

# Supreme Judicial Court Archives

Repository:  
Massachusetts Archives  
220 Morrissey Blvd  
Boston, MA 02125

Reviewed 2020-10-9

**Record Group List:**

- [Court of Common Pleas \(CCP\)](#)
- [County Court \(COU\)](#)
- [District and Police Courts \(DIS\)](#)
- [Court of General Sessions of the Peace \(GEN\)](#)
- [Probate Court \(PRO\)](#)
- [Superior Court \(SUP\)](#)
- [Supreme Judicial Court \(SJC\)](#)

## **Record Series Definitions:**

A judicial record is a precise history of a suit from commencement to termination, including conclusion of law. The records of all courts are organized into three basic series: dockets, record books, and file papers.

Dockets list all cases by term of court in the form of brief chronological entries summarizing the court proceedings. The docket entries are assigned by the clerk in a numerical sequence; however, in general, if a case is continued for additional terms, it is given a lower number each time it is continued to another term or year. The docket entry will indicate if the case has been continued to another term or if it was decided. If the case has been decided, the judgement will be noted. Notations may also include information about attorneys in the case or executions issued on the judgement in the original case. Docket books will also reference the court name, year, and term as well as the justices who sat for that term. A list of jurors called for the term is frequently given at the beginning of each term. Entries can be civil or criminal cases, petitions (e.g., naturalizations, admission to the bar, requests for special action by the court) or court business (e.g., payment of bills).

Record books, or extended records, provide narrative summaries of cases and are, for some courts, the only indexed series. Record book indices are typically in individual volumes, often covering only a single year; there is often not a cumulative index and they may not include any cross-references to docket number. Record books contain court name, year, and term; names of the justices sitting for the term; and a summary of each case as it is completed for the term. A case summary contains such information as the names, residences, and occupations of the plaintiff and the defendant; the type of action (civil) or crime (criminal); the type of damages sought; and a summary of the case and the year the case was begun and when it was decided.

File papers consist of all documents submitted in cases, usually filed together by case under a single docket number in the term the case was finished. A civil case will typically include at least three documents: a writ (filed by the plaintiff or his representative to initiate action in the case); a promissory note, a bond, or an account; and the costs of court. Additional documentation can include depositions, lawyer's appearance slips, receipts, pleadings, exceptions, and a copy of the judgement in the case. File papers for criminal cases can include an indictment, information, or complaint against the alleged perpetrator; a summons for the alleged victim and/or witnesses; a bill of costs for the sheriff or constable to serve the warrant; and a bill for court attendance and the travel costs for witnesses. Probate files may include wills, inventories, accounts, claims, petitions, administrations, and lists of heirs. Naturalization files may include declarations of intention and petitions for naturalization.

## **Record Group Descriptions:**

**Record Group Number: CCP**

**Record Group Name: Court of Common Pleas**

### **Historical Note:**

As defined in St 1699-1700 c 2, Courts of Common Pleas heard civil cases in each county for actions valuing at least forty shillings, with lesser disputes brought before a justice of the peace. The governor and council appointed four judges, who sat at quarterly sessions as determined by the legislature. These sittings typically coincided with those for courts of general sessions of the peace. Rulings could be appealed to the Superior Court of Judicature, later the Supreme Judicial Court, in the same county. Courts of common pleas received the criminal powers and duties of courts of general sessions of the peace intermittently throughout the early nineteenth century. The responsibilities were permanently transferred through St 1827 c 77, with courts of common pleas continuing to hear both civil and criminal cases until the creation of the Superior Court in 1859.

Record series are organized by county and include dockets, record books, and file papers.

### **Related Series:**

#### **Berkshire County Court of Common Pleas, Dockets, 1795-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.BE/001  
Extent: 2.25 linear feet (22 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

#### **Berkshire County Court of Common Pleas, Record books, 1761-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.BE/002  
Extent: 20.5 linear feet (89 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

#### **Berkshire County Court of Common Pleas, File papers, 1797-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.BE/003  
Extent: 165.5 cubic feet (149 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged by file type and in loose chronological order.

#### **Bristol County Court of Common Pleas, Dockets, 1720-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.BR/001  
Extent: 8 linear feet (8 volumes, 5 document boxes, and 4 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

#### **Bristol County Court of Common Pleas, Record books, 1696-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.BR/002  
Extent: 14.5 linear feet (56 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Bristol County Court of Common Pleas, File papers, 1694-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.BR/003  
Extent: 153.5 cubic feet (64 document boxes and 112 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by file type.

