



City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division

Guide to the Town of Dorchester records

Finding aid prepared by Patrick T. Collins

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Repository:	City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division
Title:	Town of Dorchester records
Collection No.:	1100.001
Dates:	(Bulk, 1806-1870) 1784-1870
Quantity:	35.0 Cubic feet (35 Document Cases, 149 Volumes, 6 Flat Boxes, 2 Publication Boxes, 1 Flat File)

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Biographical/Historical note

The Town of Dorchester was incorporated in the Massachusetts Bay Colony on 7 September 1630 by Puritan settlers who had arrived earlier in that year from England on the ship Mary and John. Dorchester originally included the present-day surrounding areas and towns of South Boston, Hyde Park, Milton, Wrentham, Stoughton, Dedham, Sharon, Foxboro, and Canton. Over the course of the next two-and-a-half centuries various pieces of Dorchester were annexed and/or established as these towns and areas.

The original settlers built their homes on a road between the first Meeting House (located at the intersection of East Cottage St. and Pleasant St.) and Savin Hill. This line of homes followed the present-day path of Pleasant Street and Savin Hill Avenue. In 1633 the citizens of Dorchester established a form of local government by appointing twelve “selectmen” who would meet monthly to deal with town business and decisions. This form of governance would become the predominate form of local government throughout New England well into the Twentieth century. In the fall of 1635 a large segment of Dorchester’s population migrated westward into Connecticut and settled at what would become Windsor, Connecticut.

In 1639 the people of Dorchester established the first “free school” for all the children of Dorchester, regardless of class, to attend (girls were not admitted until 1784 however). The school was funded through a direct tax levied on the inhabitants of Dorchester who owned property on Thomson Island. This was the first school, in what would become the United States, to be funded with public monies. By the time of the American Revolution (1775-1783) Dorchester needed more than one school; and by 1836 there were six schools throughout the town.

In 1803 a group of leading Boston citizens urged that Dorchester Neck (a.k.a. “Dorchester Point”) be annexed to Boston. On 6 March 1804 the annex of Dorchester Neck was completed (Chap. 111, Acts of 1803). This area would become what is today South Boston. In 1805 the road that would eventually become Dorchester Avenue was laid out between Milton Lower Mills and the east side of the South Bridge (located in the area known previously as Dorchester Neck) to Boston. The railroad (The Old Colony Railroad) would come to Dorchester in 1844 amidst much controversy and would replace the hourly stagecoach service from the Lower Mills to Boston.

Dorchester was always primarily an agricultural town but that is not to say that it did not know its share of industry and manufacturing. At different points throughout its history Dorchester supported the milling of grain, shipbuilding, fishing and whaling, papermaking, and the production of chocolate. In the 1830s Hayward’s Gazetteer described Dorchester as “an agricultural and manufacturing town of about 3,500 inhabitants, large farms covering broad acres, card factories, cotton, chocolate, and starch mills.” William Orcutt, in his book *Good Old Dorchester*, notes that: “Dorchester once contained the only powder-mill, the only paper-mill, the only cracker manufactory, the only chocolate-mill, and the only playing-card manufactory in the whole country.

In 1836 it was first proposed to annex the Little Neck section of Dorchester (a.k.a. Washington Village) to Boston. On 21 May 1855, after much opposition, Little Neck was finally annexed to the City of Boston (Chap. 468, Acts of 1855). The final annexation of Dorchester took effect 3 January 1870 when the entire Town of Dorchester officially became a part of the City of Boston. The previous spring the residents of Dorchester had voted 928 in favor and 726 opposed to annexation by Boston.

Sources:

Dorchester Tercentenary Committee. *Dorchester Old and New, 1630-1930*. Dorchester Historical Society, 1930.

First Church at Dorchester. *Records of the First Church at Dorchester in New England, 1636-1734*. Ed. by Rev. C. R. Eliot, et al. Boston, Mass., 1891.

Orcutt, William Dana. *Good Old Dorchester: A Narrative History of the Town, 1630-1893*. Cambridge: John Wilson & Son, University Press, 1893.

Taylor, Earl. *Dorchester MA, Town History 1630-1870*. Available at: www.dorchesteratheneum.org (last accessed 3 January 2008).

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Scope and Contents note

This collection contains the records for the Town of Dorchester from the late eighteenth century to 1870 when the

town was annexed to the City of Boston. The bulk of the records date from 1823 onwards, although there are some records from the 1780s and 1790s, and two volumes of Assessor's records cover 1807-1812 and 1818-1823. One item has been dated [1750] although this date is not conclusive. The majority of the records are either tax based or center around the proceedings of the town meetings. There is also a substantial amount of financial material including bills, receipts, and account books. Military records make up about half of the material from the Civil War period (1861-1865). There are also town publications including a small number of reports from various town offices, as well as a near complete run (the year 1858 is missing) of annual town reports for the fiscal years 1850 through 1868.

