Finding Aid to the Martha’s Vineyard Museum
Record Unit 370
Colonial Documents Collection
By Julia Novakovic

Descriptive Summary
Repository: Martha’s Vineyard Museum
Call No.
Title: Colonial Documents Collection
Creator: various
Quantity: 1.5 cubic feet
Abstract: The Colonial Document Collection is a result of various donors throughout the 20th century. Ranging from 1652 to 1776, this compilation contains important records such as legal documents, court testimonies, wills, details on land transactions, religious sermons, marriage intentions, promissory notes, and bills and receipts.

Administrative Information
Acquisition Information: The Colonial Document Collection was acquired by the Martha’s Vineyard Museum throughout the 20th century by various donors.
Processing Information: Julia Novakovic
Access Restrictions: none
Use Restrictions: none
Preferred citation for publication: Martha’s Vineyard Museum, Colonial Documents Collection, Record Unit 370.

Index Terms
-Martha’s Vineyard -Butler, Thomas
-Colonial Period -Dudley, Joseph
-Mayhew, Governor Thomas -Coffin, Enoch
-Mayhew, Matthew -Norton, Peter
-Daggett, Hannah -Smith, Benjamin
-Daggett, John -Wollon, Elisha

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   Subseries C: Wills
   Subseries D: Order Letters and Receipts
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   Subseries B: Court Documents
   Subseries C: Land Transactions
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Subseries B: Court Documents
Subseries C: Land Transactions
Subseries D: Wills and Estate Inventories
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Subseries C: Land Transactions
Subseries D: Indentured Servant Contracts
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Subseries F: Religious Documents
Subseries G: Letters
Subseries H: Promissory Notes, Bills, and Receipts
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Subseries B: Land Transactions and Estate Inventories
Subseries C: Letters
Subseries D: Bills and Receipts
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Series XI: Document Fragments
Subseries A: Dated
Subseries B: Undated

Historical Note:
This collection of Colonial Documents ranges from legal and court documents to wills and financial papers. The time span is from 1662 until 1776, when Martha’s Vineyard was still considered a colony of England. The materials were obtained by the Dukes County Historical Society [later the Martha’s Vineyard Historical Society] throughout the 20th century.

Scope and Content Note:
The Colonial Document Collection is a result of various donors throughout the
20th century. Encompassing 1662 to 1776, this artificial compilation contains important records such as legal documents, court testimonies, wills, details on land transactions, religious sermons, marriage intentions, promissory notes, and bills and receipts.

Within this record unit, several classifications of documents are given. “Legal documents” usually refers to notarized papers, such as appointments or warrants. “Court documents” represents court dockets, the decision on court cases, testimonies, and petitions brought to the General Court. The majority of letters in this collection are personal correspondence, although a few may also be of a business nature. Subseries entitled “Land transactions” do not house the official deeds to properties, but rather deal with boundary disputes or the receipts from the sale of lands. Original deeds from this time period are currently housed in Box 130B [Deeds].

Of note in this collection are several documents with signatures of Governor Thomas Mayhew, and later his grandson Matthew Mayhew, from the late 17th century. Wills and estate inventories throughout the colonial period are also of interest. A propaganda booklet from London, printed in 1774, acknowledges that there is tension between the colonies and Britain due to taxation, but does not mention the impending war.

Series Descriptions

Series I: Pre-1700

This Series contains materials from 1662-1699. Within the Legal Documents, many papers deal with official land titles, notarized payments, and other “signed and sealed” items. The subseries on Land Transactions includes a transcription of land plots in Edgartown from 1659, as well as written materials concerning land disputes and boundaries. In the third subseries, there is a 1671 will of Nicholas Butler [first of his name on the Vineyard] as well as the 1679 will of his widow, Joyce Butler. Finally, the last subseries houses an order letter to Boston from Matthew Mayhew in 1691 as well as a 1693 shipping receipt. Several of these documents show the signatures of Governor Thomas Mayhew and later his grandson Matthew.

