



Newport Historical Society

Guide to the John Clarke Trust records, 1650 – 1976

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Descriptive Summary

<i>Collection Identifier</i>	MS.088
<i>Title</i>	John Clarke Trust records
<i>Creator</i>	John Clarke Trust
<i>Date</i>	1650 – 1976 (bulk 1650 – 1959)
<i>Extent</i>	2.5 linear feet (5 boxes)
<i>Language</i>	Material is in English.
<i>Abstract</i>	This collection contains legal documents, rent agreements, nomination forms, bills, receipts, correspondence, account books, balance sheets, newspaper articles, and pamphlets dating from 1650 to 1976. The material documents the establishment and management of the John Clarke Trust, the oldest perpetual charitable trust in the United States of America.

Historical Note

The John Clarke Trust was created in 1676, per the stipulations of John Clarke's will, and is the oldest perpetual charitable trust in the United States of America. John Clarke (1609-1676) was a founding member of the First Baptist Church in Newport, Rhode Island; a prominent local physician; and a key participant in the formation of the Rhode Island's Royal Charter of 1663. His will dictated that three appointed trustees would regulate his estate upon his death, including the Applegate Neck property and a farm later named Charity Farm. The revenue from the land would be donated to charity, with an emphasis on the poor and undereducated children of Aquidneck Island. The first three trustees of the charitable trust were William Weeden, Richard Baily, and Philip Smith, who were also tasked with executing other demands of Clarke's will. These included: the transfer of money to indicated relatives; the donation of a southeast tract of land to his congregation; ongoing financial aid to his wife Sarah; and the setting of any debts or mortgages, including one to Richard Deane.

Upon the death of a trustee, they were replaced by an assignee nominated by the other two trustees. Complications arose concerning the completion of this practice when Edward Smith replaced Henry Tew in 1718 and implied that William Weeden, a relative of the original trustee of the same name, was mismanaging the trust's funds. Smith declared to the Town Council that William Weeden and the third trustee, Thomas Olney, were undercharging Jeremiah Weeden, the current tenant on the farm, for rent due to his familial status with William Weeden. William Weeden was further assisting Jeremiah Weeden by supplying revenue from the estate for the management of the farm instead of directly donating it to charity.

The Town Council attempted to replace the neglectful trustees after the 1719 "Act for Enabling and Impowering the Town Councils within this Colony to Redress and Punish all Frauds Breaches of Trust and Mismanagement of Persons Entrusted with Estates Given to Charitable Use" was implemented by the General Assembly. The three new assignees, John Wanton, John Rogers, and Philip Peckham, were later removed when the portion of the act that gave the council power to appoint new trustees was repealed in 1721. Instead, William Weeden and Edward Smith were reinstated, along with William Peckham.

After the legal battle, the trust underwent a shift in its charitable endeavors, including fulfilling its intended task of donating money to the poor and to educate children. Other monetary activities included financing the First Baptist Church elder's position, as well as supporting the erection of a charity house in Newport. It also meticulously logged all financial records relating to the farm's revenue and the donations, which were then reviewed by the Newport Town Council. After Middletown's split from Newport in 1743, the task of regulating the funds of the trust was transferred to the Middletown Town Council. The John Clarke Trust collection includes many of these account books.

In 1813, the Rhode Island Supreme Court deemed the Charity Farm taxable after a legal dispute arose in 1812 between Augustus Peckham and Henry Peckham. The trust continued to rent out parcels of the land up until

the mid-twentieth century. Over the years, the trust expanded its donations to include the aid of the Rhode Island Baptist Education Society and individual collegiate pursuits. By the 1950s, the John Clarke Trust shifted from private tenants to selling off land, which allowed for more money to be invested and bestowed on philanthropy.

Sources:

- Asher, Louis Franklin. John Clarke (1609-1676): Pioneer in American Medicine, Democratic Ideals, and Champion of Religious Liberty. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Dorrance Publications Co., 1997.
- Hanley, Alexis. "A Brief History of Charity Farms." Senior internship thesis, Salve Regina University, 2009.
- James, Sydney V. John Clarke and his Legacies: Religion and Law in Colonial Rhode Island 1638-1750. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.