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Series I: Town Records, 1790 - 1869

This series contains the town meeting records and the town papers for the Town of Dorchester. The town meeting records are the volumes which contain the proceedings of the town meetings. The town papers consist of warrants, petitions, reports, receipts/bills, correspondence, orders, adjudications, and agreements. The town papers represent the business of the town and provide an additional record of the issues brought before the selectmen and the town meetings. The town papers have a few documents with outlying dates: 1791 and 1797. Otherwise they cover all the years 1823-1869 except 1825, 1829-1830, and 1835-1836. In addition, during the period of the Civil War, 1861-1865, quite a few records appear that deal exclusively with the business of the war, including: recruitment documents, enlistment papers, discharge papers, enrollment lists for the militia, and general orders. These types of documents, i.e. those documents that deal exclusively with the Civil War, have been compiled and placed at the end of each respective year (e.g. at the end of 1861, one will find 1861-Civil War.) This step was taken in order to facilitate easier access to these documents. They are listed in this finding aid together as one unit at the end of the Town Papers.

Town Meeting Records, 1827-1869 (5 Volumes, nos. 1-5)

Volume	
1	Volume no.8, 1827-1837
2	Volume no.9, 1837-1844
3	Volume no.10, 1844-1853
4	Volume no.11, 1853-1859
5	Volume no.12, 1860-1869
Box	Folder
1	1a 1861 April-May, Civil War

Town Papers, 1790-1869

Box	Folder	
1	1-12	1790-1831
2	13-20	1832-1838 March
3	21-28	1838 April-1842
4	29-34	1843-1845
5	35-40	1846-1847 July
6	41-46	1847 August-1849
7	47-52	1850-1852 March
8	53-58	1852 April-1854 March
9	59-65	1854 April-1855 June

10	66-72	1855 July-1856
11	73-78	1857-1858 September
12	79-84	1858 October-1860 March
13	85-90	1860 April-1861
15	104-105	1863
16	107	1864
19	126-130	1865-1867
20	131-136	1868-1869, undated

Civil War, 1861-1864

Box	Folder	
13	91	1861
14	92-93	
14	96-98	1862
15	99-103	
16	106	1863
16	108-111	1864 January
17	112-117	1864 February-March
18	118-123	1864 March-July
19	124-125	1864 July-December

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Series II: Selectmen, 1806-1870

This series contains the records of the selectmen for the Town of Dorchester. The Appointments volume is a list of those persons appointed by the selectmen to serve the town in various capacities and offices. The Selectmen Records are the records of the meetings of the selectmen. There is a significant gap in these records. One volume (bound at a later date) is present and covers the years 1806-1809 (although it is dated through 1810, this date is wrong). The years 1810-1854 are not present within collection. The records commence again in 1855 and continue through until 1870 when the town was annexed to the City of Boston. The Vouchers/Receipts are a record of all outgoing money from the town's accounts from 1851-1869. At a town meeting on 1 April 1850 it was voted to accept the selectmen's suggestion "that all orders upon the treasurer for expenditure be drawn by the selectmen" and that vouchers for such disbursements be kept in the selectmen's office. Previous to that date the treasurer had solely handled all such transactions and recorded them in the town's account books. All the years between 1851 and 1869 are represented within these vouchers/receipts except for 1857. In addition some years have far more documents present than others.

Volume	
6	Appointments, 1856-1867 (1 Volume)
	Selectmen Meeting Records, 1806 - 1870 (3 Volumes, nos. 7-9)
Box	Folder
30	71
	1806-1809 (Volume no. 7)
Volumes	
8-9	1855-1870 (2 Volumes)
	Vouchers / Receipts, 1851-1869

Box	Folder	
21	1-6	1851 January-October
22	7 - 13	1851 November-1852 September
23	14-21	1852 October-1855 March
24	22-29	1855 April-1860 June
25	30-36	1860 May-1862 January
26	37-42	1862 February-1863 April
27	43-50	1863 May-1867 March
28	51-57	1867 April-December
29	58-64	1867 December-1868 August
30	65-70	1868 September-1869, undated

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Series III: Treasurer, 1786 - 1869, with gaps

This series contains ledgers maintained by the treasurer of the Town of Dorchester. A number of the volumes have dates that overlap. The dates overlap because these volumes cover the same time period but in different ways. There are cashbooks which record all transactions in the order in which they occurred regardless of the accounts involved. There are also account books which list all the transactions for each account on a monthly or yearly basis.

Ledgers (12 Volumes, nos. 10-18, 147-149)

Volume	
10	1786-1790
11	1796-1803
12	1829-1850
14	1842-1856
13	1850-1853
147	1853-1858
15	1855-1864
16	1855-1869
148	1862-1864
17	1864-1865
149	1864-1865
18	1865-1869

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Series IV: Assessors, [1750] - 1869, with gaps

There are four types of records in this series, three of which are similar and in fact duplicate some information. The Street Books provide a list of the residents of each street within the Town of Dorchester, their property, the number of polls at that address, as well as the number of men eligible for service in the militia and the number of children. The Valuations list the value of the taxable personal and real property of each individual in the town. The Assessments list the amount

of tax to be paid by each individual based on the assessed value of their personal and real property. The State Books were sent to the Secretary of the Commonwealth and listed the assessed value of each individual's personal and real property as well as the amount of tax owed based on that assessed value. There are also two miscellaneous fragments (Accession no. 90-020, Doc. no. 7 and 14) one dated [1750] and the other from 1784. They are both fragments of valuation lists for polls and estates in the Town of Dorchester.

