Descriptive Summary
Repository: Martha’s Vineyard Museum
Call No.
Title: Baptist Society of Edgartown 1821-1970
Creator: Karin Stanley
Quantity: 1 cubic feet
Abstract: This collection of documents from the Baptist Society of Edgartown consists primarily of bound ledger books. Some ledgers record church business and finances; others record actions taken during covenant meetings and the admission or removal of church members. The collection also includes member lists, church club records, and written histories of the Society.

Administrative Information
Acquisition Information: The documents of the Baptist Society of Edgartown were acquired by the Martha’s Vineyard Museum in _______ by __________.
Processing Information: Karin Stanley
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Use Restrictions: none
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Index Terms
Baptist Society of Edgartown
Federated Church
Tau Delta Sigma Club
Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavor
Edgartown Baptist Church
Edgartown Congregational Church

Series and Subseries Arrangement
Series I: Institutional History
Series II: Membership Records 1810-1970
Series III: Treasury Reports 1854-1940
Series IV: Business Records 1822-1970
Series V: Governance Records (Covenant meetings) 1823-1870
Series VI: Church Clubs 1893-1914
Historical Note
The first Baptist Society on Martha’s Vineyard was formed in the town of Tisbury in 1780. Many members of the Congregational Church of Edgartown left their church to join the new Baptist movement in Tisbury. A list of these people, dated 1810, may be found in this collection. Soon this group wished to form their own society in Edgartown. The early sermons were held in homes, eventually attracting more Congregational members. The first years were contentions as opposition to the Baptists was strong. According to Henry F. Norton’s *History of the Baptist Society in Edgartown*, “On the evening of Dec. 31, 1808, to avoid paying the annual tribute to the Congregational church, the Baptists went in a body to the town clerk’s home just before midnight, awakened him and demanded him to drop the names from the old records, and grant them membership in the Baptist society.” This was the beginning of the organized Baptist Society in Edgartown.

In 1811 they joined with the Methodists and erected a meetinghouse on Church Street. By the 1830’s it was decided that the Baptists needed to erect a new “commodious house of worship.” On Friday, September 6, 1839 “the new and elegant Baptist meeting house” was dedicated. Worship in this church would continue for another 100 years.

Over the years the animosities between the Baptists and the old Congregational church subsided, so much that by 1925 a merger took place. It has been speculated that due to dwindling membership and resources the two organizations joined forces. It appears the Congregational Church invited the Baptists to “unite with them in preaching services and prayer meetings.” Later Federated Church records (1945) report, “our churches happily united in a federation by which we conserved our resources, advanced the cause of Christian unity and opened the way for our churches to do the work of the Kingdom in Edgartown more effectively.” This merger became the Federated Church. Although the congregations were united, two church buildings continued to be used. Members met for work and worship six months per year in each building. This continued until 1945 when the prospect of prohibitive renovations to the Baptist church united the congregation under one roof, that of the former Congregational church, now the Federated Church.

After 1925 the Baptist Society continued to exist, although work and worship took place side by side with the Congregationalists, with records from both churches merged into papers from the Federated Church. The Federated Church, with its mixed congregation, continues to play an active role in the Edgartown community.
Scope and Content Note
This collection of documents from the Baptist Society of Edgartown primarily consists of ledger books, dating from 1821 through 1935. Some ledgers record church business and finance; others record actions taken during covenant meetings and admission or removal of church members. The collection includes member lists, church club records, and written histories of the Society. Business Records consist of treasurer reports, meeting minutes, and parsonage reports. Governance Records relate some business matters but are more of a record of prayer meetings and social norms of church members and the community. They also include records of admission and dismissals of church members. A history of the Society, written in 1869, provides an excellent over-view of the early church.

Given the fact that the Baptist Society merged with the Congregational Church in 1925, it was decided that Baptist records kept after that date were to be included in the Federated Church collection (RU 341). Please refer to the Federated Church collection. Some of the ledgers in this Record Unit (Baptist Society) span the years prior to and after the merger, since ledgers were placed in this collection if they originated prior to 1925.

Series Descriptions
Series I: Institutional History
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Folder 1: Institutional History

Series II: Membership Records, 1810-1970
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Folder 2: Congregationalists joining Tisbury Baptist Society 1810
Folder 3: Baptist Church Member List 1914-1970
Folder 4: Certificates of Transfer and Membership 1822-1920

Series III: Treasury Reports, 1904-1940
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Series IV: Business Records, 1822-1970
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Folder 1: Business Records 1878-1909
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Folder 3: Business Records 1917-1934
Series V: Governance Records (Covenant Meetings), 1823-1870
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Series VI: Church Clubs, 1893-1914
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Folder 6: Young Peoples Society of Christian Endeavor Prayer Meetings 1893
Folder 7: Tau Delta Sigma Club Meetings, 1911-1914