Scope and Content

This collection contains legal documents, rent agreements, nomination forms, bills, receipts, correspondence, account books, balance sheets, newspaper articles, and pamphlets pertaining to the establishment and management of the John Clarke Trust. Due to an extended period of time between the two major acquisitions of materials for the collection, and the pre-existing and longstanding arrangement of the earlier donation, the collection maintains a distinction between the two acquisitions. Series 1 contains the earlier acquisition, which was partially gifted by David F. Easterbrooks, a trustee of the trust in the 1920s. Series 2 through 5 contain a 2018 acquisition, donated by the John Clarke Trust.

The earliest records in Series 1 generally concern the adequacy of the completion of John Clarke's wishes within his will and the legal struggles that arose during their implementation. The bulk of this portion of the collection was generated around two major events: John Clarke's death in 1676 and the government examination of the trustees' management of the estate from 1700-1718. This section also includes many of the articles of appointment for new trustees. There are also a few documents created during John Clarke's lifetime, which refer to more private endeavors.

The more current records in Series 2 through 5 include financial receipts and logs of the management of the John Clarke Trust's estate from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. There are invoices for work done on the farms, as well as personal receipts from private individuals receiving charitable aid. Additionally, the collection contains published material elaborating upon John Clarke and his trust, including a pamphlet and newspaper articles.

Organization

This collection is arranged into five series:

1. Trust establishment and early records management
2. Financial records
3. Legal records
4. Communications and trust history
5. Secondary sources and notes

Subject Access

People

Bailey, Richard, d. 1678
Burke, John C., 1865-1966
Clarke, George W., fl. 1940s
Clarke, John, 1609-1676
Dennis, Robert, 1788-1867
Easterbrooks, David F., 1867-1965
Greene, Augustus G., 1819-1907
Lyndon, Josias, 1704-1778
Olney, Thomas, 1632-1722
Peckham, Samuel S., 1792-1870
Peckham, William, 1647-1734
Peckham, William, 1675-1764
Pyott, Thomas
Rodman L. Chaplin, fl. 1940s
Smith, Philip, 1634-1700
Ward, Thomas, 1641-1689
Weeden, Jeremiah
Weeden, William, 1619-1676
Weeden, William, d. 1734

Organizations

A. & H.G. Hammett
Aquidneck National Bank
Barker Bros. & Co.
Charity Farm
John Clarke Trust
Rhode Island Hospital National Bank

<i>Form/Genre</i>	<p>estate inventories</p> <p>balance sheets</p> <p>ledgers (account books)</p> <p>indentures</p> <p>agreements</p> <p>rent</p> <p>trust receipts</p> <p>commercial correspondence</p> <p>personal correspondence</p> <p>clippings (information artifacts)</p> <p>booklets</p>
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Access and Use

<i>Physical Access</i>	<p>This collection is housed on site at the Newport Historical Society. Researchers can be seen by appointment during operating hours.</p>
<i>Reproduction & Use</i>	<p>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.</p> <p>NHS also offers digital scans of collections material for educational, commercial or personal use. Fees apply.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>We reserve the right to restrict photography of copyrighted, culturally sensitive or physically endangered materials.</p>

<i>Citation</i>	John Clarke Trust records, MS.o88, Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island
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Administrative Information

<i>Processor</i>	Processed by Brittany Fox, August 10 2018.
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<i>Descriptive Rules</i>	Finding aid based on <i>Describing Archives: A Content Standard</i> (DACS)
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<i>Processing Note</i>	<p>The records in Series I were left in their original order due to their long-term integration and prior researcher use. However, some folders were divided as a precaution for the preservation of the materials. As a result, folders were renumbered to accommodate the additions, although the original folder titles are indicated on the folders. Additionally, a 1976 list of assigns was removed and placed in Series V since it was clearly added to the first acquisition at a later date and it did not comply with the scope and content of the other items in the series. Otherwise, Series I maintains a physical distinction from the other series despite similar content due to the retention of provenance.</p>
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The more recent acquisition (accession 2018.011) was donated in a box and chest with no noticeable distinction between the nature of their content. The arrangement scheme for the collection was imposed during processing in the absence of a usable original order. The series were arranged in conjunction with the type and form of the materials and the folders are organized in chronological order.

In addition to the rearrangement of the series, newspaper articles were photocopied and the originals removed. Other items removed include extra copies of the John Clarke booklet.

