



ABSTRACT

Collection of historical documents compiled by Charles Taylor, author of the 1882 town history of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Includes Court of Common Pleas cases, deeds, estate papers, indentures, land surveys, sheriff's writs, town history reference documents, Samuel Rossiter's financial papers, and genealogical research papers for over 40 families.

ACCESS:

The collection is open for research.

LANGUAGE:

English.

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GREAT BARRINGTON HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS COLLECTION, 1731-1904

7 boxes (5 linear ft.)

CALL NO.: MS 104

CONTENTS OF COLLECTION

The Great Barrington Historical Documents Collection was compiled by Charles Taylor, author of the 1882 town history. In large measure, it represents an incomplete but fascinating collection of documentation for facets of the town's social history. Great Barrington, Massachusetts developed out of the Upper and Lower Housatonic townships which were settled in 1722. The Proprietors of what was to become Great Barrington actually began to lay out and distribute land in 1733-1734, a process their successors completed in 1793.

The collection, totaling about 600 items, provides important insights into aspects of the town's development, particularly concerning land. Folder 135 in Series 7, for instance, contains copies of the Proprietor's land distribution activities. Series 2 (Deeds) and Series 5 (Land Surveys) document the sale of property and efforts to obtain accurate boundaries from the time of the initial settlement. Moreover, Series 4 (Indentures) is concerned principally with the leasing of land to individuals for farming.

Several series show the impact on townspeople of larger social and political events. The documents in Series 1 offer insight into the rural problems that led to Shays' Rebellion. The Court of Common Pleas cases (the majority occurring between 1784 and 1787) reveal the credit and cash difficulties facing Massachusetts farmers following the Revolution. Series 6 (Sheriff's Writs), on the other hand, documents the continuing problem of rural indebtedness (particularly in the first American recession of 1817-1820), but also reveals a transitional era in the local economy. An increasing number of cases involve artisans and laborers, marking a shift to a market economy. The high number of court cases involving debt (22 in 1817 alone) also evinces a change in the social and economic consciousness of rural New Englanders.

Other series open avenues to broader questions. For instance, the documents in Series 8 cover the years of Samuel Rossiter's indebtedness and eventual insolvency prior to 1800. However, Rossiter is also a major actor in acquiring land (Series 2), pursuing debtors (Series 1 and 6), and establishing himself as a landlord. Rossiter's progression from a farmer to a yeoman to a gentleman is perhaps an interesting example of the transforming power of the market in the rural economy. Series 6 (Town History Documents) likewise offers glimpses of controversies over roads, riparian rights, militia service, early court cases, school expenses, and temperance. This series also contains a notice from the town's Committee of Correspondence (July 9, 1776) demanding that certain citizens surrender their weapons.

Great Barrington is also important as the birthplace of W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois' maternal ancestors, the Burghardts, were long-time residents of the town. Although a number of Burghardts appear in these documents, it does not seem that any were close relatives of Du Bois. One of the sheriff's writs in 1821 (folder 108), however, does involve a James Freeman who was perhaps Du Bois' uncle.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COLLECTION

This collection is organized into nine series:

- [Series 1. Court of Common Pleas Cases \(1784-1815\)](#)
- [Series 2. Deeds \(1741-1865\)](#)
- [Series 3. Estate Records \(1755-1811\)](#)
- [Series 4. Indentures \(1798-1827\)](#)
- [Series 5. Land Surveys \(1792-1860\)](#)
- [Series 6. Sheriff's Writs \(1743-1869\)](#)
- [Series 7. Town History Documents \(1731-1904\)](#)
- [Series 8. Samuel Rossiter Financial Records \(1790-1821\)](#)
- [Series 9. Charles Taylor Genealogical Material \(1877-1901\)](#)



INVENTORY OF COLLECTION

Series 1. Court of Common Pleas Cases 1784-1815

This series contains the final award of 34 cases. Most involve the debt of farmers in Great Barrington and surrounding towns; thirteen occur in the years between 1784-1787 and provide some of the background for the events leading to Shays' Rebellion. Arranged chronologically.

