

Tefft Family Research Collection

Overview of the Collection

Repository: South County History Center 2636 Kingstown Road Kingston, Rhode Island 02881
Tel: 401.783.1328, website: southcountyhistorycenter.org

Title: Tefft Family Research Collection

Dates: 1990-2010

Media: Papers, Photographs

Quantity: 5 Boxes, 3 linear feet

Identification: 2022.004

Language: English

Historical Note

The Tefft family was among the earliest European settlers of what is now the town of South Kingstown. In 1662 John Tefft (abt. 1614 – 1679) acquired a large tract of land in the Pettaquamscutt Purchase. This land remained with the Tefft family until 1909. John was married to Mary (Barber) Tefft (abt. 1620-1680) and together the couple had four children, Mary Tefft (abt. 1640-1674), Joshua Tefft (1640-1676), Samuel Tefft (1644-1725), and Tabitha Tefft (1653-1722).

Joshua Tefft received notoriety for fighting on the side of the Narragansett Indian Tribe during the Great Swamp Massacre of December 19th, 1675. As a result of his participation he was arrested, found guilty of treason, and executed by the Rhode Island colonial government on January 18th, 1676. There is debate as to why Joshua Tefft fought on the side of the Narragansett due to conflicting testimonies given in the course of his trial.

Little is known about Joshua Tefft's wife, Sarah Tefft. Her gravestone was once thought to be the oldest burial marker in Rhode Island due to a misreading of her death date. However, Craig Anthony, a Rhode Island historian, proved in the late 1990s that her actual death date was March 16th, 1672, two days after the birth of her son, Peter Tefft.

At least thirteen generations of the Tefft family have subsequently lived in the United States. Notable descendants of John Tefft include diplomat Benjamin Franklin Tefft (1813-1885), New York Stock Exchange member Erastus Tucker Tefft (1810-1888), and architect Thomas Alexander Tefft (1826-1859).

There are several spellings, often used interchangeably, of the name "Tefft," including "Tifft and "Tift."

Scope and Content

The Tefft Family Research collection includes a correspondence, maps, manuscripts, newspaper clippings, papers, transcriptions of archival records, and photographs.

The collection is largely comprised of photocopies of primary and secondary source research materials compiled by A. Craig Anthony in the course of writing two books on the Tefft family. These materials relate to John Tefft and his descendants, the trial and execution of Joshua Tefft, and the life of Joshua Tefft's wife, Sarah Tefft.

Anthony believed that Sarah Tefft may have been the daughter of John Greene Jr. and compiled materials related to the Greene family and their property in Warwick. He also attempted to find records relating to Sarah's life before her marriage to Joshua Tefft. Additional materials relate to the significance of the Tefft homestead and cemetery. These include research papers written by Anthony as well as an application to have the area added to the National Register of Historic Places. These records also document the successful efforts of Anthony and members of the Tefft family to block the Blueberry Hill development in the 1990s. The area was purchased by the South Kingstown Land Trust and became Tefft Historical Park.

Other related topics researched by Anthony include a 1787 court case involving Arnold Tefft, a South Kingstown resident, and the locations of historical cemeteries. Also contained in the collection is correspondence between Anthony and members of the Tefft family. Assorted news articles relate to Anthony's research findings and publications as well as 20th century Tefft descendants. The materials in this collection have been grouped by subject. Many of the materials are photocopies that lack clear bibliographic information.

The collection has been arranged into four distinct series:

Series I: Research Materials (2022.004.0001)

Subseries I: Tefft Family Genealogies and General Research

Subseries II: Tefft-Related Government, Vital and Cemetery Records

Subseries III: Joshua and Sarah Tefft Research

Series II: Unpublished and Original A. Craig Anthony Manuscripts (2022.004.0002)

Series III: Blueberry Hill/Tefft Hill/Tefft Historical Park Materials (2022.004.0003)

Series IV: A. Craig Anthony Cemetery Photographs (2022.004.0004)

Administrative Information

Access: Any qualified person doing personal or scholarly research is permitted to utilize materials in the South County History Center collections.

Preferred Citation: Tefft Family Research Collection, South County History Center

Provenance: The materials in this collection were largely compiled by A. Craig Anthony in the course of his research on Joshua Tefft and the Tefft family.