Subseries A: Legal Documents
Box 1 of 3
Folder 1: Pre-1700: Legal Documents

Subseries B: Land Transactions
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Folder 2: Pre-1700: Land Transactions

Subseries C: Wills
Box 1 of 3
Folder 3: Pre-1700: Wills

Subseries D: Order Letters and Receipts
Box 1 of 3
Folder 4: Pre-1700: Order Letters and Receipts

**Series II: 1700-1709**

This Series contains materials from 1700-1709. Within the Legal Documents, many papers deal with notarized payments, an appointment of Joseph Dudley as “Captain of the Indians” in 1706, and other signed and sealed items. The subseries on Court Documents lists a report of the goings-on of the General Court in Boston from 1704 and a voted petition in Edgartown from 1705. The third subseries on Land Transactions concerns a testimony about land at Chickamoo in 1703. Finally, bills and receipts from 1706 complete this series.

**Subseries A: Legal Documents**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 5: 1700-1709: Legal Documents

**Subseries B: Court Documents**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 6: 1700-1709: Court Documents

**Subseries C: Land Transactions**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 7: 1700-1709: Land Transactions

**Subseries D: Bills and Receipts**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 8: 1700-1709: Bills and Receipts

**Series III: 1710-1719**

This Series contains materials from 1710-1719. The Legal Documents subseries houses notarized testimonials concerning property boundaries and assault charges. The second subseries on Land Transactions holds a 1710 claim about a land dispute. Letters from 1713 and 1719 are included in the third subseries. Lastly, many bills and receipts from 1712-1718 complete the series.

**Subseries A: Legal Documents**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 9: 1710-1719: Legal Documents

**Subseries B: Land Transactions**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 10: 1710-1719: Land Transactions

**Subseries C: Letters**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 11: 1710-1719: Letters

**Subseries D: Bills and Receipts**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 12: 1710-1719: Bills and Receipts

**Series IV: 1720-1729**
This Series contains materials from 1720-1729. Within the Legal Documents subseries are notarized payment notes, land claims, and a warrant. The second subseries houses the 1727 will of Thomas Butler and the estate inventory of Peter Ray from 1728. The Religious Documents subseries has a signed declaration of prayer for Benjamin Luce, leaving the Vineyard for a voyage in 1728. Finally, various bills and receipts from 1722-1729 complete this series.

**Subseries A: Legal Documents**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 13: 1720-1729: Legal Documents

**Subseries B: Wills and Estate Inventories**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 14: 1720-1729: Wills and Estate Inventories

**Subseries C: Religious Documents**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 15: 1720-1729: Religious Documents

**Subseries D: Bills and Receipts**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 16: 1720-1729: Bills
Folder 17: 1720-1729: Receipts

**Series V: 1730-1739**
This Series contains materials from 1730-1739. The Legal Documents subseries holds a 1737 warrant and various notarized payments. The second subseries on Court Documents has petitions, court rulings, and a docket from 1737. Within Land Transactions, there are boundary listings and a 1731 lease for a house in Chilmark. Religious documents include a request for prayers. The fifth subseries comprises letters from 1730-1738. Finally, many bills and receipts from this decade complete the series.

**Subseries A: Legal Documents**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 18: 1730-1739: Legal Documents

**Subseries B: Court Documents**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 19: 1730-1739: Court Documents

**Subseries C: Land Transactions**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 20: 1730-1739: Land Transactions

**Subseries D: Religious Documents**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 21: 1730-1739: Religious Documents

**Subseries E: Letters**
Box 1 of 3
Folder 22: 1730-1739: Letters

**Subseries F: Bills and Receipts**
Series VI: 1740-1749

This series contains materials from 1740-1749. The Legal Documents subseries holds notarized payments, the sale of a slave in 1747, and other “signed and sealed” documents. The second subseries, Court Documents, holds a long docket of cases from 1742 as well as a 1744 petition to the court concerning debts. Wills of Ebenezer Norton [1746] and Edward Cottle [1748] are housed in the third subseries. Under Religious Documents, there is an affirmation of faith and a paper certifying the transfer of the McGee family from Chilmark to another church. The fifth subseries contains personal letters from 1740-1749. Finally, various promissory notes, bills, and receipts from this decade complete the series.

