

**Archives of the
National Society of the Colonial Dames of America
in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

**Prescott House Records
Finding Aid**

Date range: 1635-2020

Bulk dates: 1944-present

Creator: The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (NSCDA-MA)

Extent: 7.51 linear feet (11 full Hollinger boxes, 2 half Hollinger boxes, 1 cabinet in the flat file cabinet; two bankers boxes of photos to be added after they are processed.)

Collection Summary: This collection consists of records related to the William H. Prescott House at 55 Beacon Street, Boston, MA, the headquarters of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (NSCDA-MA). It includes the history of the Prescott family, the usage of the Prescott House by NSCDA-MA, and the preservation of the Prescott House. The NSCDA-MA is a non-profit organization that promotes our national heritage through the preservation of historic buildings and artifacts.

Processor: Thomas R. Doyle, Shaelyn Frost, Clio Lang, Gregory Tharp. Completed February 2024.

Languages: English

Collection Details

Collection Description: This collection documents the architecture, history, physical buildings, grounds, and administration of the Prescott House as well as the biography, genealogy, and history of William Hickling Prescott and other occupants of the house. Materials include manuscripts, correspondence, drawings and plans, print materials, photographs, prints, and negatives. The collection is currently stored in the Archives of the The National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This collection will be of interest to researchers studying the history of Boston in the nineteenth century; the occupants of the house and their families including William Hickling Prescott, James Smith Colburn, and Franklin Gordon Dexter; the architectural history of early nineteenth-century homes; and women's groups and women's history.

Biographical Note: The William H. Prescott House, located at 55 Beacon Street, was commissioned by Boston merchant James Smith Colburn in 1808. It was designed and constructed, along with the adjoining home at 54 Beacon Street, by American architect Asher Benjamin. It is the western unit of the pair of identical five-story, bow-fronted brick row houses adjacent to the Boston Commons on the northern side of Beacon Street. They are within the Beacon Hill Historic District established by the Massachusetts Legislature in 1955.

William Hickling Prescott lived in the house from 1849 to 1859. Born on May 4, 1796 in Salem, Massachusetts, Prescott was an early American historian, who played an important role in the development of history as an academic discipline. His books include histories of the Spanish monarchs and the conquests of Mexico and Peru. Prescott made major renovations to the house including a rear addition with his extensive library on the second floor and a third floor study. William Hickling Prescott's widow, Susan Amory Prescott, lived in the house until her death in 1869, when it was purchased by her nephew, Franklin Gordon Dexter. The Dexter family occupied the house well into the twentieth century.

The Prescott House was purchased by The National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (NSCDA-MA) in 1944. In 1968, the NSCDA-MA thoroughly restored William Hickling Prescott's study based on plans drawn for Prescott as well as a contemporary sketch. Original architectural elements of the William H. Prescott House were modified by subsequent owners.

Arrangement Description: The collection is arranged in seven series:

Series 1: History and Architecture, 1807-2001, non-consecutive

Series 2: Biography and Genealogy, 1635-2008, non-consecutive

Series 3: Preservation and Maintenance, 1916-2014, non-consecutive

Series 4: Architectural and Renovation Plans, 1946-1998, non-consecutive

Series 5: Programs and Events, 1930-2020, non-consecutive

Series 6: Collections and Interior, 1947-2007, non-consecutive

Series 7: Administrative Files, 1943-2012, non-consecutive

Separated Materials

“Map” refers to flat case drawers. Photographs, prints and negatives related to the collection are stored separately and are awaiting processing.

Related Materials

See the “William Hickling Prescott Papers, 1665-1959” at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Acquisition Information

The materials in the collection were created by or collected by NSCDA-MA.

Subject Headings

Asher Benjamin

James Smith Colburn

Franklin Gordon Dexter

William Hickling Prescott

Events – Tourism – Massachusetts – Boston

Historians – United States – Biography

Historic buildings – Conservation and restoration – Massachusetts – Boston

Historic buildings – Designs and plans

Historic buildings – Guidebooks

Historic buildings – Maintenance and repair

Historic house museums – Collection management – Massachusetts – Boston

Historic house museums – Furniture, equipment, etc.

Historic house museums – Massachusetts – Boston

National Society of The Colonial Dames of America, Massachusetts Chapter

Prescott family – Genealogy

Prescott family – Massachusetts – Boston

Prescott House – Management

Processing Note

The processing process followed the institution’s policies and procedures.