**Dukes County Court of Common Pleas, Dockets, 1730-1839.**

Identifier: CCP.DU/001  
Extent: 0.5 cubic foot (1 document box)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Dukes County Court of Common Pleas, Record books, 1722-1839.**

Identifier: CCP.DU/002  
Extent: 1 cubic foot (2 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Dukes County Court of Common Pleas, File papers, 1681-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.DU/003  
Extent: 1.5 cubic feet (3 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Essex County Court of Common Pleas, Dockets, 1721-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.ES/001  
Extent: 16 linear feet (84 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Essex County Court of Common Pleas, Record books, 1680-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.ES/002  
Extent: 21 linear feet (111 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Essex County Court of Common Pleas, File papers, 1672-1820.**

Identifier: CCP.ES/003  
Extent: 126 cubic feet (280 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by file type.

**Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, Dockets, 1823-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.FR/001  
Extent: 2.25 linear feet (30 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, Record books, 1812-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.FR/002  
Extent: 6 linear feet (23 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, File papers, 1812-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.FR/003  
Extent: 64.5 cubic feet (58 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampden County Court of Common Pleas, Dockets, 1812-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.HP/001  
Extent: 7.75 cubic feet (7 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampden County Court of Common Pleas, Record books, 1812-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.HP/002  
Extent: 10.25 linear feet (37 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampden County Court of Common Pleas, File papers, 1812-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.HP/003  
Extent: 47.75 cubic feet (43 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged by file type and in loose chronological order.

**Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Dockets, 1810-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.HS/001  
Extent: 2.25 linear feet (12 volumes and 1 document box)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Record books, 1797-1853.**

Identifier: CCP.HS/002  
Extent: 9 linear feet (33 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, File papers, 1712-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.HS/003  
Extent: 150 cubic feet (135 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Middlesex County Court of Common Pleas, Dockets, 1721-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.MI/001  
Extent: 21 cubic feet (165 volumes in 19 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Middlesex County Court of Common Pleas, Record books, 1699-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.MI/002  
Extent: 27.25 linear feet (140 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Middlesex County Court of Common Pleas, File papers, 1738-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.MI/003  
Extent: 245.5 cubic feet (5 document boxes and 219 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by file type.

**Norfolk County Court of Common Pleas, Dockets, 1798-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.NO/001  
Extent: 18 linear feet (58 volumes and 9 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Norfolk County Court of Common Pleas, Record books, 1798-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.NO/002  
Extent: 13.75 linear feet (67 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Norfolk County Court of Common Pleas, File papers, 1790-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.NO/003  
Extent: 95.5 cubic feet (86 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by file type.

**Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, Dockets, 1812-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.PL/001  
Extent: 5 linear feet (35 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, File papers, 1798-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.PL/003  
Extent: 67.75 cubic feet (12 document boxes and 56 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged in loose chronological order.

**Suffolk County Court of Common Pleas, Dockets, 1720-1855.**

Identifier: CCP.SU/001  
Extent: 40 linear feet (328 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Suffolk County Court of Common Pleas, Record books, 1692-1855.**

Identifier: CCP.SU/002  
Extent: 68.25 linear feet (256 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Suffolk County Court of Common Pleas, File papers, 1686-1855.**

Identifier: CCP.SU/003  
Extent: 582.5 cubic feet (483 document boxes and 329 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Worcester County Court of Common Pleas, Dockets, 1777-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.WO/001  
Extent: 35.75 cubic feet (64 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Worcester County Court of Common Pleas, Record books, 1731-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.WO/002  
Extent: 30.75 linear feet (141 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Worcester County Court of Common Pleas, File papers, 1731-1859.**

Identifier: CCP.WO/003  
Extent: 237.75 cubic feet (214 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by file type.

[Back to Top](#)

## **Record Group Number: COU**

### **Record Group Name: County Court**

#### **Historical Note:**

Inferior quarter courts were established in 1636 at Ipswich, Salem, Newtown (Cambridge), and Boston. When counties were created through CL 1643, these became the county courts of Essex, (Old) Norfolk, Middlesex, and Suffolk, respectively. These courts held jurisdiction over civil and criminal business as well as public works with further functions added over time. CL 1647 charged these courts with the care of Native Americans; CL 1657 allowed the courts to record births, marriages, and deaths; and CL 1664 placed the admission of freemen under their oversight. CL 1649 and CL 1685 granted various powers relating to issues of probate. While some probate records may remain in these collections, most have been refiled with the collections of the Probate Courts (PRO). The county courts performed these functions until the founding of the provincial government of Massachusetts Bay in 1692. At that time, their duties were divided between the courts of common pleas for civil business and courts of general sessions of the peace for criminal business and county administration.