Subseries A: Legal Documents
Box 1 of 3
Folder 25: 1740-1749: Legal Documents

Subseries B: Court Documents
Box 1 of 3
Folder 26: 1740-1749: Court Documents

Subseries C: Wills
Box 1 of 3
Folder 27: 1740-1749: Wills

Subseries D: Religious Documents
Box 1 of 3
Folder 28: 1740-1749: Religious Documents

Subseries E: Letters
Box 2 of 3
Folder 1: 1740-1749: Letters

Subseries F: Promissory Notes, Bills, and Receipts
Box 2 of 3
Folder 2: 1740-1749: Promissory Notes
Folder 3: 1740-1749: Bills
Folder 4: 1740-1749: Receipts

Series VII: 1750-1759

This series contains materials from 1750-1759. The Legal Documents subseries holds a warrant, an order to Dukes County from the Massachusetts Bay Colony House of Representatives, a 1753 agreement to pay a pregnant woman, licenses to leave the province, and other “signed and sealed” documents. The second section on Court Documents has decisions of court cases, information from the Judge of the Probate of Wills in 1759, requests to appear in court, and a 1756 speech read to the Court of Dukes
County. The third subseries includes information on land boundaries and the value of several estate properties. An indenture contract from 1757 is housed in the fourth section. Under Religious Documents is a printed booklet entitled “A Sermon Preached at Marshfield, Sept. 5, 1759” as well as marriage intentions from this decade. The subseries on Letters comprises personal correspondence from 1753-1757. Finally, various promissory notes, bills, and receipts from 1750-1759 complete the series.

**Subseries A: Legal Documents**
Box 2 of 3
Folder 5: 1750-1759: Legal Documents

**Subseries B: Court Documents**
Box 2 of 3
Folder 6: 1750-1759: Court Documents

**Subseries C: Land Transactions**
Box 2 of 3
Folder 7: 1750-1759: Land Transactions

**Subseries D: Indenture Contracts**
Box 2 of 3
Folder 8: 1750-1759: Indenture Contracts

**Subseries E: Religious Documents**
Box 2 of 3
Folder 9: 1750-1759: Religious Documents
Folder 10: 1750-1759: Marriage Intentions

**Subseries F: Letters**
Box 2 of 3
Folder 11: 1750-1759: Letters

**Subseries G: Promissory Notes, Bills, and Receipts**
Box 2 of 3
Folder 12: 1750-1759: Promissory Notes
Folder 13: 1750-1759: Bills
Folder 14: 1750-1759: Receipts

**Series VIII: 1760-1769**
This series contains materials from 1760-1769. Under Legal Documents, there are announcements by the selectmen of Chilmark and Tisbury, votes for town officers, mustering orders for an Edgartown militia, and other “signed and sealed” documents. In the second section on Court Documents, there is a 1768 docket with various indictments for fornication, beating a dog, building on a neighbor’s property, and more. The Land Transactions subseries contains a lengthy document on a land dispute from 1767. The fourth subseries houses the estate inventory of Samuel Pease [1765] and the will of Enoch Coffin [1761]. Under Religious Documents is a printed booklet entitled “A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of the Reverend Jonathan Mayhew” from 1766, as well as marriage intentions from the decade. Letters from 1761-1768 are housed in the sixth subseries; of mention is a 1767 letter from the famous John Hancock to his friend
James Athearn. Finally, various promissory notes, bills, and receipts from the decade complete this series.