Using the Collection

Access: Collection is open and available for use. To access the Archives see:

<https://nscdama.org/research/>

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Preferred Citation: The Prescott House Records, The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Boston, Massachusetts

Collection Inventory

Series 1: History and Architecture, 1807-2001, non-consecutive

This series contains records on the history and architecture of the Prescott House. The series is arranged alphabetically.

Box	Folder	Description
1	1	Architects and Builders, undated
1	2	Architectural Notes on 55 Beacon St, undated
1	3	Colonial Dames Ownership and Renovations, undated
Map	-	Dexters and Architectural Changes, undated
1	4	Historic Landmark Records, 1963, 1969, 1984
1	5	Histories by Adelaide Brown (including “55 Beacon Street and It's Owners”), undated
1	6	History and Architecture, 1944-2010, undated
1	7	History by the Colonial Dames of Massachusetts, undated
1	8	History of 55 Beacon St, 1807-1977, 1998
1	9	History of Ownership, 1947-1948, 1962, undated
Map	-	National Historic Landmark Designation, 1964
1	10	Newspaper Clippings, 1959-2015, undated
1	11	Prescott Memorial, undated
1	12	Prescott Plaque, undated
1	13	Sturgis, John (Architect of Prescott House Staircase), 1862-1866, 1937, 1979, 1997-2005, undated

Series 2: Biography and Genealogy, 1635-2008, non-consecutive

This series contains the biography, bibliography, and will of William Hickling Prescott; the extract of letters from Mrs. Prescott; and the genealogy of the Prescott family. This series also contains materials relating to the Amory, Atkins, Colburn, Dexter, Frothingham, Huntington, Peabody, and Putnam families. The series is arranged alphabetically. A duplicate bound copy of “Family Jottings” was moved from a folder to the bookshelf.

Box	Folder	Description
1	1	Bancroft, Elizabeth – Copy of Diary, 1793-1795
1	2	Colburn Family – Graves, Magnolia Cemetery, SC, 2008
1	3	Colburn, James Smith – Biography, 1780-1859
1	3.1	Colburn Family – Genealogy, 1635-1845, 1891, 1998, 2008
1	4	Colburn, James Smith – Personal Memoirs, 1949
1	5	Colburn, James Smith – Personal Memoirs bound copies, 1949
1	5.1	Colburn, James Smith – Property Deed, 1808
1	5.2	Colburn, James Smith — South Carolina Historical Society Personal Papers Finding Aid, undated
1	6	Dexter, Franklin Gordon – Biographies, b. 1864-1937, 1824-1903, 1977, 2007
1	7	Genealogical Research by J. Gardner Bartlett – Contract, 1922
Map	--	Gordon, Mrs. Dexter – Photograph of a painting, 1897
1	8	Gray, Francis Calley – Biography, b. 1790-1856
1	9	Gray, Horace – Invitation to 1868 Ball, 1868
1	10	Prescott, Arizona – Correspondences, 1965-1981
1	11	Prescott, Arizona – History, 1932, 1958-1968, 1985, 1997, undated
1	12	Prescott, Catherine G. – Letters to Family, 1845, 1848
1	12.1	Prescott, Judge William – Transcript of Autobiographical Notes, 2003
2	13	Prescott, William Hickling – Newspaper, Magazine, and Journal, Articles, 1939-2000, non-consecutive
Map	--	Prescott, William Hickling – Article from Boston Post, 1859
Map	--	Prescott, William Hickling – Article from Harper’s Weekly, 1859
Map	--	Prescott, William Hickling – Article from The Outlook, 1896
2	14	Prescott, William Hickling – Biographical essays by Samuel Eliot Morison, 1893, 1959-1968
2	15	Prescott, William Hickling – Biographies, “Picture Book” by Samuel Eliot Morison, 1958
2	16	Prescott, William Hickling – Biographies, b.1796-1859, 1958, 2005
2	17	Prescott, William Hickling – Biographies and Homes, 1910, 1949-1958, non-consecutive
2	18	Prescott, William Hickling – Biographies by Students, 1962, 1996- 1997
2	18.1	Prescott, William Hickling – Biographies, Illness and Disability, 1966, 2005
2	18.2	Prescott, William Hickling – Book Plates, undated