Record arrangement and availability depends on the specific county but generally encompass record books and file papers.

#### **Related Series:**

##### **Essex County Court, Record books, 1636-1692.**

Identifier: COU.ES/002  
Extent: 2.5 linear feet (14 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by shire town.

##### **Essex County Court, File papers, 1636-1694.**

Identifier: COU.ES/003  
Extent: 25 cubic feet (55 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Includes Court of Common Pleas files for 1693-1694.

##### **Middlesex County Court, Record books, 1649-1699.**

Identifier: COU.MI/002  
Extent: 1.0 linear foot (8 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Includes Court of Common Pleas records for 1693-1699.

##### **Middlesex County Court File papers, 1649-1737.**

Identifier: COU.MI/003  
Extent: 64.75 cubic feet (19 document boxes and 51 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged by folio.  
Notes: Includes Court of General Sessions of the Peace and the Court of Common Pleas files for 1693-1737; commonly referred to as the Middlesex Folio Collection.



**Old Norfolk County Court, Record books, 1648-1681.**

Identifier: COU.NO/002  
Extent: 0.5 linear foot (4 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Old Norfolk County Court, File papers, 1654-1680.**

Identifier: COU.NO/003  
Extent: 0.5 cubic foot (1 document box)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Suffolk County Court, Record books, 1680-1692.**

Identifier: COU.SU/002  
Extent: 0.5 linear foot (2 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

[Back to Top](#)

**Record Group Number: DIS****Record Group Name: District and Police Courts****Historical Note:**

The first police court in Massachusetts was founded in Boston through St 1822 c 109, this court performed many duties formerly exercised by justices of the peace. This trend spread throughout the Commonwealth, although the exact jurisdiction and administration varied from town to town. St 1858 c 45 called for these courts to oversee minor criminal offenses, and St 1859 c 196 expanded their jurisdiction to hear civil cases where the debt or damage totaled between 20 and 100 dollars. Additionally, naturalization records could be filed with police and district courts from 1885-1906. Police courts began to be replaced with district courts after the creation of the Superior Court in 1859, with all remaining police courts renamed as district courts through the implementation of GL 1921 c 218. This process resulted in the creation of a uniform, state-wide lower court system.

This record group also includes records for the Municipal Court of the Town of Boston. Established through St 1799 c 81, this court originally held criminal jurisdiction over all offenses occurring in Boston. Jurisdiction over minor criminal offenses fell to the lower Boston Police Court after its creation. The higher court was renamed the Municipal Court of the City of Boston through St 1822 c 13. This court served in this role until the implementation of the Superior Court system through St 1859 c 196. Conversely, the present day Boston Municipal Court, created through St 1866 c 279, succeeded the Boston Police Court.

Most of the district and police court records held in this collection refer to naturalizations granted between 1885 and 1906. The main exceptions are Boston Police Court dockets and the Municipal Court of Boston series, which includes dockets, record books, and file papers.

**Related Series:**

**Bristol County Fall River District Court, File papers, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.BR.FRI/003  
Extent: 20 cubic feet (18 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Bristol County New Bedford District Court, File papers, (1847-1854, 1885-1906).**

Identifier: DIS.BR.NBE/003  
Extent: 10.25 cubic feet (1 document box and 9 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Bristol County Taunton District Court, File papers, 1888-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.BR.TAU/003  
Extent: 6 cubic feet (1 document box and 5 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Essex County Amesbury District Court, File papers, 1906.**

Identifier: DIS.ES.AME/003  
Extent: 0.5 cubic foot (1 document box)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Essex County Gloucester District Court, Dockets, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.ES.GLO/001  
Extent: 1.25 linear feet (9 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization dockets.

**Essex County Lawrence Police Court, File papers, (1848-1854, 1885-1906).**

Identifier: DIS.ES.LAW/003  
Extent: 9.25 cubic feet (1 document box, 8 record center cartons, and 1 folder)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files; includes non-naturalization files for 1849.

**Essex County Lynn Police Court, File papers, (1836, 1849, 1906).**

Identifier: DIS.ES.LYN/003  
Extent: 0.5 cubic foot (1 document box and 2 folders)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Includes naturalization files for 1906.

**Essex County Newburyport Police Court, Dockets, 1852-1904.**

Identifier: DIS.ES.NEW/001  
Extent: 1.25 linear feet (5 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged in general chronological order.  
Notes: Includes civil and naturalization dockets.

