

Special Collections and  
University Archives

UMass Amherst Libraries 

## Great Barrington Historical Documents Collection

1731-1904

7 boxes (5 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS 104



[About SCUA](#)

[SCUA home](#)

[Credo digital](#)

[Scope](#)

[Inventory](#)

[Series 1. Court of Common Pleas Cases](#)

[Series 2. Deeds](#)

[Series 3. Estate Records](#)

[Series 4. Indentures](#)

[Series 5. Land Surveys](#)

[Series 6. Sheriff's Writs](#)

[Series 7. Town History Documents](#)

[Series 8. Samuel Rossiter Financial Records](#)

[Series 9. Charles Taylor Genealogical Material](#)

[Admin info](#)

[Download](#)

[xml version](#)

[print version \(pdf\)](#)



Read collection overview

Collection of historical documents compiled by Charles Taylor, author of the 1882 town history of Great Barrington, Massachusetts.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.

See similar SCUA collections:

**Massachusetts (West)**

**Politics and governance**

## Scope 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The Great Barrington Historical Documents Collection was compiled by Charles Taylor, author of the 1882 town history.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.

## Arrangement

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)**

## Detailed contents

**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  
Brimsmaid 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  
Pitkin 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

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, Utle  
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

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

## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from: Robert Lucas

### Processing Information

Processed by Ken Fones-Wolf, December 1985.

### Language:

English

### Acknowledgments

Encoding funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

### Copyright and Use [\(More information \)](#)

*Cite as:* Great Barrington Historical Documents Collection (MS 104). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

## Search terms

### Subjects

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.  
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.

## Contributors

Taylor, Charles (compiler) [main entry]

## Genres and formats

Deeds.

Genealogies.

Indentures.

Land surveys.

Writs.

## Link to similar SCUA collections

Massachusetts (West)

Politics and governance



Special Collections & University Archives

University Libraries : UMass Amherst

154 Hicks Way : Amherst, Mass. 01003-9275

Ph. 413-545-7282 (545-SCUA)

