

Watertown Free Public Library

123 Main Street

Watertown, Massachusetts 02472

Local History Collection

**Town of Watertown Clerk records,
1749-1957 (inclusive)**

TW101

Summary

Collection name: Town of Watertown Clerk records, 1749-1957 (inclusive)

Collection number: TW101

Repository: Watertown Free Public Library (Watertown, Massachusetts)

Creator: Town of Watertown Clerk

Extent: 3.7 cubic feet (6 oversize boxes, 2 half legal size document boxes, and 2 folders)

Language: English

Provenance: The immediate source of this acquisition is unknown.

Processing information: Records were processed by WFPL staff as separate collections, identified by the call numbers: HIST 351.7444 DEE, HIST 346.043 WAT 1882, HIST 346.043 WAT 1843-1854, HIST 346.043 WAT 1870, HIST 346.056 WAT 1899-1904, HIST 974.443 WAT 1890-1899, and HIST 352.743 WAT 1932-1952. This finding aid was created by Caroline Littlewood in 2020. It is adapted from catalog records and an inventory performed by WFPL staff in 2006.

Conditions governing access: Collection is open for use in the Local History Room, Watertown Free Public Library.

Preferred citation: Town of Watertown Clerk records, TW101, Watertown Free Public Library Local History Collection, Watertown, Mass.

Historical Note

Since 1634, the Clerk has served as the official record keeper for the Town of Watertown. His primary responsibility is to record town meeting minutes and other government business for entry in the public record. He files and maintains these and other town records, including rules, regulations, ordinances, bylaws, reports of town committees, and departmental archives. He also assembles the Town's annual report, acts as custodian of the Town Seal, issues licenses and registrations, posts public notices of meetings, furnishes official letterhead, and, historically, has sworn in town officials. In addition to these activities, he acts as liaison between the town and the county and state governments. For example, Watertown Clerks of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created and maintained copies of county and state records (such as deeds or conveyances, or Orders of

the General Court) relevant to town business, for local use. They also filed certain local data, such as vital records, with the state.

In fact, Massachusetts laws have long influenced municipal recordkeeping activities. As early as 1641, the General Court required all municipalities to appoint a “clerk of writtes” to prepare local records, record vital statistics, and issue various legal documents. Ever since, the duties of the Town Clerk have developed along with state law. In the 1840s, the General Court passed several laws relating to the collection of vital statistics. These laws dictated data standards, collecting methods, and reporting procedures for birth, marriage and death records to state standards. In Watertown, the Clerk recorded and maintained vital statistics long before he was formally appointed Registrar, in 1866. Upon establishment of the Town of Watertown Board of Registrars in the 1884, the Clerk also became an ex officio member of the Board and supervisor of public elections. In the 1960s, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts passed public records law requiring Watertown and other municipalities to provide access to all public records. The Watertown Clerk assumed official responsibility for ensuring compliance with this mandate. In 2017, the state further codified this role by requiring each municipality to designate its clerk or a member of the clerk’s office as Records Access Officer.

Organization and Arrangement

This collection consists of six series. The series are arranged as follows:

- Series I. Property records, 1749-1894 (inclusive), 1870-1894 (bulk)
- Series II. Probate record books, 1899-1917 (inclusive)
- Series III. Reports of Town Committees, 1932-1957 (inclusive)
- Series IV. Copies of Town Letters, 1906-1907 (inclusive)
- Series V. Public official bonds, 1771-1859 (inclusive)
- Series VI. Loose vital records, 1764-1900 (inclusive)
 - Subseries i. Loose marriage records, 1764-1823, 1857 (inclusive)
 - Subseries ii. Loose birth records, 1890-1900 (inclusive)

Scope and Content Note

This collection consists of records created or copied and maintained by the Town of Watertown Clerk which do not clearly fall under the purview of another town office or department. It includes property records, probate records, committee reports, letters, public official bonds, and vital record notices or returns.

Series I. Property records, 1749-1894 (inclusive), 1870-1894 (bulk)

Extent: 27 bound volumes and 1 folder

Scope and Content: This series consists of bound and loose records documenting property transactions in Watertown, including records of conveyance, deeds, and mortgages. Some bound volumes appear to contain copies of records held by the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds.

Series II. Probate record books, 1899-1917 (inclusive)

Extent: 4 bound volumes

Scope and Content: This series contains record books with copies of original probate records held by the Middlesex County Court involving Watertown residents and businesses. Entries are chronological and include the five-digit Middlesex County Court docket number. The first volume includes entries between May 1899 and December 1904, with docket numbers 50198 to 66493. The second volume includes entries between January 1905 and March 1910, with docket numbers 66681 to 82328. The third volume includes entries between January 1910 and 1917, with docket numbers 84739 to 111373. This series also contains a bound index.

Series III. Reports of Town Committees, 1932-1957 (inclusive)

Extent: 7 folders

Scope and Content: This series contains the contents of a binder, labeled *Reports of Town Committees*. It includes town committee reports which have been filed in reverse chronological order. There is an alphabetical index in to the Committees (Box 6, folder 1).

Series IV. Copies of Town Letters from Feb. 1, 1906 to Feb. 23, 1907

Extent: 1 oversize box

Scope and Content: This series contains the contents of a binder of copies of letters sent by the Clerk between February 1, 1906 and February 23, 1907. It includes an index (Box 7, folder 1).

Series V. Public official bonds, 1771-1859 (inclusive)

Extent: 6 folders

Scope and Content: This series contains bonds to the inhabitants of the Town of Watertown, or to the town Treasurer, arranged chronologically.

Series VI. Loose vital records, 1764-1900 (inclusive)

Scope and content: This series consists of loose birth and marriage records either performed by Watertown officials or ministers or concerning Watertown residents. It is arranged into two subseries.

