The Massachusetts Archives, acting on behalf of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, is responsible for securing, preserving, and managing for the public good those noncurrent records of state government deemed to have archival (permanent) value. Such records have been created since colonial times by the legislative, judicial, and executive branches—the latter including the governor, other constitutional officers, and state agencies and commissions. The following outline is intended as a suggestive but by no means exhaustive summary of agencies, document types, and topics encountered among the holdings of the Archives.

RECORDS REFLECTING THE STRUCTURE OF STATE GOVERNMENT

--FOUNDATION DOCUMENTS: THE BASIS OF STATE GOVERNMENT


--LEGISLATIVE RECORDS: THE BASIS OF STATE LAW

Files of the General Court from the colonial (1629-1686), later intercharter (1689-1692), provincial (1692-1774), and Revolutionary (1775-1780) periods; of the Provincial Congress (1774-1775); and of the General Court from the Constitutional period (since 1780): Petitions, orders, reports, messages, bills. Unenacted legislation and enacted statutes and resolves. House and Senate dockets, roll calls, and journals. Committee and legislative commission hearing and background files.

--STATE SECRETARY RECORDS: THE BASIS OF STATE RECORDKEEPING


--EXECUTIVE RECORDS: THE BASIS OF STATE SERVICES


COUNCIL: Colonial (1629-1686), intercharter (1686-1692), provincial (1692-1774), and Revolutionary (1775-1780) periods: Executive records. (For Council legislative records see LEGISLATIVE RECORDS above.) Constitutional period (since 1780): Minutes, hearings, reports, approval files, treasury warrants.


EDUCATION: Board of Education minutes. Admission files for schools of the blind and deaf (State Secretary). Board of Regents and other higher education agency program review and degree approval files. Dept. of Education litigation files. Council on Education. Board of Immigration and Americanization.


--TREASURER RECORDS: THE BASIS OF STATE FINANCE


--ATTORNEY GENERAL RECORDS: THE BASIS OF STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT


--COURT RECORDS: THE BASIS OF STATE LAW INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION

Land Court registration decrees. JUDICIAL ARCHIVES (administered by the Supreme Judicial Court; serviced by the Massachusetts Archives): Supreme Judicial Court and predecessors. Superior and district courts by county, including probate and naturalization records.
SPECIAL COLONIAL AND EARLY STATE MATERIALS TO 1800

Many early documents (including legislative, administrative, land, financial, and military) are found in the 328-volume MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES COLLECTION, which also contains papers of the pre-Revolutionary governor Thomas Hutchinson. To supplement these, contemporary records from governmental archives in Great Britain and France were transcribed in the 1840s.

The EASTERN LANDS papers document settlement of public lands in the District of Maine and its separation from Massachusetts as a state in 1820. Included are legal, survey, and financial records of the General Court, legislative commissions, and the Land Office.

Archives of the PLYMOUTH COLONY, 1620-1691, held by the Plymouth County Commissioners, were transcribed, 1818-1857. Included are legislative, court, financial, and vital records; deeds and wills.

All the above contain documents relating to INDIAN AFFAIRS, including military, trading, and census records. The Archives also holds 19th-century records of the Guardians of Indians.

WITCHCRAFT records in the Massachusetts Archives Collection include depositions, examinations, warrants, and other court documents.

OTHER HISTORICAL RESOURCE FILES

Historic sites and structures in Massachusetts are documented in records of the Massachusetts Historical Commission (part of the state secretary's office): compliance files of properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places and tax certification program files.

Files of the Massachusetts Historical Records Survey conducted by the Work Projects/Works Progress administrations, 1936-1942, are supplemented by those of the American Portraits Survey and the Black Historical Records Survey. The Massachusetts Archives itself conducted a Historic Documents Inventory Survey in 1974 and a National Historical Publications and Records Commission Survey in 1981.

NONTEXTUAL MATERIALS


--ARTIFACTS: Objects related to events in Massachusetts history, including Revolutionary currency, Revere engraving plates; guns, drums, and military accoutrements; time capsules; commemorative items.
OTHER STATE RECORDS

The Archives often has detailed information on records available through the office creating them--nonarchival record series, current files of series already held at the Archives, and other archival series not yet transferred, including those of the following agencies: CAMPAIGN FINANCE. ELDER AFFAIRS. ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS--Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act Unit; Massachusetts Water Resources Authority; Dept. of Environmental Protection: water supply, water pollution, waste water management; Dept. of Environmental Management: forests and parks. HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES--Dept. of Social Services: foster home/adoption case files. MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION. TRANSPORTATION AND CONSTRUCTION--Massachusetts Turnpike Authority.

LOCAL RECORDS

In addition to vital records, charters, valuation lists, and other local governmental materials noted above as state records, the Archives has records of the Essex, Hampden, Middlesex, and Worcester county commissioners, record books of the Suffolk County Registry of Deeds (1689-Feb. 1800), the debtors/criminal calendars of the Suffolk County (Charles Street) Jail, and case files of the Middlesex County Training School. The Archives also monitors and maintains generic and some specific descriptions of holdings of municipal clerks; local conservation, historic district, and historical commissions; sheriffs; and registers of deeds.

PRIVATE RECORDS

Although only incidentally acquired by the Archives, privately created collections include personal papers of governors Oliver Ames and Eugene Foss; miscellaneous military documents; architectural plans; and photographs relating to wars and other historical events, and of state officials and institutions.

GUIDES


List of holdings by agency, with agency code/name, record series no./title, span dates, and reference to RLIN series description. RLIN record series descriptions and related agency histories are available in printout form or by search of the RLIN database online by agency, series title/title keyword, or topic. Available for consultation onsite.

Specialized guides to materials relating to the built environment, Eastern Lands, family history, social welfare; colonial and Revolutionary records; John Adams and George Washington documents. Available for consultation onsite, and in most cases printed for distribution on request.

FINDING AIDS

Lists of file folder headings or container contents accompany many series descriptions. There are also card files and/or databases indexing parts of the Massachusetts Archives Collection and holdings of photographs, maps and plans, architectural/building inspection plans, and gubernatorial correspondence.

PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIALS


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