Ives v. Curtis

1784

Box 1:1

Goodrich v. Harlbut	1784	Box 1:2
VanDeusen v. Sprague	1784	Box 1:3
Mansfield v. Burghardt	1784	Box 1:4
Hickock v. Bush	1784	Box 1:5
VanDeusen v. Herrick	1784	Box 1:6
Gilbert v. Fitch	1784	Box 1:7
Totten v. Younglove	1785	Box 1:8
Fitch v. Messenger	1785	Box 1:9
King v. Lard	1785	Box 1:10
Smith v. Fitch	1785	Box 1:11
Laverge v. Bryan	1786	Box 1:12
King v. Ingersoll	1787	Box 1:13
Brunson v. Hopkins	1789	Box 1:14
Brunson v. Palmer	1789	Box 1:15
Canfied v. Baker	1790	Box 1:16
Cooper v. Darby	1791	Box 1:17
Cooper v. Lombard	1791	Box 1:18
Lombard v. Gregory	1792	Box 1:19
Pepoon v. Sergeant, et al	1793	Box 1:20
Ensign v. Noble	1794	Box 1:21
Brimsmid v. Van Deusen	1795	Box 1:22
Hogeboom v. Darby	1797	Box 1:23
Chadwick v. Gregory	1798	Box 1:24
Chapin v. Clark	1799	Box 1:25
Hogeboom v. Hubbard	1799	Box 1:26
Hill v. Daley, et al	1800	Box 1:27
Broom, et al v. Dewey	1801	Box 1:28
Rossiter v. Hopkins and Ransom	1802	Box 1:29
Rynders v. Pierce	1802	Box 1:30
Van Deusen v. Hogeboom	1803	Box 1:31
Pirkin v. Buber	1810	Box 1:32
Kilborn v. Morse	1815	Box 1:33
Commonwealth v. Pitkin	n.d.	Box 1:34

Series 2. Deeds 1741-1865

Containing about 80 property transactions, this series reflects sales principally from 1790 to 1840. In particular, the documents here reflect the prodigious land acquisition of Samuel Rossiter (36 transactions), Thomas Ives (20), and George Pynchon (11), and the declining property holdings of some of the early families, including the Whitneys, Roots, and Hopkins. Arranged chronologically.

Sales	1741	Box 2:35
Sales	1765-1767	Box 2:36
Sales	1773-1777	Box 2:37
Sales	1783-1786	Box 2:38
Sales	1790-1794	Box 2:39
Sales	1795-1797	Box 2:40
Sales	1798-1799	Box 2:41
Sales	1800	Box 2:42
Sales	1801-1803	Box 2:43
Sales	1806-1810	Box 2:44
Sales	1811	Box 2:45
Sales	1812	Box 2:46
Sales	1813	Box 2:47
Sales	1814	Box 2:48
Sales	1815-1816	Box 2:49
Sales	1817-1818	Box 2:50
Sales	1819	Box 2:51
Sales	1820-1821	Box 2:52
Sales	1822-1824	Box 2:53
Sales	1826	Box 2:54
Sales	1827-1829	Box 2:55
Sales	1831-1832	Box 2:56
Sales	1837-1840	Box 2:57
Sales	1843-1865	Box 2:58
Sales	n.d.	Box 2:59

Series 3. Estate Records 1755-1811

Shown here are scattered estate inventories, wills, and executor's expenses for seven estates. Of particular interest are the documents of 3 Ingersoll family estates, and the detailed will and inventory of Hewitt Root. Arranged alphabetically by name.

David Ingersoll	1755	Box 2:60
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Israel Ingersoll	n.d.	Box 2:61
Peter Ingersoll	1789	Box 2:62
Hewitt Root	1788-1792	Box 2:63
Stephen Sibley	1809-1811	Box 2:64
Moses Stocking	n.d.	Box 2:65
Isaac Van Deusen	1809	Box 2:66

Series 4. Indentures 1798-1827

Most of the more than 50 indentures here reflect the farm leasing activities of Thomas Ives and are interesting for the detailed description of the terms of the lease. Several of the later indentures show the increased activity of Samuel Rossiter in this area. Of particular interest is the 1812 case of Kasson Freeman (folder 81), in which Thomas Ives had great difficulty in forcing Freeman to adhere to the terms of the indenture; and the beginnings, in 1808, of Ives' leasing of carding machines to Dudley Woodworth. Arranged chronologically.