Subseries i. Loose marriage records, 1764-1823, 1857 (inclusive)

Extent: 1 folder

Scope and content: This subseries contains marriage returns submitted to the Clerk by Watertown ministers or Massachusetts town officials. It includes list of marriages solemnized in Watertown in the 1780s and 1821 to 1823. It also includes lists of marriages solemnized in the 1700s in Braintree and Waltham which were compiled and submitted to the Watertown Clerk in 1857.

Subseries ii. Loose birth records, 1890-1900 (inclusive)

Extent: 1 folder

Scope and content: This subseries contains notices of births involving Watertown residents, which were submitted to the Clerk as mandated by Massachusetts law. Records include the date and place of birth, the name, sex and color of child; parents' names, birthplaces, and residences; and the occupation of the father, as well as the signature of the physician. Some records note if the child was legitimate or a twin.

Inventory

<i>Series</i>	<i>Box</i>	<i>Folder</i>	<i>Title or Description</i>	<i>Dates</i>		<i>Legacy call number (internal use only)</i>
Series I	1		Record of mortgages Book no. 2	1843	1854	HIST 346.043 WAT 1843-1854
	2		Assessor's Mortgage Records 1882 to	1882		HIST 346.043 WAT 1882
	1		1870 / List of Conveyances Watertown from May 1st 1870 to May 1st 1871	1870	1871	HIST 346.043 WAT 1870-1871
	1		1871 / 1871 & 1872	1871	1872	HIST 346.043 WAT 1871-1872
	1		1872 / 1872 & 1873,	1872	1873	HIST 346.043 WAT 1872-1873
	1		1873 / 1873 & 1874	1873	1874	HIST 346.043 WAT 1873-1874
	1		1873 / 1873 & 1874	1873	1874	HIST 346.043 WAT 1873-1874
	1		1874 / [no title]	1874	1875	HIST 346.043 WAT 1874-1875

	1		1875 & 1876 / Watertown Mortgages	1875	1877	HIST 346.043 WAT 1875-1876
	1		1875 1876 / Watertown	1875	1877	HIST 346.043 WAT 1875-1876
	2		1877 / [no title]	1876	1878	HIST 346.043 WAT 1876-1878
	2		1878 & 1879 / Watertown Deeds and Mortgages	1878	1879	HIST 346.043 WAT 1878-1879
	2		1879 / [no title]	1879	1880	HIST 346.043 WAT 1879-1880
	2		1880 / [no title]	1880	1881	HIST 346.043 WAT 1880-1881
	2		1881 & 1882 / [no title]	1881	1882	HIST 346.043 WAT 1881-1882
	2		May 1883 / [no title]	1881	1883	HIST 346.043 WAT 1882-1883
	2		May 1884 / By Geo. L. Morgan East Cambridge	1883	1884	HIST 346.043 WAT 1883-1884
	2		1885 / [no title]	1884	1885	HIST 346.043 WAT 1884-1885
	3		1886 / [no title]	1885	1886	HIST 346.043 WAT 1885-1886
	3		1887 / [no title]	1886	1887	HIST 346.043 WAT 1886-1887
	3		1888 / [no title]	1887	1888	HIST 346.043 WAT 1887-1888
	3		1889 / [no title]	1888	1889	HIST 346.043 WAT 1888-1889
	3		1890 / [no title]	1889	1890	HIST 346.043 WAT 1889-1890
	3		1891 / [no title]	1890	1891	HIST 346.043 WAT 1890-1891
	3		1892 / [no title]	1891	1892	HIST 346.043 WAT 1891-1892
	3		1893 / [no title]	1892	1893	
	3		1894 / [no title]	1893	1894	HIST 346.043 WAT 1893-1894
	6	9	[Loose deeds]	1749	1858	HIST 351.7444 DEE
Series II	4		Probate Index			HIST 346.056 WAT INDEX
	4		Probate records no. 1	May 1899	Dec.1 904	HIST 346.056 WAT 1899-1904 v. 1
	5		Probate records no. 2	Jan. 1905	Mar. 1910	HIST 346.056 WAT 1905-1910 v. 2
	5		Probate records no. 3	Jan. 1910	1917	HIST 346.056 WAT 1910-1917 v. 3
Series III	6	1-7	Reports of Town Committees, 1932-1957 (inclusive)	1932	1957	HIST 352.743 WAT 1932-1952
Series IV	7		Copies of Town Letters from Feb. 1, 1906 to Feb. 23, 1907	Feb. 1906	Feb.1 1907	HIST 352.384 WAT 1906-1907
Series V	6	10-15	[Public official bonds]	1771	1859	HIST 351.7444 TRE 1824-1870 HIST 351.7444 DEE
Series VI	6	8	[Subseries i. Loose marriage records]	1764	1857	None
Series VI	6	16	[Subseries ii. Loose birth records]	1890	1900	HIST 974.443 WAT 1890-1899

Related Materials

WFPL's Local History Collection includes print Town committee reports, which can be found by searching the online catalog. We also hold microfilm copies of Watertown births, marriages, and deaths. Indices to these copies are available online at www.watertownlib.org.

Property records for Watertown, Massachusetts are held by the Registry of Deeds for Southern Middlesex County. You can search an index to these documents at <http://www.masslandrecords.com/MiddlesexSouth/>.

Access Points

Deeds—Massachusetts—Watertown

Licenses

Marriage records

Mortgages

Personal property—Massachusetts—Watertown

Probate records

Public records—Massachusetts—Watertown

Real property—Massachusetts—Watertown

Registers of births, etc.

Town clerks

Watertown (Mass.)—Officials and employees

Watertown (Mass.)—Politics and government