



William Wells Papers

1796-1863/1814-1832

1 box (0.5 linear feet)

Call no.: MS040

Collection overview

A prominent figure in the rural town of Shelburne, Mass., during the early nineteenth century, William Wells served for many years as a town selectman, representative in the state legislature, and captain of the militia. He died in Shelburne in July 1848, leaving behind his wife Prudence (May) and their nine children.

This tightly focused body of documents from William Wells represents a cross-section of public life in the town of Shelburne during the early decades of the nineteenth century, touching on the town's finances, care for the church, school, highways, roads, and the local militia.

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Background on William Wells

A prominent figure in the early history of Shelburne, Mass., William Wells was born in Colchester, Conn., on Jan. 27, 1767, the son of David and Mary (Taintor) Wells. At the age of five, William's family settled in Shelburne, a young hill town, and soon established themselves among the local elite. During the Revolution, David Wells commanded a Hampshire County regiment that saw service at Ticonderoga and that was present at Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga, and he was involved in later years in local political and social life.

Following in his father's footsteps, William rose to become Captain in the militia and served for many years as a town selectman and state legislator, playing a role in the tri-fold division of Hampshire County in 1812 into the present-day Hampshire, Hampden, and Franklin Counties. Wells married Prudence May (1768-1862) on Dec. 7, 1794, raising a bevy of seven sons and two daughters. He died of bladder disease on July 11, 1848, and is buried in Shelburne's Hill Cemetery.

Scope of collection

This tightly focused body of documents from William Wells represents a cross-section of public life in the town of Shelburne during the early decades of the nineteenth century, and are typical of the sorts of records maintained by a town official. The documents touch on a wide variety of topics, ranging from town finance to care for the church, school, highways, and roads. Among the more interesting items in the collection are a contract apprenticing a boy to a local farmer (1796), a thick sheaf of letters and other documents relating to the local militia regiment, a legal dispute regarding taxes and support for the Baptist meetinghouse in town (1791), and a series of petitions relating to the care of elderly, poor, and troublesome residents.

Inventory

Accounts, individual	1813-1831	Box 1: 1
Accounts with the town of Shelburne	1814-1828	Box 1: 2
➤ Agricultural fairs, report on meetings	1821	Box 1: 3
Baptist Church	ca.1791	Box 1: 4
➤ Legal analysis of request by local Baptists to be refunded taxes	ca.1810	
➤ Extract from the Records of the Baptist Church in Deerfield and Shelburn	1791 Oct. 27- Nov. 24	
Bonds	1816-1833	Box 1: 5
Borders: certificates of perambulation	1818-1819	Box 1: 6
Deed	1799	Box 1: 7
Estate inventories and supporting material	1821-1837	Box 1: 8
➤ Franklin Peace Society (notice naming Wells Franklin Peace Society agent for Shelburne)	1823 June 25	Box 1: 9
Guardianship records for Isaac Winter, Lawrence Kemp	1818-1821	Box 1: 10
Highways and bridges: petitions and notices	1813-1863	Box 1: 11
➤ Indenture: apprenticeship contract for Francis Lester to Edward Barney to learn agriculture	1796 Sept. 29	Box 1: 12
Juror lists	1821-1824	Box 1: 13
Meeting warrants and notices	1814-1818	Box 1: 14
Militia records	1803-1832	Box 1: 15
Miscellaneous documents (including list of books)	1819-1831	Box 1: 16
Petitions (other than highways and bridges)	1813-1823	Box 1: 17
➤ Petition from Shelburne (Mass.) Selectmen to Massachusetts General Court regarding support for indigent family of Paul McCay	1813 May 18	
➤ Petition from freeholders in Northeast School District to Shelburne (Mass.) Selectmen to authorize raising funds for a school	1818 Dec. 14	
➤ Complaint from Shelburne (Mass.) Selectmen to Probate Court (Franklin County)	1820 July 5	
➤ Petition from David Wells et al. to Shelburne (Mass.) Selectmen to authorize rebuilding a school	1822 Mar. 4	
➤ Petition from David Long et al. to Shelburne (Mass.) Selectmen to support elderly Asa Childs	1822 Aug. 15	
➤ Letter from Elijah Alvord et al. to Shelburne (Mass.) Selectmen	1825 Mar. 16	
➤ Petition to the Shelburne (Mass.) Selectmen relative to the behavior of Lorenzo Joyner	ca.1820	
➤ Unitarian Society: agreement to purchase a bass viol	1830	Box 1: 18
Voting lists and votes recorded	1815-1830	Box 1: 19

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Gift of Robert W. Hugo, Friend of the Libraries, through Steve Finer, Aug. 1990.

Processing Information

Processed by Linda Seidman, 1990, and Margaret Dashwood, Sept. 2015.

Bibliography

Everts, L. H., *History of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts*, vol. 2. Philadelphia : Everts, 1879, p. 646.

Sheldon, George, *History of Deerfield*, vol. 2. Greenfield, Mass. : E. A. Hall & Co., 1896, p. 363-364.

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Some materials have been digitized and are available online in [Credo](#).

Language:

English

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Search terms

Subjects

- Apprentices--Massachusetts--Shelburne
- Baptists--Massachusetts--Shelburne
- Massachusetts. Militia
- Poor--Massachusetts--Shelburne
- Shelburne (Mass.)--History
- Shelburne (Mass.)--Politics and government
- Wells, David

Contributors

- Wells, William **[main entry]**

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