



City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division

Guide to the Town of West Roxbury records

Finding aid prepared by Zachary Enright

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Repository:	City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division
Title:	Town of West Roxbury records
Collection No.:	1400.001
Dates:	1851-1874
Quantity:	5.0 Cubic feet (1 Document Box 59 Volumes 3 Oversize Boxes)

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Biographical/Historical note

Pre-1630: Area is inhabited by the Wampanoag Indian Tribe.

1630: The first Puritan settlers arrive in Roxbury, led by William Pynchon (1589- 1661), three weeks after the founding of Boston. The town is originally called Rockberry. It includes what is now West Roxbury as well as what are now several other neighborhoods and towns. The town is named after the unique rock outcroppings later called Roxbury puddingstone. All the other Roxburys in the United States from the town of Roxbury in New Hampshire to Roxbury Drive in Beverly Hills have their origin in Roxbury, Massachusetts. What is now West Roxbury is first called the Spring Street neighborhood of the town of Roxbury.

1632: The first meetinghouse and burial ground are constructed in what is now the John Eliot Square (Roxbury Highlands) section of the town. All parishioners travel to the meetinghouse for church including those who live in what will become the West Roxbury section of the town. Reverend John Eliot (1604-1691) is the minister. Eliot is known as "The Apostle of the Indians" for his efforts to Christianize the Native American population.

1635: Reverend Eliot founds the Roxbury Latin School. It moves to what is now West Roxbury in 1922.

1643: Joseph Weld, one of the first settlers of what would become West Roxbury, is granted a large tract of land by the Massachusetts Bay Company stretching from Forest Hills to Brookline as a reward for negotiating a treaty with the Pequot Indians.

1652: Approximately 120 houses are in the area that would become the town. Most dwellings are in John Eliot Square, named after the preacher who wrote the first bible in the Algonkian Language that was instrumental in converting many Native Americans to Christianity.

1662: Centre Street is laid out as the main route between Boston and Hartford, Connecticut.

1683: The Westerly Burial Ground is located on Centre Street, in the area of the original Roxbury settlement.

1706: Approximately 45 families settled around Jamaica Pond form the independent town of Jamaica Plain although they don't receive official recognition from the colony.

1710: The area from Jamaica Plain to Dedham is known as Jamaica End or Spring Street.

1711: Residents build The Second Church of Christ on Walter Street to avoid having to travel to the meetinghouse in John Eliot Square, Roxbury. They also establish the Walter Street Burial Ground. Today the site of this defunct house is located in the Arnold Arboretum.

1733: The congregation moves to a building on Centre Street. Today it is the Theodore Parker Unitarian Church.

1767: Jeremiah Richards donates money to build the first school in town.

1776: General George Washington (1732-1799) uses Weld Hill for rallies. Residents attempt to establish themselves as a separate town called "Washington" after the General but their petition is denied by the colonial government.

1805: Washington Street is laid out. Originally called Dedham Turnpike, it is later renamed for General George Washington and is the main route connecting Dedham to Boston.

1835: The Old South Evangelical Church is built on Mount Vernon and Centre Streets. Reverend Christopher Marsh is the first pastor. The church is later replaced by the West Roxbury Congregational Church (1891) and now is a branch of the Boston Public Library.

1837-1846: Reverend Theodore Parker is minister of the Second Church of Roxbury. He is a staunch abolitionist.

1841: The pastor of Purchase Street Unitarian Church, George Ripley, comes to Roxbury with his wife Sophia. They establish Brook Farm, a utopian community organized under the tenets of Transcendentalism on the dairy farm of Charles Ellis. Nathaniel Hawthorne is briefly a member of the group that he writes about in "The Blithedale Romance". Other prominent visitors include: Horace Greeley, A. Bronson Alcott, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Brook Farm is later auctioned off (1849) and used as a Civil War camping ground for the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, and the Martin Luther Home German orphanage (1870). The farm also includes a section of Roxbury Puddingstone (Drumlins or hills created by retreating glaciers) called "Pulpit Rock" where John Eliot preached to the Native Americans in the seventeenth century.

1848: The Boston and Providence Railroad creates stops at Central (Bellevue) Street, West Roxbury Village, and

Spring Street. Increased access to town causes the area's population to expand and, in turn, urbanizes this previously rural farming community. At this point in time the West Roxbury area has three sections: West Roxbury Village (Center Street), Mount Bellevue, and Germantown (Washington and Grove Streets) where Germans from East Dedham settle.

1849: Park Street and La Grange Streets are laid out.

1851: West Roxbury breaks away from Roxbury in an attempt to remain rural. West Roxbury includes Roslindale and Jamaica Plain.

1856: West Roxbury is connected to Roxbury by horse drawn streetcars.

1863: Colonel Robert Gould Shaw is killed along with 255 of his troops after an attack on Fort Wagner, South Carolina. A West Roxbury native, Shaw is the leader of The 54th Massachusetts Regiment, the first all black company of soldiers in the Civil War.

1873: West Roxbury is annexed to Boston.

Adapted from Serkiss, Sandi. "The History of West Roxbury; 1627-1927." Available at: www.wrhistory.org (Last accessed on 11 August 2009)

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Scope and Contents note

The records of the town of West Roxbury extend 4 cubic feet. The records date from the inception of the in 1851 until its annexation by the City of Boston in 1874. The majority of the records, 57 volumes, are financial records: tax books, payroll and accounts. Two folders of Deeds contain those for land taken for the Stony Brook Sewer as well as the only known example of the West Roxbury Town seal. Also within this collection are 7 volumes of Official Reports of the Town of West Roxbury dating from 1865 – 1873, the Report on the Location and Erection of a Town House 1866, and the Annual Report of the School Committee 1854.

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Box	Folder	
1	1	Abatements, 1852-1866
Volume		
2		Cash Taxes Paid, 1868-1870
Volumes		
3-25		Collector's Books, 1855-1873 (23 Volumes)
Volume		
29-31		Tax Registers, 1852, 1856-1857, 1865 (3 Volumes)
26, 32-34, 36		Town and County Tax Books, 1852-1864 (5 Volumes)
Oversize Volume		
2	41-43	Valuation Books, 1861-1873 (14 Volumes Volume 35 1860-1863 Volume 37 1856-1859 Volume 38 1852-1855 Volume 39 1864-1866 Volume 40 1867-1869 Oversize Box 2 1861, 1865, 1866 Oversize Box 3 1867-1869 Oversize Box 4 1870, 1871, 1873)

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27, 28,
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Street Books, 1873 (3 Volume)

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Series II: Constable

Box Folder
1 3 Writs, 1865, 1866

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Series III: Town Clerk, 1851-1874
Deeds, 1851-1874

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1 5 General, 1851-1871
Volume
1 Record of Deeds and Conveyances, 1859-1867

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Series IV: Treasurer

Volume
50-52 Account Ledgers, 1851-1866, 1866, 1868-1872 (3 Volumes)
53-54, Payment Ledgers, 1851-1866, 1866, 1872-1874 (3 Volumes)
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55-56 Payroll, 1872 April-1873 November, 1873 November-December (2 Volumes)
57 Town Accounts, 1851 July-1853 October (1 Volume)

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Series V: Publications

Box Folder
1 26 Report of the Committee on the Location and Erection of a Town House, 1866
1 27 Annual report of the School Committee, 1854
Official Report of the Town of West Roxbury, 1865-1869, 1871, 1872 (7 Volumes)

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