**Essex County Newburyport Police Court, Record books, 1850-1853.**

Identifier: DIS.ES.NEW/002  
Extent: 0.5 cubic foot (1 document box)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Disbound naturalization records; includes correspondence.

**Essex County Newburyport Police Court, File papers, (1836-1855, 1886-1906).**

Identifier: DIS.ES.NEW/003  
Extent: 2.25 cubic feet (5 document boxes and 4 folders)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Includes naturalization files for 1844-1855 and 1886-1906.

**Essex County Salem Police Court, File papers, 1832-1849.**

Identifier: DIS.ES.SAL/003  
Extent: 0.5 cubic foot (1 document box)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampden County Springfield Police Court, File papers, 1891-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.HP.SPR/003  
Extent: 2.25 cubic feet (2 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged in general chronological order.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Middlesex County Lowell Police Court, File papers, (1840-1861, 1885-1906).**

Identifier: DIS.MI.LOW/003  
Extent: 22.5 cubic feet (1 document box and 20 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by file type.  
Notes: Includes naturalization files for 1840-1854 and 1885-1906.

**Middlesex County Malden District Court, File papers, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.MI.MAL/003  
Extent: 2.25 cubic feet (2 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Middlesex County Marlborough Police Court, File papers, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.MI.MAR/003  
Extent: 1.5 cubic feet (1 document box and 1 record center carton)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Middlesex County Newton Police Court, File papers, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.MI.NEW/003  
Extent: 2.75 cubic feet (6 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Middlesex County Somerville Police Court, Dockets, 1886-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.MI.SOM/001  
Extent: 0.25 linear foot (1 volume)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization dockets.

**Middlesex County Woburn District Court, Dockets, 1894-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.MI.WOB/001  
Extent: 1 cubic foot (1 record center carton)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization dockets.

**Norfolk County Dedham District Court, File papers, 1870-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.NO.DED/003  
Extent: 1 cubic foot (1 record center carton)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Norfolk County Quincy District Court, Dockets, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.NO.QUI/001  
Extent: 2.25 cubic feet (7 volumes in 2 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization dockets.

**Norfolk County Quincy District Court, File papers, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.NO.QUI/003  
Extent: 4.5 cubic feet (4 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Norfolk County Stoughton District Court, File papers, 1891-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.NO.STO/003  
Extent: 1 cubic foot (2 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Norfolk County Wrentham District Court, File papers, 1900-1904.**

Identifier: DIS.NO.WRE/003  
Extent: 0.5 cubic foot (1 document box)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Plymouth County Brockton Police Court, File papers, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.PL.BRO/003  
Extent: 4.75 cubic feet (1 document box and 4 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Suffolk County Boston Police Court, Dockets, 1822-1862.**

Identifier: DIS.SU.BPC/001  
Extent: 25.5 linear feet (101 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by type.

**Suffolk County Municipal Court of Boston, Dockets, 1800-1859.**

Identifier: DIS.SU.MCB/001  
Extent: 13 cubic feet (389 volumes in 28 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Suffolk County Municipal Court of Boston, Record books, 1800-1859.**

Identifier: DIS.SU.MCB/002  
Extent: 41 linear feet (139 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Suffolk County Municipal Court of Boston, File papers, 1799-1859.**

Identifier: DIS.SU.MCB/003  
Extent: 82.75 cubic feet (3 document boxes and 74 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Includes naturalization files for 1816-1859.

**Suffolk County Chelsea Police Court, File papers, 1886-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.SU.CHE/003  
Extent: 2.25 cubic feet (2 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Suffolk County Dorchester District Court, File papers, 1902-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.SU.DOR/003  
Extent: 0.5 cubic foot (1 document box)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Worcester County Clinton District Court, File papers, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.WO.CLI/003  
Extent: 2.25 cubic feet (2 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Worcester County Fitchburg Police Court, Dockets, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.WO.FIT/001  
Extent: 0.25 linear foot (3 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization dockets.

**Worcester County Fitchburg Police Court, File papers, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.WO.FIT/003  
Extent: 5.25 cubic feet (2 document boxes and 4 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Worcester County Southbridge District Court, File papers, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.WO.SOU/003  
Extent: 1.25 cubic feet (3 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Worcester County Westborough District Court, File papers, 1892-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.WO.WES/003  
Extent: 0.5 cubic foot (1 document box)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files.

**Worcester County Worcester District Court, Dockets, 1885-1906.**

Identifier: DIS.WO.WOR/001  
Extent: 0.5 linear foot (2 volumes and 1 document box)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization dockets.

