

ESTHER CLARK WRIGHT ARCHIVES

ACADIA UNIVERSITY

Dykes and Common Fields collection

Accession 1900.018-DCF



Compiled by Rhianna H. Edwards
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Dykes and Common Fields collection. – [textual records]. – 1784-1936. – 13cm of textual records

Table of Contents

(click on title to jump to that page)

File List	3
Administrative History	4
Custodial History.....	5
Scope and Content.....	5
Notes.....	6
Citation for this electronic finding aid:.....	6
Access Points	7

File List

1900.018-DCF/1 New Minas District dyke record book. – 1784 – 1865. – 1 v of textual records

Item is a photocopy of a "book for keeping the dyke acct. in the district of New Minas". It contains minutes of meetings held by the Commissioners, as well as accounts with the various proprietors. The book records the history of the dyke, from its construction in 1784 until 1865. As the years proceeded, it appears that the dyke was named the Wolfville Dyke and, later, the Beckwith Dyke.

Note: Supplied title based on contents of item

Note: A notation on the first page of the photocopy notes that the original is held by Mrs. Lorna Bishop Huston, although when this notation was made and where Mrs. Huston is now located is not known

1900.018-DCF/2 Grand [Paree?] Common Field. – 1826. – 1 v of textual records

Item is a photocopy of minutes kept at a meeting of the proprietors of the Grand [Paree?] common field, held 'at the school house', 1 September 1826.

Note: Supplied title based on contents of item

Note: There is no indication of who donated this item or where the original is held.

1900.018-DCF/3 [Wickwire Dyke minute book](#). – 1881 – 1936. – 1 v of textual records

Item contains minutes of meetings held by the Proprietors of the Wickwire Dyke.

Note: Supplied title based upon contents of item

Note: Digitized document contains only a selection of the minute book.

1900.018-DCF/4 [Wickwire Dyke account book](#). – 1899 – 1930. – 1 v of textual records

Item contains accounts related to the repair and maintenance of the Wickwire Dyke. There are many loose papers, letters, lists, etc., interleaved

Note: Supplied title based upon contents of item

Note: Digitized document contains only a selection of the account book.

1900.018-DCF/5/1 [Wickwire Dyke account book](#). – 1904 – 1936. – 1 v of textual records

Item contains accounts related to the repair and maintenance of the Wickwire Dyke, but also to collecting back taxes from farmers after the dyke was breached. This dyke was destroyed by storms in two stages: the East Wickwire in December 1928 and the West Wickwire in March 1931.

Note: Supplied title based upon contents of item

Note: Digitized document contains only a selection of the account book.

1900.018-DCF/5/2 Wickwire Dyke account book, interleaved papers. – 1929 – 1936. – 1 cm of textual records

These papers were removed from the account book (5/1) and placed in plastic file pockets by researcher Sherman Bleakney. He then wrote a description of some of them (see accession file), stating that most of them related to the efforts to collect back taxes from farmers whose fields were then submerged by tidal waters due to the breaching of the dyke in 1928 and 1931. File pocket number six contains a [Letter of resignation](#) submitted by Secretary (and Treasurer and Clerk) of the Proprietors of the Wickwire Dyke, W, H. Evans, 23 May 1934.

Note: Supplied title based upon contents of item

Note: Digital documents available for: a [letter from the owners of the Wickwire Dyke to J.L. Illsley](#) at the House of Commons re: dyke repair, a [list of amounts due from proprietors \(1933\)](#), a [list of the amounts due from proprietors \[19--?\]](#), a [list of the amounts due from proprietors \[1934\]](#), a breakdown of [expenditures and rates \(1929-1934\)](#) and an advertisement for 'Farm Food' from the [Colonial Fertilizer Company \(1930\)](#).

1900.018-DCF/5/3 Wickwire Dyke account book, interleaved papers. – 1929 – 1936. – 0.5 cm of textual records

These papers were also removed from the account book (5/1) and placed in plastic file pockets by researcher Sherman Bleakney; however, he did not write a summary of them.

Note: Supplied title based upon contents of item

Note: Digital documents available for an [order of business](#) from a Wickwire Dyke Common Field meeting, a list of the Wickwire Dyke's [expenditures for 1899](#), and a [report on the Wickwire Dyke](#) breaks, a new aboiteau, and running dyke.