2	19	Prescott, William Hickling – Books Read By, undated
2	20	Prescott, William Hickling – Correspondences, 1833-1845
2	21	Prescott, William Hickling – Genealogy, Letters, 1996, 2005, 2007
2	22	Prescott, William Hickling – Harvard Magazine Article, 1996
3	23	Prescott, William Hickling – Noctograph Paper, c. 1820s–1840s
3	24	Prescott, William Hickling – Will, copy of, 1854-1855, 1857-1858
3	25	Prescott Family – “Family Jottings,” by Roger Wolcott, 1939
3	26	Prescott Family – Portraits and Memorabilia of family, 1994, undated
3	27	Prescott House Inhabitants – Research materials donated by W. Russel MacAusland, 2008
3	28	Prince Family Outstanding Members, 1600-1950’s, 1979
3	29	Read, John Harleston, 1998, 2008
3	30	Thorndike, Augustus – (Prescott family friend), b. 1797-1858, 1996
3	31	Ticknor, George (biographer of W.H. Prescott)
3	31.1	Ward, Samuel Dexter, 1788-1871, 2008, undated
3	32	Webster, Jane – Copy of Will, 1965

Series 3: Preservation and Maintenance, 1916-2014, non-consecutive

This series contains correspondence, notes, receipts, and other materials relating to the structure, content, repairs, and preservation of the Prescott House. Architectural and renovation plans are found in series 4. The series is arranged alphabetically.

Box	Folder	Description
1	1	Accounting of House Repairs, undated
1	2	Applications for Building Permits, 1916-1965
1	3	Architectural Renovations, 54 Beacon St., 1983
1	4	Basement, 1997-1998, 2004
1	4.1	Balustrade Repairs, 2012
1	5	Condition Report, 1994
1	6	Elevator - Inspection and Certificates of Use, 1974-2006, 2020
1	7	Headquarters Purchases & Alterations, 1944-1948
1	8	Historic Paint colors, c. 1989-1998
1	9	Historic Paint colors, 2014
1	10	House Diagrams Misc, undated
1	11	House Repairs, undated
2	12	House Repairs, 1963-1981
2	13	House Repairs, 1984-1986
2	14	House Repairs, 1990, 1995, 1998
2	15	House Repairs, 2001-2005, 2008-2009
2	15.1	House Repairs, 2010-2011
2	16	Long Range Plans, 1978-1985
2	16.1	Maintenance and Repair History, 2001-2019
2	17	Office Renovation, 2000-2002
2	18	Period Histories, undated
2	19	Prescott Study, 1965, 1968
2	20	Preservation Consultant, 2014
2	21	Preservation Restriction Agreement, 2013
2	22	Renovation and Repairs - 4 th Floor, 1973-2007
2	23	Renovations, 1973-1974
2	24	Renovations, 1999
3	25	Roofing and Masonry Repairs, 1985
3	26	Roof Repair, 1984
3	27	Roof Repair, 2004-2013
3	27.1	Roof Preservation Project- MPPF Grant, 2012-2013
3	27.2	Roof Preservation Project Plans, 2013
3	27.3	Roof Preservation Project- Project Manual, 2012
3	28	Shutters & Beacon St, 1990-1997
3	28.1	Water Damage, 2004
3	28.2	Water Damage, 2010
3	29	Window Restoration and Renovation , 2007-2008
3	29.1	Window Restoration and Renovation 2009-2013
3	29.2	Window Restoration- Edwin S. Webster Foundation Grant, 2010-2011

Series 4: Architectural and Renovation Plans, 1946-1998, non-consecutive

This series is comprised of architectural and renovation plans and is related to documents found in series 3.

Box	Folder	Description
Map	--	Architectural Plans – Kitchen, c. 1998
	--	Architectural Plans, 2013
	--	Architectural Plans, 1989
	--	Renovation Plans – Alterations, 1946-1947
	--	Renovation Plans for the 2nd Floor, 1946
	--	Renovation Plans for 5th Floor, 1973
	--	Illustrations of Historic Houses (including Prescott House, Quincy Homestead, and others), Jigsaw Puzzle Advertisement, c. 1982

Series 5: Programs and Events, 1930-2020, non-consecutive

This series includes programs and events pertaining to the Prescott House. This series is arranged alphabetically.