**Worcester County Worcester District Court, File papers, (1851-1855, 1884-1906).**

Identifier: DIS.WO.WOR/003  
Extent: 24.75 linear feet (20 volumes and 11 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Naturalization files; includes Worcester Police Court naturalization files for 1851-1855.

[Back to Top](#)

**Record Group Number: GEN**

**Record Group Name: Court of General Sessions of the Peace**

**Historical Note:**

As defined in St 1699-1700 c 1, Courts of General Sessions of the Peace heard criminal cases and oversaw county administration. The courts were served by justices of the peace appointed by the governor and council. The legislature determined the date and location for quarterly sittings, where the entire bench would preside over criminal jury trials prosecuted by the attorney general. Rulings could be appealed to the Superior Court of Judicature, later the Supreme Judicial Court, to present the case before another jury.

The courts of general sessions of the peace also administered county business proceedings. In this role, judges of general sessions reviewed financial accounts, levied taxes, examined town by-laws, planned highway development, issued liquor licenses, regulated jails, supervised treatment of the poor, and appointed some county officials.

Powers and duties of the courts of general sessions of the peace were repeatedly transferred to the courts of common pleas and restored throughout the early nineteenth century. The courts of general sessions were finally abolished through St 1827 c 77, with all criminal powers transferred to the courts of common pleas and administrative authorities to the county commissioners and commissioners of highways. Suffolk County is an exception: St 1799 c 81 provided criminal jurisdiction over all offenses occurring in Boston to the Municipal Court (of the Town/City) of Boston. Records of this court fall under District and Police Courts (DIS).

Record arrangement and availability depends on the specific county but may include dockets, record books, and file papers.

#### **Related Series:**

##### **Berkshire County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Record books, 1761-1822.**

Identifier: GEN.BE/002  
Extent: 1 linear foot (4 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

##### **Berkshire County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, File papers, 1762-1827.**

Identifier: GEN.BE/003  
Extent: 8.25 cubic feet (1 document box and 7 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

##### **Bristol County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Dockets, 1720-1827.**

Identifier: GEN.BR/001  
Extent: 2.25 cubic feet (5 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

##### **Bristol County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Record books, (1697-1746, 1777-1830).**

Identifier: GEN.BR/002  
Extent: 2.25 linear feet (8 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Includes County Commissioner records for 1828-1830.

##### **Bristol County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, File papers, 1686-1780.**

Identifier: GEN.BR/003  
Extent: 9 cubic feet (20 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Dukes County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Dockets, 1730-1757.**

Identifier: GEN.DU/001  
Extent: 0.25 cubic foot (1 document box)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Dukes County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Record books, (1753-1762, 1798-1837).**

Identifier: GEN.DU/002  
Extent: 0.75 cubic foot (2 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Includes County Commissioner records for 1828-1837.

**Essex County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Dockets, 1812-1832.**

Identifier: GEN.ES/001  
Extent: 0.5 linear foot (2 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Includes County Commissioner dockets for 1828-1832.

**Essex County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Record books, 1692-1868.**

Identifier: GEN.ES/002  
Extent: 3.5 linear feet (20 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Includes County Commissioner records for 1828-1868.

**Essex County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, File papers, 1693-1827.**

Identifier: GEN.ES/003  
Extent: 28.75 cubic feet (64 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Franklin County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Dockets, 1812-1827.**

Identifier: GEN.FR/001  
Extent: 1 microfilm reel  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Franklin County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Record books, 1812-1827.**

Identifier: GEN.FR/002  
Extent: 1 microfilm reel  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Franklin County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, File papers, 1812-1827.**

Identifier: GEN.FR/003  
Extent: 1 cubic foot (1 record center carton)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampden County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, File papers, 1788-1827.**

Identifier: GEN.HP/003  
Extent: 1 cubic foot (1 record center carton)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.



**Hampshire County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Record books, 1693-1726.**

Identifier: GEN.HS/002  
Extent: 0.5 linear foot (3 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampshire County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, File papers, 1721-1827.**

Identifier: GEN.HS/003  
Extent: 14.25 cubic feet (13 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Middlesex County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Record books, 1686-1831.**

Identifier: GEN.MI/002  
Extent: 2.25 linear feet (13 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Includes County Commissioner records for 1828-1831.

