



Newport Historical Society

Guide to the Collection of Music, circa 1643 – 1975

Newport Historical Society
82 Touro Street
Newport, Rhode Island 02840
(401) 846-0813
www.newporthistory.org

Descriptive Summary

<i>Collection Identifier</i>	MS.089
<i>Title</i>	Collection of Music
<i>Creator</i>	Newport Historical Society
<i>Date</i>	circa 1643 – 1975
<i>Extent</i>	97 items in 3 boxes and two volumes
<i>Language</i>	Material is predominantly in English, with some items in French or German.

Historical Note

This collection covers a large range of musical styles, notational format, and publishing methods beginning with examples early musical notation. Initially, music of the Western World was largely transmitted orally and remembered with varying accuracy, eventually sparking attempts to create a more cohesive, reliable form of written notation (Boorman). The resulting system, largely dated to the 1100s, used four lines and stemless notes whose shapes, fill, and relation to surrounding notes indicated their value. The two oldest pages of music in the Newport Historical Society's collection, with hand copied and colored Latin and Germanic text, are fragments of larger, bound collections of religious psalms and service music including the Marian hymn, *Regina Coeli*, of the Catholic Church. While religious in nature, these pieces, most likely produced in Europe, are quite different from early American pieces of the collection which initially feature simpler melodies and vernacular texts.

Particularly in the New England region, many religious groups settling in the colonies sought simplicity in their theology and religious practices in reaction to the opulence and ritual of the Catholic Church and Church of England. For music, this meant a turn away from the grand, heavily instrumented, and multipart music common to Catholic and Anglican Churches and toward more participative, Biblically based music (Ogasapian, 29-30). Originally, these colonial religions paired psalm texts directly from the Bible with common melodies of well-known, simplified religious themes or even secular, regional tunes. These psalms and hymns were sung initially by the entire congregation in unison without regard to rhyme or precise pitch. Believing the Bible to be the perfect word of God, music was approached as another tool through which to express God's works and being simply and honestly, not something to be studied or embellished. However, the varying interpretations and abilities of community members – and the resulting cacophony – caused religious leaders of many denominations to rethink these views, sparking stronger appreciation for music education, practice, lyrical adaptation, and new forms of musical notation.

Having developed relatively independently of European influences, musicians and composers seeking a unique American sound after the Revolutionary War often returned to these religious roots, expanding psalms and hymns with instrumental lines and adaptations and resetting melodies for trained, multipart choirs (Tawa, 31-43). The collection's Singers Assistant and Federal period musical books are excellent examples of this trend, containing both simple transcriptions of religious and regional themes and single parts of American composers' expansions of vernacular melodies. With sacred roots, these items display the growing appreciation for music as a form of cultural – not only religious – expression.

A majority of the collection dates from 1838 to the mid-1900s, Newport's Gilded Age of grand hotels, boarding houses, and summer entertainment. By this time, the publishing industry was well established in the United States, with successful music publishing companies from Boston and New York to Detroit and Dallas. While these major publishing houses produced larger choral and instrumental works and classically known pieces, minor publishing houses produced pieces primarily for personal use and entertainment (Boorman). In the case of the Newport Historical Society's collection, pieces are overwhelmingly arranged for piano alone or single voice accompanied by piano. These songs captured and condensed the sound of bands, orchestras, and other visiting musical groups for whom Newport was a regular performance venue. Not do such pieces cover a wide variety of dance forms and genres – polkas, redowas, mazurkas, waltzes – but they often feature sights, figures, and events around Newport in dedications, titles, and cover images, appropriating music into another type of souvenir.

The collection also illustrates the use of music to express patriotic and political sentiments.

Spanning a number of American conflicts, the collection contains pieces commemorating figures of the Revolutionary War and events of the American Civil War. Later pieces of the collection display state and national pride, particularly songs published during the period surrounding both World Wars and pieces donated by Rhode Island composer, Nathan Kaye, commemorating the American Bicentennial in 1976. Conveying appreciation for local patriots, some pieces are dedicated to commanders and other servicemen of the Newport Naval Training Station.

Of course, the collection includes evidence of larger public performances, containing full and condensed scores and programs of musical events in the region. Scores edited and published by the Musical Antiquarian Society, both bound and loose, serve not only as useable arrangements of well and lesser known chorales and instrumental works, but as a record of the society, listing officers, yearly published works, and extensive arrangement notes. More specifically tied to Newport, the collection includes a program from the second Newport Music Festival, containing artist descriptions and numerous advertisements from businesses throughout the state.

In all, the collection illustrates major developments in American music history as well as the religious, national, and cultural roles music has played locally in Newport, Rhode Island.

References:

- Boorman, Stanley, et al. "Printing and publishing of music." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. Accessed July 17, 2013.
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40101pg1>.
- Ogasapian, John. *Music of the Colonial and Revolutionary Era*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004.
- Tawa, Nicholas E. *From Psalm to Symphony: A History of Music in New England*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001.

Scope and Content

Written and printed music, most of which relates to Newport, Rhode Island, and New England more broadly. Collection contains pages of sacred chant manuscripts, printed and handwritten collections of hymns, psalms, and musical exercises, and printed books of multipart choral pieces. It also contains full and condensed musical scores and programs from regional musical events. Sheet music meant for piano or accompanied voice makes up the majority of the collection, much of which features Newport sights and sounds in musical themes and cover artwork.

Organization

The Newport Historical Society Music Collection is organized into one series:

I. Music, 1643-1975, undated

The series is separated into three boxes of sheet music, scores, and music books. Within each box, folders are organized chronologically. Materials are arranged in folders chronologically by date of publication with undated material appearing last.

Subject Access

Organizations Newport Historical Society

Form/Genre hymnals
music (performing arts)
sheet music
scores
songbooks
songs (documents)

Access and Use

Physical Access This collection is housed on site at the Newport Historical Society.
Researchers can be seen by appointment during operating hours.

Reproduction & Use NHS allows monitored personal photography of manuscript and artifact collections for research use only, with some limitations and restrictions. Fees apply. See our Personal Photography Policy and Agreement for more details.

NHS also offers digital scans of collections material for educational, commercial or personal use. Fees apply.

Personal photography or purchase of digital prints and scans does not imply permission to reproduce or publish these materials. Images from the NHS collections may be reproduced only with written consent of the Newport Historical Society. Permission is granted for one time, non-exclusive use only. All subsequent and additional use requests must be made in writing.

We reserve the right to restrict photography of copyrighted, culturally sensitive or physically endangered materials.

Citation Collection of Music, MS.o89, Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island

Administrative Information

Processor Processed by Renee L. Erb.

Descriptive Rules Finding aid based on *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS)

Processing Note This open collection has been added to with little provenance record keeping. 3 pieces of sheet music donated by Natalie Nicholson (2000.6) were interfiled in this collection. They are each marked on the back with the accession number in light pencil.

The collection is fully processed with a finding aid and inventory, but has only been partially entered into the database.

Accession Info FIC.2013; 2000.6; 1854.6

Inventory