



# Massachusetts Historical Society

1154 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02215-3695

TEL (617) 536-1608 FAX (617) 859-0074 www.masshist.org

## THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS FACT SHEET

The Massachusetts Historical Society is one of the nation's preeminent research libraries with collections that provide an unparalleled record of the vibrant course of American history. The Society has an extraordinary assembly of personal papers from three presidents—John Adams, John Quincy Adams, and Thomas Jefferson—as well as accounts of the lives of thousands of ordinary Americans and their families. With millions of pages of manuscript letters, diaries, and other documents, as well as early newspapers, broadsides, artifacts, works of art, maps, photographs, and prints, the MHS offers a wide-ranging perspective on the United States from the earliest beginnings of the nation to the present day.

The Massachusetts Historical Society was established in 1791 to preserve important documents from the founding of the United States that were rapidly disappearing through neglect and natural disaster. Jeremy Belknap, the Society's founder, believed it was vital to preserve these irreplaceable materials and to continue to collect the records of the growing nation. The Society was created as the first institution with the primary mission of collecting and publishing American history. Today, the Society's collections are studied by scholars, enjoyed by the public, and form the basis of curricula used in teaching students across the country.

The Society's remarkable **Manuscript Collection** consists of more than 12 million documents. Highlights include manuscript copies of the Declaration of Independence written by Thomas Jefferson and John Adams; the diary of Samuel Sewall, a judge at the Salem Witch Trials and an early antislavery advocate; Paul Revere's account of his famous midnight ride written at the suggestion of Jeremy Belknap in order to preserve a first-hand testimony of the event; poems and letters by Phillis Wheatley, America's first African American poet; and documents related to the Massachusetts 54th Volunteer Infantry Regiment, the first African American regiment raised in the North during the Civil War. The Society holds diaries, records, and letters that document the lives of those who served in the French and Indian, Revolutionary, and Civil wars.

Broadsides—single sheets printed on one side—served as the primary tool for public announcements beginning with the establishment of printing in America through the early 20th century. The **Broadside Collection** has more than 10,000 items—a large and important compilation given the ephemeral nature of their time-specific use. Generally posted or read aloud, broadsides constituted official notices of laws and regulations and provided news of battles, deaths, executions, and other current events. Highlights include a notice of Harvard's commencement exercises in 1643, announcements of antislavery rallies, and the most important single printed document in American history—one of the few copies of the original printing of the Declaration of Independence.

**The Map Collection** consists of approximately 2,500 maps and charts, the oldest dating from the 16th century. From its founding, the Society has collected maps that illustrate the history and development of the entire United States. The collection is particularly strong in maps of Boston, Massachusetts, and New England, including the first map printed in Massachusetts. The Samuel C. Clough Collection features manuscript maps and atlas plates prepared by Clough in the early 20th century for a massive, but unfinished, topographical history of Boston. Other highlights include the Francis Russell Hart collection of maps of the West Indies and Central America, and the charts and 16 engraved printing plates for Joseph F. W. Des Barres's *Atlantic Neptune* (1776-1781.)

The **Early Imprint Collection** includes many of the first books printed in America, among them Rev. John Eliot's "Indian Bible," *Mamusse Wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblum God* (Cambridge, 1663), the first Bible printed in America in any language; and Samuel Sewall's *The Selling of Joseph* (Boston, 1700), the first antislavery tract printed in New England.

The **Newspaper Collection** contains 300 publications, ranging from single issues of foreign newspapers to extensive runs of early Boston papers. The Society holds the only extant copies of many 18th-century newspapers, such as the *Boston News-Letter*, which began production in 1704 and was the first newspaper in the colonies published on a weekly basis. The collection also contains James Franklin's *New-England Courant*, published from 1721 to 1727, which includes Benjamin Franklin's first appearance in print, as well as a complete run of *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison's antislavery newspaper.

The **Artifact Collection** holds nearly 3,000 objects that represent several centuries of American history. A pocket watch that belonged to the Puritan clergyman Cotton Mather, according to family tradition, was "carried by him among the Indians, who, hearing the ticking were frightened and thought he carried the Devil in his pocket." A late-17<sup>th</sup>-century chest of drawers later became known as the "the Witch Bureau" when an 1861 description recorded that "from the middle drawer...one of the Witches jumped out who was hung on Gallows Hill, in Salem." Other highlights include the pen Abraham Lincoln used to sign the Emancipation Proclamation; a windowsill from a Harvard detention house, signed by students confined for bad behavior in the early 19th century; the swords of William Prescott and John Linzee who fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill; George Washington's epaulettes; and a silver urn made by Paul Revere in the neoclassical style he adopted toward the end of the American Revolution.

Since 1796—when the MHS acquired its first painting, a portrait of colonial governor Thomas Hutchinson—the Society's **Art Collection** has served as a vital complement to its exceptional archive of American history. With paintings, sculpture, prints, and drawings by artists both famous and obscure, the works of art at the Society reveal striking observations about life in another period, capture the figures who shaped American history, and depict monuments and natural features of the continent, including many that disappeared centuries ago. There are some 545 portraits and miniatures in the collection, many by early America's most noted painters, among them John Singleton Copley, Edward Savage, John Smibert, Gilbert Stuart, Eliza Goodridge, and John Trumbull. Cityscapes and landscapes form a small but important subset of the collection and include two original views of Brook Farm by Josiah Wolcott, dated 1845 and c. 1846.

The **Graphics Collection** includes approximately 4,000 prints, drawings, silhouettes, and posters of portraits and historical events from the European discovery of America to the present. Notable pieces include Paul Revere's engraving of the Boston Massacre; the earliest known American woodcut, a 1670 portrait of Richard Mather; and mezzotints of Native American leaders. The collection also includes World War I recruiting and war loan posters.

The **Photograph Collection** consists of approximately 120,000 photographs that span the development of photographic technology, including hundreds of daguerreotypes, tintypes, ambrotypes, glass-plate negatives, and cartes de visite of notable and ordinary citizens and family groups. More than 2,000 images document the abolitionist movement and the Civil War.