**Middlesex County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, File papers, 1737-1827.**

Identifier: GEN.MI/003  
Extent: 24.25 cubic feet (5 document boxes and 20 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Norfolk County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, File papers, 1794-1822.**

Identifier: GEN.NO/003  
Extent: 2.25 cubic feet (2 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Plymouth County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, File papers, 1800-1801.**

Identifier: GEN.PL/003  
Extent: 0.5 cubic foot (1 document box)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Suffolk County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Dockets, 1737-1809.**

Identifier: GEN.SU/001  
Extent: 0.75 cubic foot (2 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Suffolk County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Record books, (1702-1732, 1796-1807).**

Identifier: GEN.SU/002  
Extent: 1.75 linear feet (8 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Suffolk County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, File papers, 1707-1778.**

Identifier: GEN.SU/003  
Extent: 1.25 cubic feet (3 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Worcester County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Dockets, 1777-1812.**

Identifier: GEN.WO/001  
Extent: 5.75 cubic feet (13 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Worcester County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, Record books, 1731-1827.**

Identifier: GEN.WO/002  
Extent: 1.75 linear feet (8 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Worcester County Court of General Sessions of the Peace, File papers, 1776-1827.**

Identifier: GEN.WO/003  
Extent: 13.5 cubic feet (3 document boxes and 11 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

[Back to Top](#)

**Record Group Number: PRO**  
**Record Group Name: Probate Court**

**Historical Note:**

Probate courts were established through St 1783 c 46, overseeing the probate of wills, estate administration, guardianship of minors and the infirm, and the examination of those entrusted with these responsibilities. Over time, the jurisdiction of the probate courts was expanded to include trusts through St 1818 c 190, changes of name through St 1851 c 256, adoptions through St 1851 c 324, insolvency through St 1858 c 93, and conservatorships for the elderly and the mentally ill through St 1898 c 527 and St 1901 c 125, respectively. Additionally, St 1887 c 332 allowed married women to petition for their own separate estates and probate courts were granted jurisdiction over divorce cases through St 1922 c 542. Throughout the years, the functions of the probate court have focused on issues of equity as it has increased its influence as an authority of domestic affairs.

Prior to the established of probate courts, the General Court ordered records be kept of all wills, administrations, and inventories through CL 1639. Furthermore, under CL 1649, the executor of a will was required to record the will with the clerk of the appropriate county court at its next session. A period of at least thirty days was then allowed for taking a complete inventory of the testator's estate. The county court was also authorized to divide an intestate man's estate among the widow and children. Through CL 1685, the General Court empowered the county courts to hear all complaints from legatees and creditors against any executor who withheld debts due from the testator's estate and to summon the executor to make an account before the court. The county courts were also authorized to hear all cases relating to wills and administrations, allowing the aggrieved party the right of appeal to the Court of Assistants. The judiciary was reorganized under the charter of 1692, and the Governor and Council became designated the Supreme Ordinary of Probate.

While some probate records may remain in the County Courts collections (COU), most have been refiled with the collections of the Probate Courts. The record series defined below reflect the probate records physically housed in the Massachusetts Archives. Other series

may be located in offsite storage. A large number of historical probate records have been digitized and are available to view online. Please see [this directory of probate record availability](#).

#### **Related Series:**

##### **Middlesex County Probate Court, Dockets, 1648-1871.**

Identifier: PRO.MI/001  
Extent: 8.5 linear feet (38 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged by docket number.

##### **Middlesex County Probate Court, File papers, 1648-1871.**

Identifier: PRO.MI/003  
Extent: 344.25 cubic feet (765 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged by docket number.

##### **Suffolk County Probate Court, Dockets, 1636-1910.**

Identifier: PRO.SU/001  
Extent: 17 linear feet (76 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged by docket number.

##### **Suffolk County Probate Court, File papers, 1871-1910.**

Identifier: PRO.SU/003  
Extent: 419 cubic feet (931 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged by docket number.

[Back to Top](#)

## **Record Group Number: SUP**

## **Record Group Name: Superior Court**

#### **Historical Note:**

The state-wide Superior Court system was established through St 1859 c 196, holding the same powers and jurisdiction as the Supreme Judicial Court. The statute called for civil and criminal business to be separated into exclusive court terms and recognized the necessity of having two or more sessions in the same county. As defined through St 1860 c 114, the Superior Court's civil jurisdiction concerned all civil actions not exclusive to the Supreme Judicial Court, police courts, or justices of the peace, although it could hear appeals from lower courts on these matters. Through St 1891 c 379, the Superior Court's criminal jurisdiction was expanded to include exclusive original jurisdiction over capital crimes, an area which was previously reserved for the Supreme Judicial Court alone. An appellate division of the Superior Court was established through St 1943 c 558 to review certain sentences in criminal cases.

Most court records held at the Massachusetts Archives predate 1860, but the collection does include Superior Court cases of historic significance. Record series for *Commonwealth v. Sacco and Vanzetti* through the Norfolk County Superior Court are defined below. For details about this case, please see [The Case of Sacco & Vanzetti](#).

