

AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY
MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

NAME OF COLLECTION:

Shays' Rebellion Collection, 1786-1787

LOCATION(S):

Mss. boxes "S"
Octavo vols. "S"

SIZE OF COLLECTION:

three manuscript boxes; two octavo volumes

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON COLLECTION:

See David P. Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion ...* (Amherst, Mass., UMass Press, 1980) and Michael Paulin, *The Ballad of Daniel Shays'* (Athol, Mass.: Transcript Press, c1986).

SOURCE OF COLLECTION:

Gifts of Chandler Eastman Potter, 1856; John Munro Woolsey, 1927; Albert Farnsworth, 1927; Probate Court, Worcester County, 1915. The typescript copy of Joseph P. Warren's thesis, the gift of James T. Adams, 1926. The "List of Men ... Pledge of Allegiance" and the seven reels of microfilm from the Massachusetts Archives, the gift of George Billias, 1992.

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION:

Following the American Revolution, the country found itself in a severe economic depression; the effects of which were keenly felt by the farmers of Western Massachusetts. Unable to pay their debts, including overdue taxes, small property holders found themselves in court; some were imprisoned for debt and many had property seized.

Shays' Rebellion began with farmers seeking tax and judicial reform from the Massachusetts General Court, as well as the issuance of paper money. The legislature, however, opposed most of these positions. Frustrated by the situation and their inability to change it peacefully and within the framework of the law, farmers, in August 1786, took up arms and converged on the Court of Common Pleas in Northampton, Mass., in an attempt to keep the court from sitting (thus preventing further trials and imprisonment of debtors). On August 29th, the insurgents were successful and other, similar groups stormed the courts at Concord, Great Barrington, Taunton, and Worcester, Mass.

From September 25th to 28th, a group of armed insurgents lead by Capt. Daniel Shays (1747-1825), a veteran of the Revolution, occupied the Courthouse at Springfield, Mass., preventing the State Judicial Court from sitting. An assault on their next target, the Federal Arsenal in Springfield, on 25 January

1787 was defeated and the insurgents fled, but were soon captured. In February 1787 the rebellion collapsed. Many of the insurgents were pardoned at once, though two were hanged for treason.

This collection contains disparate materials all pertaining in some respect to Shays' Rebellion. The bulk of the collection consists of a bound photostat copy (138 p.) and a typescript copy of General Benjamin Lincoln's (1733-1810) orders as the commander of the forces to suppress the rebellion. Both the photostat and typescript copies appear to have been made from the same original and there is evidence that this original was formerly in the possession of the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield, Mass., then sold to William Randolph Hearst, Esq. The typescript copy is indexed. Both include letters of the Commissary Department of the Massachusetts Army, most of which are signed by James Prince and Joseph Ruggles. The orders date from 19 January to 18 March 1787, and the letters date from 22 January to 22 October 1787 (with one letter dated 31 March 1788).

There are disbound sections of an orderly book attributed to one Major Tay. This is a daily account of his activities from 18 January to 14 February 1787 and a record of General Lincoln's orders from 20 January to 13 February 1787 (16 p.).

Also included in the collection is what appears to be a manuscript copy of George Richards Minot's The History of the Insurrection in Massachusetts in the Year 1786 ..., published in Worcester in 1788 by Isaiah Thomas. With Minot's emendations, it is approximately two hundred forty-five pages and may be the copy Thomas used to set the type for the book.

Another study in the collection is a typescript copy of a thesis entitled "The Shays Rebellion: A Study in the History of Massachusetts" that was written by Joseph Parker Warren (1873-1909) in Cambridge, Mass., in 1900. The typescript, which was copied from Warren's original thesis in the Harvard University Library by Walter B. Briggs, assistant librarian, includes volume 1, chapters 1-3, and volume 2, chapter 4, and appendixes. There is a fifth chapter, entitled The Shays Rebellion and the Congress of Confederation, in the original, but it was not transcribed as it had been published in the American Historical Review, XI, 1906. The first four chapter headings are The Causes, The First Period of Shays Rebellion, The Campaign of General [Benjamin] Lincoln, and The Restoration of Order. Among the material in the appendixes is "The Narrative of Park Holland" (1752-1844), a captain in General Lincoln's forces.

During this period many of the towns in Massachusetts petitioned the General Court and the Governor for a "redress of grievances." The majority of the petitions in the collection include the following complaints: 1) the General Court should not sit in Boston but in a country town near the center of the state, 2) there must be more currency in circulation, 3) taxes are extravagant, 4) salaries of public officials are too high, and 5) debtors should not be jailed.

One folder of documents relates to the arrests and trials of insurgents and another to miscellaneous military returns, orders, etc. The remainder of the collection consists of various items including a letter to Isaiah Thomas concerning the capture of Job Shattuck; a copy of a letter from Ethan Allen to the Massachusetts government expressing alarm that insurgents are seeking refuge in Vermont and offering to cooperate with Massachusetts in securing peace; a resolution of the Massachusetts General Court, 25 June 1787, pertaining to the pursuit of insurgents across state lines and the position of the government toward the insurgents; and a document thought to be from Major William Pynchon entitled "Rumours from the Country," describing conditions in Massachusetts.

The collection also includes a photostat of a ninety-six page document entitled "List of Men Who Took Oaths of Allegiance ...". The list was gleaned from documents from the Massachusetts Archives and

includes over three thousand names. The list also includes the town, county and status of each man. Also included are seven reels of microfilm relating to this list.

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American Antiquarian Society
MANUSCRIPTS DEPARTMENT

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3 seven reels of Massachusetts Archives microfilm

OCTAVO**VOLUME**

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2	Col. Benjamin Lincoln, Order Book [photostat]