Street Books, 1850-1869 (82 Volumes, nos. 19-100)

Volumes

19-33	Volume nos. 42-56, 1850-1852
34-60	Volume nos. 57-83, 1853-1859
61-87	Volume nos. 84-110, 1860-1866 no.3
88-100	Volume nos. 111-123, 1866 no.4 - 1869

Valuations, 1848-1860 (8 Volumes, nos. 101-107, 146)

Volume

101	1848-1850
102	1853
103	1854
104	1856
146	1857
105	1858
106	1859
107	1860

Assessments, 1780-1865 (11 Volumes, nos. 108-118)

Volume

108	1780, 1790, 1792-1796
109	1791
110	1807-1812
111	1818-1823
112	1827-1830
113	1831-1838
114	1844-1847
115	1851-1853
116	1854-1856
117	1857-1859
118	1860-1865

State Books (9 Volumes, nos. 119-127)

FlatBox Volume

1	119	1861
2	120-121	1862-1863
3	122-123	1864-1865
4	124-125	1866-1867
5	126-127	1868-1869

Miscellaneous, [1750], 1784

FlatBox

6/A/086	[1750], 1784 (2 document fragments)
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Series V: Town Clerk, 1818-1870

This series contains the records from the Town of Dorchester that were filed in the Clerk's office in the town. There are oaths of office for the town officers, lists of dog licenses, list of jurors, legal documents such as writs, deeds, mortgages and certificates, as well as military records. It is important to note here that when the first three volumes (1827-1852) of Mortgages, Deeds, etc. were rebound, they were mislabeled "Deeds." Although these three volumes do contain a record of deeds they also include mortgages and other agreements the same as those in the final two volumes (1852-1870). The Record of Soldiers, Officers, and Seamen during the Rebellion, 1861-1865 provides a list of every man who entered the service from Dorchester during the Civil War and a short note concerning the specifics of his time in the war. In addition, this volume has a brief, narrative history of each of the five companies that Dorchester sent to the Civil War including an account of each company's experience in the war.

Volume	
128	Oaths of Office, 1853-1869 (1 Volume)
129	Dog Licenses, 1869, undated (2 volumes)
Box	Folder
30	1 (v. 130)
131	List of Jurors, 1856-1867 (1 Volume)
132	Miscellaneous Memoranda, 1818-1840 (1 Volume)

Trustee Writs, 1852-1865

Box	Folder	
31	2-8	1852-1865

Mortgages, Deeds, etc., 1827-1870**Volumes (5 Volumes, nos. 133-137)**

Volume	
133	1827-1837
134	1837-1843
135	1843-1852
136	1852-1864 (1 Volume, w/index)
137	1864-1870

Deeds, 1846-1869, undated

Box	Folder	
31	9-13	1846-1859
32	14-18	1860-1869, undated

Mortgages, Liens, Certificates, etc., [1827-1861]

Box	Folder	
32	19-24	1828-1841
33	25-33	1842-1854
34	34-38	1855-1860

Miscellaneous Documents, 1850, undated

Box	Folder	
34	39	1850, undated

Military Records, 1861-1865 (3 Volumes, nos. 138-140)

Volume		
138		Record of Soldiers, Officers, and Seamen during the Rebellion, 1861-1865
Box	Folder	
34	40	Enrollment List, 1862 (Volume no. 139)
34	41	Index of Enrollment List, 1863 (Volume no. 140)

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This series contains material published by the Town of Dorchester for distribution to the citizens of the town. There is a near complete run of Annual Town Reports (1858 is missing) from 1850-1868. The Annual Town Report for the year ending 1 February 1852 (i.e. for the year of 1851) has a list of town officers for the years 1754-1851.

Annual Auditor's Reports (4 Reports)

Box	Folder	
35	1	1839, 1840, 1844, 1849

Annual Town Reports (22 Reports)

Box	Folder	
35	2	1850-1852
35	3	1853-1855
35	4	1856-1857, 1859
35	5	1860-1861 (2 copies 1860)
35	6	1862-1863 (2 copies 1863)
35	7	1864-1865
35	8	1866-1867
35	9	1867 (fragments)
35	10	1868

School Committee, 1853-1867

Box	Folder	
35	11	Annual School Committee Reports, 1853, 1855-1857, 1867
35	12	Regulations of the School Committee, 1858 April 1

Valuation of Total Taxable Poles and Estates (5 Volumes, nos. 141-145)

Publications		
2/PB/65		1849-1855 (2 copies)
2/PB/65		1850
2/PB/66		1869 (2 copies)

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