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
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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
- Subseries E: Bound Church Records

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.

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