<i>Accession Info</i>	Series 2-5 of the John Clarke Trust records were a gift of the John Clarke Trust in 2018. Some items in Series 1 were likely donated by David F. Easterbrooks in the 1920s.
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Accession Number: 2018.011; 25.013

Inventory

Series 01: Trust establishment and early records, 1650 – 1855

The materials in this series range from legal and financial documents pertaining to the establishment and management of the trust to papers relating to John Clarke's will and estate. There is also a folder relating to the Baptist Church. Items within this series were donated to NHS many years prior to the rest of the collection and are kept together to maintain that distinction, and to ensure that prior references to items in this series continue to be meaningful.

File 01.001: Legal and financial documents concerning John Clarke and his estate, 1672 – 1740 (bulk 1672 – 1793)

This folder contains indentures of land and rent agreements as well as agreements to the appointment of new assigns for the trust. It also includes documents acknowledging the fulfillment of shares being passed on to relatives that comply with John Clarke's will. A 1740 letter to Abraham Redwood from "John Clark" was perhaps incorrectly filed here long ago.

File 01.002: Charity Farm fund and Baptist church papers, 1753 – 1832

Account books concerning the financial management of Charity Farm. Includes credit and debt lists as well as documentation of charity given. There are also frequent references to the rent paid by Augustus Peckham.

File 01.003: Papers relating to the settlement of John Clarke's estate, 1650 – 1669

This folder contains legal documents such as deeds of gift, appointment of attorneys, financial accounts, and indentures. It also includes a photocopied letter from John Clarke to the Boston court concerning his imprisonment in 1657.

File 01.004: Papers relating to the settlement of John Clarke's estate, 1670s

This folder contains stock and inventory lists of the John Clarke Trust estate that was rented out as well as other administrative documents concerning the management of Charity Farm. There are also deeds of sale and papers acknowledging the fulfillment of portions of John Clarke's will. A letter corresponding with the General Assembly is also housed in the folder.

File 01.005: Papers relating to the settlement of John Clarke's estate, 1684 – 1697

This folder contains rent agreements as well as acknowledgements of the completion of portions of John Clarke's will. It also houses a letter from the Town Council ordering the trustees to give an account of their finances.

File 01.006: Papers relating to the settlement of John Clarke's estate, 1700 – 1855

This folder contains acknowledgements of the fulfillment of John Clarke's wishes in his will as well as nominations for new assigns to the John Clarke Trust. Other items include land indentures and financial lists.

File 01.007: Papers relating to the settlement of John Clarke's estate, undated

This folder contains undated items, including money transactions and a list of credit and debt. The material likely originates from the period surrounding the establishment of the John Clarke Trust in the late seventeenth century.

File 01.008: Persons appointed as trustees for fund, 1764 – 1831

This folder contains nominations and lists of assigns for the John Clarke trust.

File 01.009: Transactions concerning lending and inventory of John Clarke's estate, 1663 – 1676

This folder contains inventories.

File 01.010: Copy of John Clarke's will

This folder contains a typed copy of John Clarke's will and testament.

Series 02: Financial records, 1810 – 1958

This series contains financial records of the John Clarke Trust, particularly receipts documenting payment of rent or charity donations, bills and receipts of local Newport businesses, and Trust account books.

Material is arranged chronologically

File 02.001: Financial records, 1814 – 1819

This folder contains a list of money received and donated by the John Clarke Trust Charity Farm and a note of payment by David Braman.

File 02.002: Financial records, 1859

This folder contains a receipt from Mary R. Dennis.

File 02.003: Financial records, 1860 – 1861

This folder contains official Aquidneck Bank and personal handwritten receipts for the exchange of money concerning rent or charity for the John Clarke Trust and its Charity Farm.

File 02.004: Financial records, 1862 – 1864

This folder contains official Aquidneck Bank and personal handwritten receipts for the exchange of money concerning rent or charity for the John Clarke Trust and its Charity Farm. There are also receipts from local businesses, including A.J. Ward, and the renter Samuel Peckham.

File 02.005: Financial records, 1865 – 1867

This folder contains official Aquidneck Bank and personal handwritten receipts for the exchange of money concerning rent or charity for the John Clarke Trust and its Charity Farm. There are also receipts from local businesses, including Swinburne, Peckham, & Co.