In addition to case files, or file papers, record series include exhibits submitted by the Commonwealth and the defense, administrative records generated and maintained by the Clerk's Office during the course of the trials, and notes and correspondence held by the District Attorney's Office of Norfolk County.

**Related Series:**

**Norfolk County Superior Court, *Commonwealth v. Sacco and Vanzetti*.**

Identifier: SUP.NO/001  
Extent: 13.5 cubic feet (28 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged by sub-series. (See below.)

**Norfolk County Superior Court, *Commonwealth v. Sacco and Vanzetti*, Case files.**

Identifier: SUP.NO/001.001  
Extent: 4 cubic feet (9 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged by file number.

**Norfolk County Superior Court, *Commonwealth v. Sacco and Vanzetti*, Exhibits.**

Identifier: SUP.NO/001.002  
Extent: 4.5 cubic feet (8 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged by exhibit type and number.

**Norfolk County Superior Court, *Commonwealth v. Sacco and Vanzetti*, Clerk of Courts.**

Identifier: SUP.NO/001.003  
Extent: 2.25 cubic feet (5 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by file type.

**Norfolk County Superior Court, *Commonwealth v. Sacco and Vanzetti*, District Attorney.**

Identifier: SUP.NO/001.004  
Extent: 2.75 cubic feet (6 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by file type.

[Back to Top](#)

**Record Group Number: SJC**

**Record Group Name: Supreme Judicial Court**

**Historical Note:**

St 1780 c 17 established the Supreme Judicial Court under the Judiciary branch of government as the Commonwealth's general trial court, succeeding the Superior Court of Judicature. St 1782 c 9 defined its jurisdiction over appeals, pleas, capital offenses, and crimes against the public good. The governor and council also transferred jurisdiction over divorce cases through St 1785 c 69. The court maintained these powers until the Superior Court began hearing divorces in 1887. The Supreme Judicial Court served as a circuit court, sitting in each county as defined by the legislature. The governor and council originally selected four justices and a chief justice to serve on the bench, with the number of justices

increasing to six through St 1799 c 82. The Supreme Judicial Court sat in two sessions as defined through St 1804 c 105. Sittings with at least three justices would address capital offenses, appeals, and all issues in law. Single justice sittings could hear cases that had not been tried in the inferior courts of common pleas and general sessions of the peace, reviewed by the full court as needed. The appellate nature of the court was reinforced with the creation of the Superior Court through St 1859 c 196, which held the same powers and jurisdiction as the Supreme Judicial Court. St 1860 c 112 designated the Supreme Judicial Court for the Commonwealth, allowing appeals to be heard from all the counties under a single body.

The Supreme Judicial Court can be traced directly from the Superior Court of Judicature established in 1692 through St 1692-3 c 33. While this act was disallowed by the English Privy Council, the court continued to act in this capacity, and the Massachusetts legislature officially established the Superior Court of Judicature, Court of Assize and General Gaol Delivery through St 1699-1700 c 3. The court held jurisdiction over all pleas involving real or personal property, pleas to which the English Crown was a party, and all matters relating to conservation of the peace and punishment of offenders.

Record series are organized by county and include dockets, record books, and file papers.

#### **Related Series:**

##### **Berkshire County Supreme Judicial Court, Dockets, (1797-1815, 1832-1958).**

Identifier: SJC.BE/001  
Extent: 2.5 linear feet (23 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by docket type.

##### **Berkshire County Supreme Judicial Court, Record books, 1797-1955.**

Identifier: SJC.BE/002  
Extent: 5 linear feet (24 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

##### **Bristol County Supreme Judicial Court, Dockets, 1797-1918.**

Identifier: SJC.BR/001  
Extent: 5.5 cubic feet (1 volume, 5 document boxes, and 3 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

##### **Bristol County Supreme Judicial Court, Record books, 1797-1906.**

Identifier: SJC.BR/002  
Extent: 6 linear feet (29 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

##### **Bristol County Supreme Judicial Court, File papers, 1796-1860.**

Identifier: SJC.BR/003  
Extent: 28.5 cubic feet (26 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Essex County Supreme Judicial Court, Dockets, 1819-1918.**

Identifier: SJC.ES/001  
Extent: 2.5 linear feet (12 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Essex County Supreme Judicial Court, Record books, 1797-1930.**

Identifier: SJC.ES/002  
Extent: 9.5 linear feet (39 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Essex County Supreme Judicial Court, File papers, 1695-1871.**

Identifier: SJC.ES/003  
Extent: 3.25 cubic feet (7 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.  
Notes: Includes naturalization files for 1870-1871.

