's Vineyard Street Railway Inc., the Dukes County Street Railway Co., and the Vineyard Haven Line.

By 1891, an ambitious project was created, with the intention of running a trolley line from Cottage City through Tisbury, Chilmark, and Gay Head. No construction ever took place. However, the existing lines did extend to other portions of Oak Bluffs. In 1894, the Cottage City Street Railway Company decided to “equip the road with electricity” like the larger cities on the mainland were doing. The lines were electrified beginning in 1895, and open-air trolley cars became a familiar sight during the summer months Down-Island. In 1914, the street railway companies were buying and selling portions of one another’s rails. The result was confusion. Just three years later, in 1917, the trolley lines abruptly closed and the rails were ripped up for war purposes.

Scope and Content Note:

The Martha’s Vineyard Land Transportation Collection houses information on the Martha’s Vineyard Railroad [1872-1896] and the Trolley Lines that ran on the Island from the mid-19th century until 1917. This artificial compilation is a result of many donors.

Most of the information in this collection is on the Martha’s Vineyard Railroad Company [MVRR]; materials comprise organizational correspondence, business publications [including maps, tickets, and timetables], newspaper and magazine articles, research notes, and diagrams. Photographs of the MVRR and its locomotive, *Active*, can be found in Photo Files 801a-f. For an account book belonging to the MVRR, dated 1890-1895, please see AB 87 in the stacks.

Two types of trolleys ran on Martha’s Vineyard: horse-drawn and electric. While information on the horse-drawn trolleys is limited [the MVM collection has a few newspaper articles and tickets for rides on the “Horse Railroad”], the archive has more materials on the electric trolleys. These records include business correspondence, maps, newspaper articles, and an informative essay on Vineyard Trolley Lines in history. Photographs of Island trolleys can be found in Photo File 800c.

Series Descriptions

Series I: Martha’s Vineyard Railroad

Subseries A: Organizational Records

This Subseries contains organizational records from the Martha’s Vineyard Railroad Company from 1872-1895. Within this section are the articles of incorporation for this company, lists of land granted to the railroad, and some stock certificates from the 1880s.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 1: Martha’s Vineyard Railroad: Organizational Records, 1872-1895.

Folder 2: Martha’s Vineyard Railroad: Stock Certificates, 1884 and 1887.

Subseries B: Business Publications

This Subseries contains publications by the Martha's Vineyard Railroad Company from 1873-1895. Maps of the railroad tracks from 1894 and 1895 are included in this section, as well as tickets and timetables used by the company and its passengers. Under "Publications" is a program for the "Fifth Annual Gathering of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers at Martha's Vineyard" from 1874.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 3: Martha's Vineyard Railroad: Maps, 1894-1895.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 4: Martha's Vineyard Railroad: Publications, 1874.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 5: Martha's Vineyard Railroad: Tickets and Timetables, 1873-1893.

Subseries C: Newspaper Articles

This Subseries contains newspaper articles regarding the Martha's Vineyard Railroad. The first folder in this subseries holds newspaper articles and advertisements written about the MVRR while it was still in existence between 1873 and 1895. The second folder recalls the history of the railroad in articles from 1921-1992.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 6: Martha's Vineyard Railroad: Newspaper Articles, 1873-1895.

Folder 7: Martha's Vineyard Railroad: Newspaper Articles, 1921-1992.

Subseries D: Publications

This Subseries contains publications regarding the Martha's Vineyard Railroad. The first folder in this subseries holds magazine articles written about the MVRR in journals such as *Railroad Magazine*, *Modern Railroader*, and *Yankee Magazine*. The second folder has a publication written by Walter Blackwell in 1971 about finding traces of the MVRR left on the Island as well as photos of where it ran and a concise history of the Vineyard's railroad.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 8: Martha's Vineyard Railroad: Periodical Articles, 1943-1990.

Folder 9: Martha's Vineyard Railroad: *Tracing the Route of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad: 1874-1896*, by Walter Blackwell, published 1971.

Subseries E: Miscellaneous

This Subseries contains various materials on the Martha's Vineyard Railroad, including drawings of the railway cars, copied maps of the railway routes, a photographic collage from a magazine, and research notes.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 10: Martha's Vineyard Railroad: Miscellaneous.

Series II: Trolleys on Martha's Vineyard

Subseries A: "Horse Railroad"

This Subseries contains information on the "Horse Railroad" that ran on the Vineyard during the latter half of the 19th century. The first folder of this section holds newspaper clippings from the 1950s on the horse-drawn trolley, while the second folder has several tickets from the "Horse Railroad" from 1884-1886.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 11: Martha's Vineyard "Horse Railroad:" Newspaper Articles, 1953-1958.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 12: Martha's Vineyard "Horse Railroad:" Tickets, 1884-1886.

Subseries B: "Street Railway"

This Subseries contains information on the electrified "Street Railway" system that ran on Martha's Vineyard from 1896-1917. Business Correspondence includes letters from the Massachusetts "Committee on Relations of Street Railways to Municipal Corporations" office to various town clerks on Martha's Vineyard. The maps in the second section are maps of the Island detailing where the "street railways" ran in 1909 and 1911. The folder in this subseries entitled "Newspaper Articles" holds clippings from the 1950s on the short-lived Street Railway. Finally, the last folder has the transcript of a lecture given to the MVHS by Herman Page on the Martha's Vineyard Trolley Lines, as well as a picture of a trolley car that is similar to what would have been used on the Island.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 13: Martha's Vineyard "Street Railway:" Business Correspondence, 1892-1900.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 14: Martha's Vineyard "Street Railway:" Maps, 1909, 1911.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 15: Martha's Vineyard "Street Railway:" Newspaper Articles, 1952-1954.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 16: Martha's Vineyard "Street Railway:" Miscellaneous.