

Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum

Record Unit 353

Smith Diaries, 1813-1824

By Julia Novakovic

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum

Call No.

Title: Smith Diaries, 1813-1824

Creator: Hannah Smith and Rebecca Smith

Quantity: .5 cubic feet

Abstract: The Smith Diaries are a compilation of journals kept by Hannah Smith [1789-1878] and Rebecca Smith [1795-1821], as well as manuscripts of poetry by Hannah Smith. The diaries [both sisters' from 1813-1814 and Hannah's from 1823-1824] document social events, town gossip, births and deaths, and musings from young women growing up during the early 19th century. Hannah's poetry developed from events in her lifetime in addition to observations of nature and influence by great authors.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information: The Smith Diaries were acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum in _____ by _____.

Processing Information: Julia Novakovic

Access Restrictions: none

Use Restrictions: none

Preferred Citation for Publication: Martha's Vineyard Museum, Smith Diaries, Record Unit 353.

Index Terms

- Smith, Hannah
- Smith, Rebecca
- Diary
- Poetry
- Martha's Vineyard

Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Diaries

Subseries A: Hannah Smith

Subseries B: Rebecca Smith

Series II: Transcriptions

Subseries A: Hannah Smith

Subseries B: Rebecca Smith

Series III: Poetry

Series IV: Genealogical Reference

Biography:

Hannah Smith was born April 4, 1789. She was the eldest daughter of Samuel Smith III and Love Pease. Her siblings included Harrison, Gilbert, Anne, Rebecca, Samuel, and twins Josiah and Clarissa. Though little data is recorded about Hannah Smith, through her diaries one can see that she received an excellent education. Her father owned a farm and was the Registrar of Deeds for Dukes County. His office was at their home, and Hannah often noted daily visitors in her diaries. She never mentioned working or chores within her entries, so one might presume that her family was quite affluent. Hannah Smith never married, and died on November 10, 1878. She was interred at Pease Point Cemetery alongside her parents.

Rebecca Smith was born January 23, 1795. The fifth-eldest child in the Smith household, Rebecca was also well-educated. Within her journal entries, Rebecca spoke of traveling all over the Island and attending fêtes. In 1818, she married her cousin Samuel Butler. One year later, her son Cyrus was born. Sadly, Rebecca died in 1821. Her sister Hannah dedicated a poem to her, beginning with the verse: "She sleeps in dust whom once my heart held dear/ Who oft beguiled my tedious hours away/ She sleeps in dust forgive the parting tear/ Which falls in memory of her slumbering clay."

Scope and Content Note:

The Smith Diaries are a compilation of journals kept by Hannah Smith [1789-1878] and Rebecca Smith [1795-1821], as well as manuscripts of poetry by Hannah Smith. They are the oldest diaries in the Martha's Vineyard Museum collection. The journals [both sisters' from 1813-1814 and Hannah's from 1823-1824] document social events, town gossip, births and deaths, and musings from young women growing up during the early 19th century. Hannah's poetry developed from events in her lifetime in addition to observations of nature and influence by great authors. The .5 cubic feet of material is arranged within several categories: original diaries, transcriptions, poetry, and genealogical reference. Researchers have access to the transcription project by Marian Halperin who transcribed these diaries in 2000.

Series Descriptions

Series I: Diaries

Subseries A: Hannah Smith

This subseries houses “diurnal records” of Hannah Smith from March 1, 1813-February 28, 1814, and then January 1, 1823 through July 25, 1824. Twenty-four years old at the time of her first diary here, Hannah chronicled news on the island, town gossip, and her personal musings. She also included many quotations and stanzas from famous authors, including Homer, John Milton and William Shakespeare. Her vivid imagination is evident, citing her home a “Castle” and some gentlemen visitors “Princes.” By the 1823-1824 diary, Hannah’s entries became heavy with poetry, with some town news interspersed. She also began writing the weather [for example: July 2, 1823] and Island observations in prose.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 1: Hannah Smith: Diary, March 1, 1813- February 28, 1814.

Folder 2: Hannah Smith: Diary, January 1, 1823-December 1, 1823.

Folder 3: Hannah Smith: Diary, November 19, 1823- July 25, 1824.

Subseries B: Rebecca Smith

This subseries houses the diary of Rebecca Smith from April 20, 1813- March 20, 1814. Eighteen years old at the time, Rebecca recorded news well before the first Vineyard newspaper was established. She wrote of events on the mainland in addition to Island information. Rebecca also reported on guests visiting her household, town gossip, and weather. Of interest are descriptions of hearing British warships in the Holmes Hole harbor [April 20, 1813 and July 1813], visiting a “haunted house” [September 25, 1813], and her travels to relatives’ homes off-Island.

Box 1 of 1

**Folder 4: Rebecca Smith: Diary, April 20, 1813- March 20, 1814.

Series II: Transcriptions

Subseries A: Hannah Smith

This transcription was created by Marian Halperin in 2000. The diaries of Hannah Smith, from 1813-1814 and then 1823-1824, reveal information about social events, town news, and the education that some young women received while on Martha’s Vineyard during the early 19th century. The transcription notes where words are missing, blurred, or illegible.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 5: Hannah Smith: Diary Transcription, 1813-1814.

Folder 6: Hannah Smith: Diary Transcription, 1823.

Subseries B: Rebecca Smith

This transcription was created by Marian Halperin in 2000. The diary of Rebecca Smith, from 1813-1814, reveals information on social events, town news, and births and deaths on the Island during the early 19th century. The transcription notes

where words are missing, blurred, or illegible.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 7: Rebecca Smith: Diary Transcription, 1813.

Series III: Poetry

This series contains two manuscripts of poems by Hannah Smith: one bound and dated, one unbound and undated. The first folder begins with "Lines taken from the first leaf of my Journal, written January 1st 1823"; later poems throughout the manuscript have dates alongside the verses, though some are undated. The second folder has unbound, lined papers from the mid-19th century. Within the undated poetry, Hannah Smith wrote an ode in memoriam of her sister Rebecca, who died in 1821, as well as various lamentations and poems about nature.

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Folder 8: Hannah Smith: Poetry, c. 1823-1865.

Folder 9: Hannah Smith: Poetry, undated.

Series IV: Genealogical Reference

This series contains a convenient genealogical chart for Hannah Smith and Rebecca Smith and their relatives.

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Folder 10: Smith Family, Genealogical Reference