

Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum
Record Unit 360
Reverend Nathaniel Hancock Papers, 1725-1761
By Julia Novakovic

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum

Call No.

Title: Reverend Nathaniel Hancock Papers, 1725-1761

Creator: Nathaniel Hancock [1701-1774]

Quantity: .5 cubic feet

Abstract: The Reverend Nathaniel Hancock Papers are a collection of sermons, letters, and receipts from 1725-1761. Three-fourths of the documents in this collection are sermons that Reverend Hancock preached at the Church of Christ in Tisbury throughout his thirty years as minister. Within his letters, there is a petition for dismissal from his position at the church from 1755.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information: The Reverend Nathaniel Hancock Papers 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, Reverend Nathaniel Hancock Papers [1725-1761], Record Unit 360.

Index Terms

- Martha's Vineyard
- Hancock, Nathaniel
- Church History
- Athearn, Jabez
- Tisbury Church
- Sermons

Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Reference

Series II: Letters

Subseries A: Personal Correspondence

Subseries B: Ministry Correspondence

Series III: Sermons

Series IV: Bills and Receipts

Historical Note:

Nathaniel Hancock IV was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts on January 14, 1701. Less than seventy years earlier, his great-grandfather [the first Hancock in America] had arrived at Boston. The prominent Hancock family ensured their son an education, and he graduated from Harvard College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1721. Reverend Nathaniel Hancock then taught school in Woburn, Massachusetts, until a search committee [headed by Jabez Athearn] from Martha's Vineyard convinced him to become their minister in 1725. Initially, he was hired at an annual salary of fifty pounds. By 1727, he signed on as pastor and soon after married Sarah Torrey [the daughter of his predecessor]. Reverend Hancock convinced the town to build a new church for the Tisbury congregation. He preached there for nearly thirty years, raising his seven children in West Tisbury.

However, in 1755 a petition began that called for the resignation of Reverend Hancock. It is not known why the attitude toward Hancock so sharply changed. Charles Banks noted, "The church records of the Torrey and Hancock pastorates were in the possession of Rev. Mr. Hancock in 1760, four years after his dismissal... the Deacon reported that Mr. Hancock refused to give them up. What became of them is not now known, but it is traditional that they were destroyed because of the minutes they contained regarding offences committed by members of the church and the action of the officers against the offenders."

Hancock never served as a minister again. He became a judge of the King's Bench by 1761. Sixteen years after his ousting, the former Reverend Hancock requested a restoration of privileges as member of the Tisbury Church through a formal apology. The church voted and accepted his "confession." On September 10, 1774, Nathaniel Hancock IV died. He had been the first of his name on the Vineyard. He did not live to see his legendary second cousin, John Hancock of Boston, sign the Declaration of Independence.

Scope and Content Note:

The Reverend Nathaniel Hancock Papers are an artificial compilation of personal documents from 1725-1761. Three-fourths of the papers in this collection are sermons that Reverend Hancock preached at the Tisbury Church of Christ throughout his 27 years as minister. Unfortunately, the majority of these sermons are in very poor condition as a result of over-handling, low-quality ink, and water damage.

Additional documents include bills, receipts, and correspondence. Within his letters is the petition for dismissal from his position at the church from 1755. Many deeds under his name are currently housed in Box 130B [Deeds].

Series Descriptions

Series I: Reference

This series contains biographical information on Reverend Nathaniel Hancock [1701-1774]. Included in this section is a speech written by Judge Stewart Hancock in 1981, detailing the story of his great-great-great-great-grandfather's life on Martha's Vineyard. Also, a genealogical chart of some early Hancocks is within this series, as well as information on the link between Reverend Hancock and the famous John Hancock [signer of the Declaration of Independence].

Box 1 of 1

Folder 1: Reverend Nathaniel Hancock: Reference

Series II: Letters

This series contains letters written to Reverend Hancock during his years on Martha's Vineyard. The first section houses personal letters, while the second section houses a petition-- his dismissal from the Tisbury Church in 1755.

Subseries A: Personal Correspondence

Box 1 of 1

Folder 2: Reverend Nathaniel Hancock: Letters, 1730-1761.

Subseries B: Ministry Correspondence

Box 1 of 1

Folder 3: Reverend Nathaniel Hancock: Dismissal from Tisbury Methodist Church, 1755.

Series III: Sermons

This series contains sermons preached by Reverend Hancock during his ministry at the Tisbury Church of Christ. Unfortunately, the majority of these sermons are in poor condition; some have holes worn through the papers while some are illegible due to the fading of ink, over-handling, and water damage. His handwriting is extremely small and leaves no margins around the papers. From the legible documents, though, one can learn that Reverend Hancock's sermons were "recycled" [reused] throughout his duration at the Tisbury Church. Also, many Bible verse notations are evident, perhaps highlighting the "popular" verses of the 18th century.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 4: Reverend Nathaniel Hancock: Sermons, 1725-1728.

Folder 5: Reverend Nathaniel Hancock: Sermons, 1730-1734.

Folder 6: Reverend Nathaniel Hancock: Sermons, 1735-1739.
Folder 7: Reverend Nathaniel Hancock: Sermons, 1740-1744.
Folder 8: Reverend Nathaniel Hancock: Sermons, 1745-1749.
Folder 9: Reverend Nathaniel Hancock: Sermons, 1750-1756.
Folder 10: Reverend Nathaniel Hancock: Sermons, undated.

Series IV: Bills and Receipts

This series contains bills and receipts written by Reverend Hancock from the 18th century on Martha's Vineyard. A previous researcher typed up transcriptions for several of these papers.

Box 1 of 1

Folder 11: Reverend Nathaniel Hancock: Bills and Receipts, 1733-1761.