Administrative History¹

In the early days and continuing into the 20th century, under the townships' Commissioners of Sewers, each group of proprietors of a dyke organized itself for the day-to-day use of the lands and the maintenance of their condition. At annual meetings, the proprietors set the yearly rate for covering the dykeland expenses. They also appointed, from among themselves, assizers to assess the size and value of dyke holdings; branders to brand and otherwise mark the livestock to be allowed on the dykelands after haying or harvest; field watchers to keep an eye on the condition of the fields and to ensure peace on the dykelands; fence viewers; and drivers to care for the animals feeding on the common fields. It was all voluntary work.

¹ This information has been taken from Marjory Whitelaw, *The Wellington Dyke*, Nimbus Press Limited and The Nova Scotia Museum: Halifax, 1997

The expense of regular maintenance and repair was borne, often with difficulty, by the proprietors; but the added expense of rebuilding dyke walls damaged by major storms caused great hardship for most. For example, by 1932 the Wickwire Dyke had been severely damaged by storms and, unable to meet the expenses, the proprietors had to abandon it.

By 1943 the federal and provincial governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick had come to recognize the value of the dykelands and in 1943 set up the Maritime Dykeland Rehabilitation Committee (MDRC). For the first time, the condition of the Maritime dykeland was to be treated as a single and continuing project. Proprietors could apply for help through their local commissioners. The costs of repairs were to be divided evenly among Ottawa, NS and NB. There was so much work to be done that the reclamation project became known as the Emergency Program. In its first four years the MDRC completed 80 projects in Nova Scotia and 50 in New Brunswick. But work was still being done piecemeal, and the Emergency Program could not handle all the work that needed to be completed. In June 1948, the federal parliament passed an act creating the Maritime Marshland Rehabilitation Administration and the three Maritime provinces signed agreements the following April. It then embarked upon major construction projects, reinforcing dyke walls and replacing aboiteaux sluice boxes. By the late 1960s almost all of the major projects had been completed. In 1970 the federal government decided it could safely withdraw from the field, and supervision of dyke maintenance was turned over to the provinces. In Nova Scotia the Department of Agriculture and Marketing became the supervising authority, making annual grants to the marsh bodies for dyke maintenance. These have continued to the present.

Custodial History

All five volumes of this collection have resided in the Archives since before anyone can remember. Information about the donors, the custodial history, and the provenance cannot be determined. It is assumed that the volumes were not acquired together as a unit; rather, that they came in from different donors at different times – but this is not verifiable. Due to the uncertainty about provenance, the volumes were grouped together as a collection.

Scope and Content

The collection consists of five volumes that record information about dykes and common fields in the Annapolis Valley area.

One volume is a photocopy of a record book titled "a book for keeping the dyke acct. in the district of New Minas", one is a photocopy of the minutes of a meeting held by the proprietors of the Grand [Paree?] Common Field, and the other three volumes contain minutes and accounts for the Wickwire Dyke.

Notes

Supplied title based upon contents of collection

Digital copies available

Records subject to the *Copyright Act*

See also accession 1900.030 – Harcourt Cameron map, 1945 – of the Grand Pre, NS area

See also accession 1900.058-LEW – Lewis P. Dennison fonds. Ledger that includes accounts of work on the Grand Pre dyke, 1871 - 1876

See also accession 1936.001-LDC – Proprietors of the Lower Dyke Common Field

See also accession 1998.001 – Government of Canada. Department of Agriculture. Maritime Marshland Rehabilitation Administration

See also accession 1998.002-HER – Jack Herbin fonds – copies of two maps, the originals of which are held at NSARM. One map is of the Horton Marsh, 1806, and the second is of the Wickwire Dyke, 1808.

For reasons of historic authenticity, all file titles provided by the author and captions provided by the photographer are transcribed unedited. The spelling of both peoples' and places' names has changed with time, so inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the titles are unavoidable. Files and captions may also contain inaccuracies or terms that would now be considered offensive.

Citation for this electronic finding aid:

This finding aid should be cited as a website. Relevant information is as follows:

Title: Dykes and Common Fields collection

Date: 2001

Author: Esther Clark Wright Archives, Acadia University

Access Points

Dikes (Engineering)--Nova Scotia--Wolfville Region--History

Salt marshes--Nova Scotia--Wolfville Region--History

Wickwire Dyke (Kings Co., NS)

Proprietors of the Wickwire Dyke (NS)

Beckwith Dyke (Kings Co., NS)

Wolfville Dyke (Kings Co., NS)