Isaac Van Deusen	1798	Box 3:67
Parin Batchellor, John Eldridge, Isaac Preston	1799	Box 3:68
Melanston Foster, Levi Ormsby, Marson Whiting	1800	Box 3:69
Richard Francis, Ormsby, Andrew Hollenbeck	1803-1805	Box 3:70
Aaron Phelps, Benjamin Rogers, Ethel Jones	1806	Box 3:71
Martin Richmond, Joseph Buel	1807	Box 3:72
Jabez Jones, Palmer Utley, Jared Selley, Dudley Woodworth	1808	Box 3:73
Jones, Daniel Pixley, John Kennedy, Jonathan Turner, Samuel Barstow, Utley	1809	Box 3:74
Barstow, Kennedy, Aaron Otis, Nicholas Hearse	1810	Box 3:75
Hollenbeck, Otis, Woodworth, Samuel Billings, Barstow, David Boardsley, John Burghardt	1811	Box 3:76-77
Otis, Woodworth, Hollenbeck, Billings, Barstow, Lewis Goram, James Reese, Con Mooney, Dan Weed	1812	Box 3:78-80
Kasson Freeman	1812	Box 3:81
Seeley, Weed, Billings, Barstow	1813	Box 3:82
James Humphrey and S. Rossiter	1815	Box 3:83
Sylvester Burt	1827	Box 3

Series 5. Land Surveys 1792-1860

Many of the surveys in this series were commissioned by George (between 1813-51) and Walter Pynchon (between 1792-1839) for their extensive holdings in the town. Arranged alphabetically by name.

John Ashley	n.d.	Box 4:84
John Burghardt	1793	Box 4:85
P. Chapin	n.d.	Box 4:86
W. Deland	n.d.	Box 4:87
Greene and Walker	n.d.	Box 4:88
Hopkins family	1824	Box 4:89
Ives family	1833	Box 4:90
John Kellogg	1792	Box 4:91
Leavenworth family	1831	Box 4:92
Morris Loomis	n.d.	Box 4:93
George Pynchon	1813-1851	Box 4:94
Walter Pynchon	1792-1839	Box 4:95
Josiah Smith	1860	Box 4:96
R. Taylor	1845	Box 4:97
S. Trobridge	1845	Box 4:98
David Wainwright	n.d.	Box 4:99
Whiting family	1810-1831	Box 4:100
Unidentified	1791-1858	Box 4:101

Series 6. Sheriff's Writs 1743-1869 (bulk 1801-1827)

Included in this series are a large number of writs addressed to sheriff Ezra Kellogg for failure to pay creditors, coinciding with the first major American economic depression (1817-21). Evident in these documents is the increasing propensity of town residents to pursue their neighbors for even small amounts of money. Also evident are the increasing numbers of actions against artisans, reflecting the changing nature of the town's economy. A list of names mentioned in this series is included in folder 102. Arranged chronologically.

Writs & List	1743-1744	3 items	Box 4:102
Writs	1801-1816	3 items	Box 4:103
Writs	1817	22 items	Box 4:104
Writs	1818	2 items	Box 4:105
Writs	1819	6 items	Box 4:106
Writs	1820	3 items	Box 4:107

Writs	1821	9 items	Box 4:108
Writs	1822-1827	15 items	Box 4:109
Writ	1869	1 item	Box 4:110

Series 7. Town History Documents 1731-1904

Series 7 contains an array of documents covering events and institutions in the town's history, including correspondence (July 9, 1776) warning certain people to put down their arms and a 1754 court case involving a false alarm about an Indian raid. Among other subjects covered are the riparian rights of mill sites, roads, bridges, town buildings, militia duties, school expenses, Revolutionary War reimbursements, and some correspondence. Arranged alphabetically by subject.