**Franklin County Supreme Judicial Court, Dockets, 1816-1953.**

Identifier: SJC.FR/001  
Extent: 1.75 linear feet (16 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Franklin County Supreme Judicial Court, Record books, 1816-1953.**

Identifier: SJC.FR/002  
Extent: 3.5 linear feet (16 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Franklin County Supreme Judicial Court, File papers, 1816-1863.**

Identifier: SJC.FR/003  
Extent: 11 cubic feet (10 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampden County Supreme Judicial Court, Dockets, 1816-1886.**

Identifier: SJC.HP/001  
Extent: 4.5 cubic feet (139 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampden County Supreme Judicial Court, Record books, 1816-1952.**

Identifier: SJC.HP/002  
Extent: 5.75 linear feet (19 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampden County Supreme Judicial Court, File papers, 1816-1859.**

Identifier: SJC.HP/003  
Extent: 11 cubic feet (10 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampshire County Supreme Judicial Court, Dockets, 1807-1900.**

Identifier: SJC.HS/001  
Extent: 2.5 linear feet (21 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampshire County Supreme Judicial Court, Record books, 1797-1954.**

Identifier: SJC.HS/002  
Extent: 3.5 linear feet (18 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Hampshire County Supreme Judicial Court, File papers, 1797-1861.**

Identifier: SJC.HS/003  
Extent: 17 cubic feet (1 document box and 15 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Middlesex County Supreme Judicial Court, Dockets, 1852-1921.**

Identifier: SJC.MI/001  
Extent: 8.75 cubic feet (53 volumes in 8 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Middlesex County Supreme Judicial Court, Record books, 1797-1920.**

Identifier: SJC.MI/002  
Extent: 8 linear feet (44 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Middlesex County Supreme Judicial Court, File papers, 1797-1859.**

Identifier: SJC.MI/003  
Extent: 56.5 cubic feet (1 document box and 51 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by file type.

**Nantucket County Supreme Judicial Court, File papers, 1828-1933.**

Identifier: SJC.NA/003  
Extent: 2.25 cubic feet (5 document boxes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Norfolk County Supreme Judicial Court, Dockets, 1798-1891.**

Identifier: SJC.NO/001  
Extent: 6 linear feet (27 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Norfolk County Supreme Judicial Court, Record books, 1798-1952.**

Identifier: SJC.NO/002  
Extent: 5 linear feet (26 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Norfolk County Supreme Judicial Court, File papers, 1796-1862.**

Identifier: SJC.NO/003  
Extent: 21 cubic feet (19 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Plymouth County Supreme Judicial Court, Dockets, 1813-1917.**

Identifier: SJC.PL/001  
Extent: 4.25 linear feet (21 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Plymouth County Supreme Judicial Court, Record books, 1798-1936.**

Identifier: SJC.PL/002  
Extent: 4.25 linear feet (16 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Plymouth County Supreme Judicial Court, File papers, 1811-1931.**

Identifier: SJC.PL/003  
Extent: 17.5 cubic feet (16 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Suffolk County Supreme Judicial Court, Dockets, 1702-1918.**

Identifier: SJC.SU/001  
Extent: 51.25 linear feet (353 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by type.  
Notes: Includes minute books of the Superior Court of Judicature.

**Suffolk County Supreme Judicial Court, Record books, 1686-1949.**

Identifier: SJC.SU/002  
Extent: 110 linear feet (494 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by type.  
Notes: Includes records of the Superior Court of Judicature and Special Courts.

**Suffolk County Supreme Judicial Court, File papers, 1629-1885.**

Identifier: SJC.SU/003  
Extent: 576.5 linear feet (1382 volumes, 13 document boxes, and 215 record center cartons)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically and by type.  
Notes: Includes records of the Superior Court of Judicature and the Court of Assistants; commonly referred to as the Suffolk Files collection.

**Worcester County Supreme Judicial Court, Dockets, 1797-1961.**

Identifier: SJC.WO/001  
Extent: 7.75 linear feet (166 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

**Worcester County Supreme Judicial Court, Record books, 1797-1913.**

Identifier: SJC.WO/002  
Extent: 5.75 linear feet (23 volumes)  
Arranged: Arranged chronologically.



**Worcester County Supreme Judicial Court, File papers, (1797-1886, 1901-1931).**

Identifier: SJC.WO/003

Extent: 60.5 cubic feet (55 record center cartons)

Arranged: Arranged chronologically.

[Back to Top](#)