File 02.006: Financial records, 1868 – 1869

This folder contains official Aquidneck Bank and personal handwritten receipts for the exchange of money concerning rent or charity for the John Clarke Trust and its Charity Farm. There are also receipts from local businesses, including Swinburne, Peckham & Co.

File 02.007: Financial records, 1870 – 1878

This folder contains official National Exchange Bank and personal handwritten receipts for the exchange of money concerning rent or charity for the John Clarke Trust and its Charity Farm.

File 02.008: Financial records, 1879 – 1887

An account book created by A.G. Greene, a treasurer of the John Clarke Trust, which contains credits, debts, and charity donations relating to Charity Farm.

File 02.009: Financial records, 1887 – 1894

An account book created by A.G. Greene, a treasurer of the John Clarke Trust, which contains credits, debts, and charity donations relating to Charity Farm.

File 02.010: Financial records,, 1900 – 1908

This folder contains official Newport Trust Company and personal handwritten receipts for the exchange of money concerning rent or charity for the John Clarke Trust and its Charity Farm. There are also receipts from local businesses, including Barker Bros. & Co and Ralph R. Barker.

File 02.011: Financial records, 1910 – 1911

This folder contains official Newport Trust Company and personal handwritten receipts for the exchange of money concerning rent or charity for the John Clarke Trust and its Charity Farm. There are also receipts from local businesses, including Barker Bros. & Co., Thomas Pyott, A. & H.G. Hammett, and John M. Friend, as well as others.

File 02.012: Financial records, 1912 – 1913

This folder contains official Newport Trust Company and personal handwritten receipts for the exchange of money concerning rent or charity for the John Clarke Trust and its Charity Farm. There are also receipts from local businesses, including Barker Bros. & Co., A. & H.G. Hammett, and John C. Burke, as well as others.

File 02.013: Financial records, 1929

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company and the assigns of John Clarke.

File 02.014: Financial records, 1930 – 1932

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company and the

assigns of John Clarke.

File 02.015: Financial records, 1933 – 1935

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company and the assigns of John Clarke.

File 02.016: Financial records, 1936 – 1937

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company and the assigns of John Clarke.

File 02.017: Financial records, 1938 – 1939

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company and the assigns of John Clarke.

File 02.018: Financial records, 1940 – 1943

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company and the assigns of John Clarke. It also includes bills and receipts from local businesses, including George W. Clarke.

File 02.019: Financial records, 1944 – 1945

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company and the assigns of John Clarke. It also includes bills and receipts from local businesses, including John C. Burke, J.T. O'Connell, Inc., and Bradsley-Riley Electric Co.

File 02.020: Financial records, 1946 – 1947

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company and the assigns of John Clarke. It also includes bills and receipts from local businesses, including George W. Clarke and John C. Burke, among others.

File 02.021: Financial records, 1948 – 1949

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company and the assigns of John Clarke. It also includes bills and receipts from local businesses,

including John C. Burke, Rodman L. Champlin, among others.

File 02.022: Financial records, 1950 – 1951

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company and the assigns of John Clarke. It also includes bills and receipts from local businesses, including George W. Clarke and John C. Burke, among others.

File 02.023: Financial records, 1952 – 1953

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company and the assigns of John Clarke. It also includes bills and receipts from local businesses, including George W. Clarke, Rodman L. Champlin, and John C. Burke, among others.

File 02.024: Financial records, 1954 – 1955

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company and the assigns of John Clarke. It also includes bills and receipts from local businesses, including John C. Burke, Rodman L. Champlin, George W. Clarke, among others. There are also notices of taxes assessed by the Town of Middletown.

File 02.025: Financial records, 1956 – 1959

This folder contains official receipts from the Newport Trust Company, the assigns of John Clarke, and the Rhode Island Hospital Trust Company. It also includes bills and receipts from local businesses, including John C. Burke, among others.

File 02.026: Undated financial records

This folder contains undated financial material relating to the John Clarke Trust. The creators of the material include A.L. Wisener & Co., E. Stevens, and the Industrial Trust Company. The folder also includes a ribbon and clasp that held Newport Trust Company receipts.

File 02.027: Account book, 1834 – 1859

This folder contains an account book created by Robert Dennis, a treasurer of the John Clarke Trust. It includes lists and notes regarding the financial activity of Charity Farm, specifically income and charity given. The accounts were then

approved by the Town Council of Middletown, R.I. and annotated by Joshua Coggeshall, a council clerk.