Committee of Correspondence notice	1776		Box 5:111
Complaint vs. Militia Delinquents	1812		Box 5:112
Correspondence--Thomas Ives	1789-1795		Box 5:113
Correspondence--Thomas Ives	1804-1811		Box 5:114
Correspondence --G. Kindale	1770		Box 5:115
Correspondence --Mary Pynchon pension	1846		Box 5:116
Correspondence --Samuel Rossiter	1819		Box 5:117
Correspondence --Peter Van Ness	1769		Box 5:118
Court cases	1754-1755		Box 5:119
Duty on carriage	1799		Box 5:120
Fire at Isaac Pixley's	1787		Box 5:120a
Highway plan	1764		Box 5:121
Iron bridge	1867		Box 5:122
Militia appointment	1794		Box 5:123
Mill Claims vs. Proprietors	n.d.		Box 5:124
Minutes of Bear Town roads	1792-1797		Box 5:125
Miscellaneous receipts	1777-1821		Box 5:126
Muddy Brook Settlers	1770-1870		Box 5:127
Newspaper clippings	1883-1904		Box 5:128
Petition against assigned road from Stockbridge to Great Barrington	1810		Box 5:129
Petition against the Sheffield Turnpike	1805		Box 5:130
Petition Against Town Officers	n.d.		Box 5:131
Petition of Peter Nusted	1800		Box 5:132
Pluma Sumner Obituary	n.d.		Box 5:133
Power of Attorney--David Ingersoll	1731, 1741		Box 5:134
Proprietors Records--Land Distribution	1734-1793		Box 5:135
Protestant Episcopal Church	n.d.		Box 5:136
Revolutionary Soldier Tombstones	1895-1896		Box 5:137
Revolutionary War reimbursements	1782		Box 5:138
School Expenses	1814-1880		Box 5:139
School House Shares	1810-1819		Box 5:140
Sheriff's Auction	1807		Box 5:141
Simon's Rock	1898		Box 5:142
Stories and Anecdotes	n.d.		Box 5:143
Town Hall	1874-1876		Box 5:144
Town History notes	n.d.		Box 5:145
Town House	1837-1845		Box 5:146
Town Meetings	1761-1811		Box 5:147
Voters' Register	1818		Box 5:148
Washington Benevolent Society	1812		Box 5:149
Water Company	1865-1868		Box 5:150
Willard Family	1738-1819		Box 5:151

Series 8. Samuel Rossiter Financial Records 1790-1821

(oversize flat box)

Included here are a series of documents concerning the debt, assets, and eventual insolvency of Rossiter in 1799. Rossiter rebounded from this to amass considerable holdings in Great Barrington by 1815 (see, in particular, series 1, 2, 4, and 6). Arranged chronologically.

Documents relating to Indentures, Insolvency, and Estate	1790-1821		Box 6:152-154
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Series 9. Charles Taylor Genealogical Material 1877-1901

This series consists of correspondence, documents, and notes, compiled by Great Barrington historian Charles Taylor concerning local families. Arranged alphabetically by family name.

Bacon	1899		Box 7:155
Barnaby	n.d.		Box 7:156
Bement	1894		Box 7:157

Bronson	1900	Box 7:158
Crittendin	1897-1898	Box 7:159
Daniel-Thompson	n.d.	Box 7:160
Danks	1891	Box 7:161
Day	1898	Box 7:162
Dersey	1897-1898	Box 7:163
Farmer	1893	Box 7:164
Foote	1894	Box 7:165
Gay	1896-1897	Box 7:166
Gilbert	1893	Box 7:167
Gregson	n.d.	Box 7:168
Gridley	1895	Box 7:169
Hyde	1877	Box 7:170
Ingersoll	1893	Box 7:171
Ives	1895-1900	Box 7:172
King	1894	Box 7:173
Kinne	1898-1899	Box 7:174
Leavenworth	1879-1880	Box 7:175
Peyer	1899	Box 7:176
Pier	1898-1899	Box 7:177
Pixley	1901	Box 7:178
Plummer	1897-1898	Box 7:179
Porter	1877-1900	Box 7:180
Posell	1893	Box 7:181
Pynchon	1896	Box 7:182
Ransom	1891	Box 7:183
Rossiter	1898	Box 7:184
Sutcliffe	1897-1899	Box 7:185
Talcott	1897	Box 7:186
Taylor	1888-1901	Box 7:187
Turner	1879-1897	Box 7:188
Van Deusen	1898	Box 7:189



PROVENANCE

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NAMES AND SUBJECT TERMS

Subjects	Genre terms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debt--Massachusetts--Great Barrington (Town)--History--Sources. • Farm tenancy--Massachusetts--Great Barrington (Town)--History--Sources. • Great Barrington (Mass. : Town)--Economic conditions--Sources. • Great Barrington (Mass. : Town)--Genealogy. • Great Barrington (Mass. : Town)--History--Sources. • Great Barrington (Mass. : Town)--Politics and government--Sources. • Great Barrington (Mass. : Town)--Social conditions--Sources. • Ives, Thomas. • Kellogg, Ezra. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deeds. • Genealogies. • Indentures. • Land surveys. • Writs.

- Land use--Massachusetts--Great Barrington (Town)--History--Sources.
- Pynchon, George.
- Pynchon, Walter.
- Root, Hewitt.
- Rossiter, Samuel--Finance, Personal.
- Taylor, Charles J. (Charles James), 1824-1904.



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