

**Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum
Record Unit 141
Congregational Church of Edgartown
1761-1925
By Linda M. Wilson**

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum

Call No.

Title:

Creator:

Quantity: 1.5 cubic feet

Abstract: This collection of church records dates from 1791 to 1925 when the Congregational Church and the Baptist Church merged to form The Federated Church. There are numerous hand-written documents from the early history of the church. They include membership lists, meeting announcements, correspondence, sermons and lectures written by various ministers, church governance documents and financial records. Also included are many pew deeds and letters of transfer of membership.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information: These materials were acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum as a donation from The Federated Church of Edgartown.

Processing Information: Linda M. Wilson

Access Restrictions: none

Use Restrictions: none

Preferred Citation for Publication: Congregational Church of Edgartown, 1761-1925, Martha's Vineyard Museum, Record Unit 141.

Index Terms

Congregational Church of Edgartown

First Parish Church of Edgartown

The Mayhew Church of Edgartown

The First Orthodox Congregational Church, Edgartown

Congregational Meetinghouse at Edgartown

Sermons

Kingsbury, Rev. Samuel

Balch, Rev. Thomas
Thaxter, Rev. Joseph
Mayhew, Experience
Alden, Rev. E.K.
Tilton, Rev. David
Hall, Rev. John G.
Marchant, Rev. Edgar
Gannet, Rev. Allen
Church History, Martha's Vineyard

Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Church Governance

Subseries A: Bylaws and Constitutions

Subseries B: Meetings and Reports

Subseries C: Ministerial Correspondence

Subseries D: Letters from Members

Subseries E: Bound Church Records

Series II: Finances, 1791-1830

Series III: Publications, 1827-1922

Series IV: Membership Records

Subseries A: Baptisms and Deaths

Subseries B: Visitation List, 1849

Subseries C: Letters of Transfer

Subseries D: Wills

Series V: Ministers

Series V: Ministers

Subseries A: Joseph Thaxter, 1744-1825

Subseries B: Other Ministers

Series VI: Reference

Historical Note:

The religious tradition in Colonial America which is reflected on Martha's Vineyard is one of close and intermingled functions between town and church. This is certainly reflected in the history of the Congregational Church of Edgartown where the political leaders of the town were often the religious leaders as well. This relationship is documented, for example, in town and church records showing that property owners were taxed to support the ministers. Transfers of land, funding for building and selling meetinghouses are typical transactions. Thomas Mayhew was the earliest in a long line of clergymen to serve the congregation in Edgartown. By 1650 diary entries note a "Mr. Mahu" as the pastor on the "Iland called Martins Vineyard." Other remarkable figures were associated with the early church: Experience Mayhew known for his work among the Indians; another Thomas Mayhew, father of "Mr. Mahu"; John Cotton, Jr., son of the

famed Rev. John Cotton of Boston's First Church; Joseph Thaxter, a long tenured politically active minister who brought the church into the 19th century. By mid-century the town was no longer supplying land for the church and it was up to the congregation to collect money for the ministers' salaries. These were prosperous times for the church. The financial panic of 1857 did not affect whaling merchants on the Vineyard, among whom the Osborn family were notable and active church members. Abraham Osborn served as a Proprietor or Trustee for many years. As the decades passed church membership dwindled Island-wide and the Baptists and the Congregationalists were able to facilitate a remarkable merger in 1925 with the creation of the Federated Church.

Scope and Content Note: This compilation of church documents is the result of a donation from the Federated Church of Edgartown. Other documents from the church can be found in R.U. 342 covering the Baptist Church and R.U. 343 on the Federated Church. Among the most compelling hand-written records in this collection are letters from church members detailing the indiscretions of other members; a controversy between Rev. Thaxter and a Baptist evangelist over the total emersion of adults for baptism; Rev. Thaxter's hand-written hymnal from 1778; hand drawn diagrams showing the ownership of church pews; a visitation plan dated 1849 with a hand-colored map of Edgartown neighborhoods; and diary fragments and sermons. Recommended for further information are articles from the *Intelligencer* written by Arthur Railton: "The First 30 Ministers of the First Church" and "The 1828 Meetinghouse", May 1992, and "The Tribulations of Reverend Thaxter", August 1992.

Series Descriptions

Series I: Church Governance

Subseries A: Bylaws and Constitutions

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Folder 1: Bylaws, Constitutions, Covenants, 1853-1915

Folder 2: Requirements for Membership, 1827

Subseries B: Meetings and Reports

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Folder 3: Meeting Announcements and Reports, 1820-1925

Subseries C: Ministerial Correspondence

Box 1 of 4

Folder 4: Announcements, Calls to Ministers, Recommendations, Responses, 1857-1914

Subseries D: Letters from Members

Box 1 of 4

Folder 5: Letters submitted to the Proprietors, 1848

Subseries E: Bound Church Records

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Folder 6: Church Records, 1717-1839

Folder 7: Church Records, 1820-1837

Folder 8: Church Records, 1843-1880

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Folder 1: Church Records, 1828-1905

Folder 2: Church Records, 1839-1916

Series II: Financial Records, 1791-1830

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Folder 3: Financial Records, 1791-1859

Folder 4: Construction and sale of the Meeting House, 1815-1846

Folder 5: Town Meeting Transactions, 1842

Series III: Publications

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Folder 6: Church Bulletins and Programs, 1827-1922

Series IV: Membership Records

Subseries A: Baptisms and Deaths

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Folder 7: Copies of Baptism Records, 1722 -1840

Folder 8: Death Records, 1761-1821

Folder 9: Visitation Plan, 1849

Subseries B: Pew Deeds

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Folder 10: Deeds to Pews, 1797-1905

Folder 11: Copies of Pew Deeds, 1768-1897

Box 4 of 4 (Oversize)

Folder 1: Charts of pew holders and amounts paid, Jan. 4th, 1831 and 1834. (Originals and photocopies)

Subseries C: Letters of Transfer

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Folder 1: Letters of Transfer, 1855-1891

Subseries D: Wills

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Folder 2: Will of F. Agnes Wilson, 1913

Series V: Ministers

Subseries A: Joseph Thaxter, 1744-1825

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Folder 3: Personal Papers, 1778-1783

Folder 4: Correspondence, 1809-1826

Folder 5: Prayer Delivered at the Dedication of the Bunker Hill Monument, 1825

Subseries B: Other Ministers

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Folder 7: Rev. Samuel Kingsbury: Ordination Sermon, 1761

Folder 8: Rev. Allen Gannet, 1841-1858

Folder 9: Religious Writings of Other Ministers, 1747-1892

Series VI: Reference

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Folder 10: Harriet Pease Transcriptions

Folder 11: Copies and clippings