**Subseries A: Legal Documents**
Box 2 of 3
Folder 15: 1760-1769: Legal Documents

**Subseries B: Court Documents**
Box 2 of 3
Folder 16: 1760-1769: Court Documents

**Subseries C: Land Transactions**
Box 2 of 3
Folder 17: 1760-1769: Land Transactions

**Subseries D: Wills and Estate Inventories**
Box 2 of 3
Folder 18: 1760-1769: Wills and Estate Inventories

**Subseries E: Religious Documents**
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Folder 19: 1760-1769: Religious Documents
Folder 20: 1760-1769: Marriage Intentions

**Subseries F: Letters**
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Folder 21: 1760-1769: Letters

**Subseries G: Promissory Notes, Bills, and Receipts**
Box 2 of 3
Folder 22: 1760-1769: Promissory Notes
Folder 23: 1760-1769: Bills
Folder 24: 1760-1769: Receipts

**Series IX: 1770-1776**
This series contains materials from 1770-1776. Under Legal Documents, there is an oversized appointment of Benjamin Smith as “Register of Wills, Administration, and other Writings” of Dukes County, in addition to other notarized payments and other “signed and sealed” documents. The second subseries on Court Documents includes records from trials, notifications of rulings, and other court-related papers. The next section on Land Transactions relates the boundaries of property on Chappaquiddick from 1772. Indenture Contracts from the fourth subseries include the years 1770 and 1772. The next section, Wills, houses Thomas Daggett’s will and estate inventory from 1773. Under Religious Documents are several marriage intentions from 1775 and 1776. The seventh subseries on Letters holds many letters from different writers throughout this period. Various promissory notes, bills, and receipts and kept in the eighth subseries. Finally, miscellaneous documents from 1770-1776 include a 1772 crew list from the ship *Union* and a printed booklet entitled “Considerations on the Measures Carrying On With Respect to the British Colonies in North America” from 1774.

**Subseries A: Legal Documents**
Box 3 of 3
Folder 1: 1770-1776: Legal Documents
   Subseries B: Court Documents
Box 3 of 3
Folder 2: 1770-1776: Court Documents
   Subseries C: Land Transactions
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Folder 3: 1770-1776: Land Transactions
   Subseries D: Indenture Contracts
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Folder 4: 1770-1776: Indenture Contracts
   Subseries E: Wills and Estate Inventories
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Folder 5: 1770-1776: Wills and Estate Inventories
   Subseries F: Religious Documents
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Folder 6: 1770-1776: Marriage Intentions
   Subseries G: Letters
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Folder 7: 1770-1776: Letters
   Subseries H: Promissory Notes, Bills, and Receipts
Box 3 of 3
Folder 8: 1770-1776: Promissory Notes
Folder 9: 1770-1776: Bills
Folder 10: 1770-1776: Receipts
   Subseries I: Miscellaneous
Box 3 of 3
Folder 11: 1770-1776: Ship Union Crew List, 1772.

Series X: Undated
   This series contains undated materials that are from the colonial period, based on writing style and names mentioned. These documents include court hearings, estate inventories, land disputes, letters, and bills and receipts. Of interest in the Miscellaneous subseries is a Latin diploma, a printed advertisement for “fine British ink powder” in both English and French, and an undated family record of a line of the Mayhew family.
   Subseries A: Court Documents
Box 3 of 3
Folder 13: Undated, Court Documents
   Subseries B: Land Transactions and Estate Inventories
Box 3 of 3
Folder 14: Undated, Land Transactions and Estate Inventories

**Subseries C: Letters**
Box 3 of 3
Folder 15: Undated, Letters

**Subseries D: Bills and Receipts**
Box 3 of 3
Folder 16: Undated, Bills and Receipts

**Subseries E: Miscellaneous**
Box 3 of 3
Folder 17: Undated, Miscellaneous

**Series XI: Document Fragments**

This series contains document fragments; in some instances a majority of the paper is present, while in others only a few inches remain. The first subseries holds materials where a date can be surmised from the paper. The second subseries has various undated document fragments, dealing with subjects from land boundaries to letters to bills and receipts.

**Subseries A: Dated**
Box 3 of 3
Folder 18: Dated Fragments, 1713-1765.

**Subseries B: Undated**
Box 3 of 3
Folder 19: Undated Fragments