Processed by: Caleb Goodhouse and Erica Luke, with the generous support of Connie May.

Subject Terms

Great Swamp Massacre, Dec. 19, 1675, South Kingstown, R.I; King Philip's War, 1675-1676; Rhode Island--History--Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775; South Kingstown (R.I.)—History; Tefft family

People

Tefft, B. F. (Benjamin Franklin), 1813-1885

Tefft, Erastus

Tefft, John, 1614-1679

Tefft, Joshua, 1640-1676

Tefft, Thomas Alexander, 1826-1859

Tefft, Sarah, d. 1672

Tefft, William E. (William Erastus), 1841-1903

Related Materials at South County History Center

Research Library: Tefft family newsletters and published genealogies

Contents Listing

Series I: Research Materials (2022.004.0001)

Subseries I: Tefft Family Genealogies and General Research

Box	Folder	Description
1	1	Typed genealogies
1	2	Handwritten genealogical information
1	3	Scholarly Articles
1	4	Tefft research compiled by Judith Watson
1	5	Correspondence between Tefft family researchers
1	6	Rhode Island and New England maps

Subseries II: Tefft-Related Government, Vital and Cemetery Records

Box	Folder	Description
1	7	Military Records
1	8	Census and vital records
1	9	Cemetery records
1	10	Rhode Island Government and Court Records – letter-sized
2	11	Rhode Island Government and Court Records – oversized
2	12	South Kingstown, RI, Town Council and probate records
2	13	South Kingstown, RI, land evidence records
2	14	Other Rhode Island town records
2	15	Connecticut town records
2	16	Stonington, CT, records
2	17	New York town records

Subseries III: Joshua and Sara Tefft

Box	Folder	Description
2	18	King Philip's War and Joshua Tefft
2	19	Joshua Tefft research compiled by Jean A. Bradley
2	20	Sara Tefft research
2	21	(Sara) Tefft/Greene family research

Subseries IV: Published Works by A. Craig Anthony about the Tefft Family

Box	Folder	Description
2	Loose	“The Tefft Family & the Narragansett Controversy: A Window to the Creation of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations” (1998) [2 COPIES]
2	Loose	“The Children of Josepha and Sarah (sic) Tefft and the Descendants of Samuel and Elizabeth Tefft” (2000)
2	Loose	<i>King’s Province: Samuel Tefft’s Narrative of the Narragansett Country</i> (2005)

Subseries V: A. Craig Anthony Correspondence and Research

Box	Folder(s)	Description
3	22 - 25	Craig Anthony Research Notes
3	26	Arnold Tiftt research
3	27	A. Craig Anthony correspondence
3	28	A. Craig Anthony news articles

Series II: Unpublished and Original A. Craig Anthony Manuscripts (2022.004.0002)

Box	Folder	Description
4	1	“Joshua Tefft d. 18 January 1676 R.I.P” (1994)
4	2	“The Oldest Gravestone in New England – or is it? The Sara Tefft Gravestone Re-Examined” (1996)
4	3	A. Craig Anthony practicum pgs. 1-60 (1996)
4	4	A. Craig Anthony practicum pgs. 61-114 (1996)
4	5	“The Real Dirt on the Sara Tefft Gravestone: A Window to the Creation of New England” (1997)
4	6	“Sara Tefft: The New World’s Unluckiest Bride” (1998)
4	7	“The Tefft Family & the Narragansett Controversy: A Window to the Creation of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations” (1998) [ORIGINAL]

Series III: Blueberry Hill/Tefft Hill/Tefft Historical Park Materials (2022.004.0003)

Box	Folder	Description
4	1	Blueberry Hill/Tefft Hill property development
4	2	Blueberry Hill/Tefft Hill property development news coverage
4	3	Tefft Homestead research and Tefft Historical Park
4	4	“The Historical and Archaeological Significance of the Tefft Historical Park, South Kingstown, Rhode Island” (2002)
5	loose	“The Tefft Homestead” Scrapbook by A. Craig Anthony

Series IV: A. Craig Anthony Cemetery Photographs (2022.004.0004)

Box	Folder	Description
4	1	SK081 – Simon Niles Lot
4	2	EX066 – Peleg Kenyon Lot
4	3	FR004 – Jones-Hammon Lot
4	4	Unidentified Cemetery Lots