Box	Folder	Description
1	1	Beacon Hill Civic Association, 2015-2016
1	2	Boston Historic Homes Walking Tour, 1999
1	3	Brochures, undated
1	4	Centennial Celebration, 1993
1	5	Diamond Jubilee Dinner – Address by Samuel Eliot Morison, 1968
1	6	Diamond Jubilee Dinner – Bound Copies of Address by Samuel Eliot Morison, 1968
1	7	Docent – Administration and Training, c. 1997, 2008
1	8	Docent – Scripts, c. 1970s, 2003, 2022
1	9	Exhibition Guide – “Yester-morn to Yester-Eve,” 1991
Map	--	Exhibit Wall Text, undated
1	10	Garden Club Tour Luncheon, 2003-2006
1	11	Garden Club Tour Luncheon, 2007-2009
1	12	Garden Club Tour Luncheon, 2010-2014
1	13	Landmark Ceremony, 1964
2	14	Little Women Day, Proclamation from Mayor, Martin Walsh, 2019
2	15	Little Women Filming at the Prescott House, 2019-2020
2	16	Mexican Plaque Dedication, 1959-1980
2	17	Phantoms of Fashion, undated
2	18	Prescott Descendants Reunion, 2005
2	19	Prescott Descendants Reunion – Correspondences, 2005
2	20	Prescott Grave Walk, 1999
2	21	Prescott House Calendar Events, 1984-1987, undated
2	22	Prescott House Visitors, 1930-2002
3	23	Prescott House Visitors, 2008-2011
3	24	Simmons University Visit – Correspondences, 2012
3	25	Suffolk University Educational Project, 2011-2012
3	26	200 th Anniversary Celebration, 2006-2008
3	27	Unveiling and Replacement of Prescott Plaque, 1959-1972
3	28	War Relief Work, 1940-1945

Series 6: Collections and Interior, 1947-2007, non-consecutive

This series consists of descriptions, bequests, loans, articles, and appraisals of the interior of the Prescott House and its collections. This series is arranged alphabetically.

Box	Folder	Description
1	0.1	Accession Records – Historical Costumes, 1947-1961, 1970, non-consecutive
Map	--	Auctioneer's Catalogue of Prescott's Library, 1871
1	1	Bequests – Objects, 1949-1968, 1979, 1994, 2007, undated
1	1.2	Best Bed Chamber, c. 1900s
1	2	Ceramics Identified and Dated by John Cushion, 1981
1	3	Collections and Interior – Descriptions, 1981, 1984, 2004, undated
1	4	Collections – Articles, undated
1	5	Collections – Miscellaneous, 1994, 1996, undated
1	6	Collections – Photos and Text About Paintings, 1984, undated
1	7	Collections – Repairs, 1959-2003
1	8	Crossed Swords, 2005, undated
1	9	Deaccession, 1984-1991
1	9.1	Deaccession Fund, 2004
Map	--	Depiction of Library, undated
1	9.2	Furniture Preservation 2003-2004
1	10	Gwen Ellis' Doll House – Speech, 1975-1979
1	11	History of Console Table, 1992
1	12	Inventory & Appraisal, 1968, 1981
2	13	Insurance Appraisal, 2001, 2003
2	13.1	Insurance Valuation, 2016
2	14	Inventory Database Project (including CD), 2005
2	14.1	Magazine Antiques Project, 2003-2005
2	15	Objects on Loan, 1949, 1968-1971, 1980-1996, 2007
2	16	Stair Carpet, 2001-2002
2	17	Textile Documentation Forms, 1994-1996

Series 7: Administrative Files, 1943-2012, non-consecutive

This series contains records of The National Society of Colonial Dames in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, mostly related to the operations of the Prescott House. This series is arranged alphabetically.

Box	Folder	Description
1	1	Bequests – Pecuniary, 1962-2002
1	2	29 Branch Street – Leases and Agreements, 1973-1984
1	3	29 Branch Street – Leases and Agreements, 1999-2001
1	3.1	Budget Proposals, 2003-2005
1	4	CD-ROM Project, 2000-2002
1	5	Docent Committee Chairman – Job Description, c. 1987
1	6	House Caretaker – Job Description, c. 1998
1	7	House Committee, 1997-2005
1	7.1	House Committee, 2006-2011
1	8	Hutchins & Wheeler – Correspondences About Legal Matters, 1962-1981
1	8.1	Inventory and Suppliers, 2000-2005, 2010
1	9	21 & 23 Joy St. – Realtor Correspondences, 1930
1	9.1	Meeting Minutes, 1943-1969, non-consecutive
1	10	Museum Properties Committee 2004-2006
1	11	Records of Purchase, 1944, 1951
1	11.1	Rental Information, 2003
1	12	Stocks and Investments – Loring, Wolcott & Coolidge Office Documents, 1997-2001
1	13	Tax Exemption Documents, 1966-1989, 2015

Series 8: Photographs - Awaiting processing