File 02.028: Account book, 1860 – 1878

This folder contains an account book created by Samuel S. Peckham and Felix Peckham, treasurers of the John Clarke Trust. It includes lists and notes regarding the financial activity of Charity Farm, specifically income and charity given. The accounts were then approved by the Town Council of Middletown, R.I. and annotated by Joshua Coggeshall and Albert L. Chase, council clerks.

File 02.029: Account book, 1879 – 1905

This folder contains an account book created by Robert Dennis, a treasurer of the John Clarke Trust. It includes lists and notes regarding the financial activity of Charity Farm, specifically income and charity given. The accounts were then approved by the Town Council of Middletown, R.I. and annotated by Joshua Coggeshall, a council clerk.

File 02.030: Account book, 1879 – 1907

This folder contains an account book created by A. G. Greene, a treasurer of the John Clarke Trust. It includes lists and notes regarding the financial activity of Charity Farm, specifically income and charity given.

File 02.031: Account book, 1891 – 1953

This folder contains an account book of the John Clarke Trust. It includes lists and notes regarding the financial activity of the trust, specifically income and charity given.

File 02.032: Account book, 1956 – 1958

This folder contains an account book of the John Clarke Trust. It includes lists and notes regarding the financial activity of the trust, specifically income and charity given. The book contains loose receipts within the pages.

File 02.033: Rhode Island Hospital Trust Company receipts, 1958 – 1959

This folder contains receipts from the Rhode Island Hospital Trust Company. They were removed from the John Clarke Trust financial account book of 1956-1958.

Series 03: Legal records, 1821 – 1956

This series contains legal documents pertaining to the John Clarke Trust, including appointments of assigns and land evidence.

Material is arranged chronologically

File 03.001: Legal records, 1821 – 1871

This folder contains official records, including appointment of assigns, a survey of Charity Farms, and a fifty year lease to the Methodist Episcopal Church in Middletown.

File 03.002: Legal records, 1908 – 1956

This folder contains legal documents such as an official statement at a Superior Court of the State of Rhode Island hearing, the purchase of a transmission line easement, and drafts for the appointments of assigns.

Series 04: Communications and trust history, 1762 – 1976

This series contains correspondence and a variety of materials pertaining to Trust history, including lists of assigns and a volume of compiled meeting minutes and hand-copied documents.

File 04.001: David F. Easterbrooks correspondence, 1940 – 1956

This folder contains correspondence pertaining to David F. Easterbrooks's time as assign of the John Clarke Trust. The subjects of the letters concern financial dealings or proclamation of gratitude.

File 04.002: Material associated with the First Baptist Church, circa 1762

This folder contains a hymn, a receipt, and an account of what is due from members of the Baptist meeting house.

File 04.003: List of Assigns, 1976

This folder contains typed and handwritten lists of assigns for the John Clarke Trust from 1676 to 1976. The lists indicate the dates the individuals were appointed, who appointed them, and who they replaced. It also includes a reference page that corresponds with the typed list.

File 04.004: Book of copied documents, meeting minutes, and history of the John Clarke Trust

This folder contains a book that compiles a wide range of information pertaining to the history of the John Clarke Trust. The book has hand-copied versions of the list of assigns up until 1967, John Clarke's will, John Clarke's instructions for Charity Farms, Josias Lyndon's will, mortgage deeds, appointment of assigns, votes of the assigns, meeting minutes from special meetings, and financial lists for the management of the Trust. It also includes typed degrees from Superior Court hearings of the State of Rhode Island.

Series 05: Secondary sources and notes, 1956 – 1983

This series contains pamphlets, newspaper articles, and research notes pertaining to John Clarke, the John Clarke Trust, and its history.

File 05.001: Pamphlets and newspaper articles, 1956 – 1983

This folder contains a booklet about John Clarke's life reprinted by the assigns of John Clarke. The original booklet was published in 1924 and the reprint is from 1983. The newspaper articles pertain to Charity Farm land being used for the site of a school and a portion being leased to the Newport Music Shell Inc. The articles also include background histories of the trust and the use of the land. In a Grist Mill blurb, an overview of the trust and its establishment was written for its upcoming 300th anniversary.

File 05.002: Researcher notes

This folder contains handwritten researcher notes and transcriptions. It also includes a drawing of the Harris and Clarke family crest.