

**Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum  
Record Unit 120**

**Beriah Norton Collection**

By Matthew Seklecki and Julie Newell

**Descriptive Summary**

**Repository:** Martha's Vineyard Museum

**Call No.**

**Title:** Beriah Norton Collection

**Creator:** various

**Quantity:** .5 cubic feet

**Abstract:** The Beriah Norton Collection contains numerous documents that deal with the life of Beriah Norton and his involvement in the community and town affairs of Edgartown.

**Administrative Information**

**Acquisition Information:** The Beriah Norton Collection was acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum in \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.

**Processing Information:** Matthew Seklecki

**Access Restrictions:** none

**Use Restrictions:** none

**Preferred citation for publication:** Martha's Vineyard Museum, Beriah Norton Collection, Record Unit 120.

**Index Terms**

Beriah Norton

Grey's Raid

Edgartown, Massachusetts

Militia

Martha's Vineyard

Sir Henry Clinton

Major John Andre

Major General Charles Grey

**Series and Subseries Arrangement**

Series I: Documents Relating to Grey's Raid, 1778

Series II: Legal Documents

Series III: Edgartown Papers

Series IV: Requests/Requisitions  
Series V: Miscellaneous  
Series VI: Reference Copies

## **Historical Note**

Beriah Norton was born on January 12, 1733 in the village of Edgartown, Massachusetts on the island of Martha's Vineyard. His chief occupation was that of a farmer. Mr. Norton married Ann Frances Cosen on December 15, 1757.

Despite his humble social standing, Norton did gain assume the position of Colonel in the Island's colonial militia. During the American Revolution, Colonel Norton remained in his post as colonel in the coastal defense force. During the war, the Island remained largely neutral since it was dependent on the British navy for its security and prosperity. In 1778, the British army, under the command of Major General Charles Grey, traversed the east coast of the American colonies in search of supplies for the royal army.

A squadron of British ships stopped at the island of Martha's Vineyard for provisions. At the time, the Island was largely known for its sheep farming and fishing. For Island residents, this event is known as Grey's Raid. Grey's Raid was given that name because General Grey of the British Royal Army was the commander of the operation to obtain supplies. The British commander sent a message to Island residents to provide provisions to the army and not to resist. The commander did warn Island residents of the consequences of resistance.

Colonel Norton was put in charge of supplying the British with the provisions that they required. According to Norton, the British agreed to pay back to the people of Martha's Vineyard for the supplies that they stole. General Grey's account is altogether different and says that he made no such agreement with Norton. Colonel Norton, after the war, went to plead his case in both New York City and England, in front of Parliament without any luck. Beriah Norton traveled to England three times in an effort to receive reparations. Yet, he was never successful in receiving funds. As a result, his failure to obtain reparations hurt his social standing within the community.

Norton remained on the Vineyard for the rest of his life, but his financial situation steadily declined. Beriah Norton was a prominent figure in the workings of the town of Edgartown. He held various town, county, state, and federal offices. Beriah Norton died on December 4, 1820.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Beriah Norton collection consists of over 100 documents and ranges in date from the 1760s to the early 1800s. These documents are related to the life of Beriah Norton, his involvement with the British during Grey's Raid during the American Revolution,

to legal documents and other items relating to the town of Edgartown, especially those concerning Norton's involvement in town affairs and other business. There are also documents that concern requests and requisitions made both by Beriah Norton and to Beriah Norton. There is also a miscellaneous series in the collection.

Accompanying the Grey's Raid documents are several items acquired by Arthur Railton for the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society's Intelligencer from the University of Michigan's library concerning Grey's Raid. Railton used these documents as the basis for an Intelligencer article. They are copies of accounts from Sir Henry Clinton and Beriah Norton.

This is a complete document list that has been included in the collection. This list organizes the documents chronologically from earliest to most recent. It provides a description of each document as well. Several deeds relating to Beriah Norton can be found in the deed box, 131B.

## **Series Descriptions:**

### **Series I: Documents Relating to Grey's Raid**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 1: Grey's Raid - September 10, 1778

"State of facts"; regarding events [Sept.] 10-15 [1778]; signed by Beriah Norton.

Memorandum of Papers dating 9 March 1777 to 1 January 1800 and related to Gray's raid and attempts to obtain payment.

Philip Browne, Capt., *Scorpion* to The Inhabitants of Old Town; order not to move any stores, goods, or livestock nor to molest the soldiers; guard will be landed to take possession of stores; inhabitants will not be insulted nor molested if peaceable.

B. Symes on the *Carysfort*; marked "copy"; orders to Beriah Norton Colonel of the Militia to assemble the militia to gather the cattle and sheep and bring them to "Homeseshole" by two in the afternoon or the troops will march to collect them.

Folder 2: Grey's Raid - September 10, 1778 - December 8, 1778

Order conveying General Gray's order to gather militia by daylight and to collect oxen and sheep and bring them, along with "armes acutorments & ammunition to homesishole harbour." 3 March 1779 accounting of cattle and sheep and tons of hay taken 10-15 September 1778. Resolution of Congress that Major General Lord Sterling allow Col. Beriah Norton to enter New York and provide a Flag for that purpose, and that he be allowed to return. Beriah Norton, Boston, to the Council of the State of Mass. Bay; James Athearn was given letter by the General Court recommending him to George Washington for a Flag to go into New York in "quest of some allowance for the stock that the British troops took" but has not yet acted.

Folder 3: Grey's Raid – February 14, 1779 – September 9, 1779

Beriah Norton and James Athearn to The Council of the State of Massachusetts Bay; accuse Chilmark of interfering with attempts to obtain reimbursement for stock taken in Gray's raid and then engaging Timothy Folger of Nantucket "to proceed to New York for the same purpose. Statement of Moses Lumbert regarding ownership of sheep driven from Squipnockett during Grey's Raid. Order signed by Ed Winslow aboard the *Restoration*; orders concerning going ashore and treatment of inhabitants.

Petition to Sir Henry Clinton; Beriah Norton and William Mayhew, Agents of the Inhabitants of Martha's Vineyard; applying for promised payment; Grey's orders also required them to "remain in peace"; invoke example of "peaceable response" to Coll. Winslow's supplying of the garrison at Newport with Vineyard wood and provisions in the fall of 1779 as evidence of their compliance; Petition returned with note signed by John Andre dated Dec. 18, 1779.

Folder 4: Grey's Raid – May 3, 1780 – July 5, 1780

House of Representatives document granting Beriah Norton permission to travel to Britain by way of New York, subject to any orders, limitations, and restriction imposed by the Council. Restrictions and instructions issued by the General Court regarding Beriah Norton's conduct in negotiating the claims. Agreement under which Beriah Norton proceeds to London to seek payment for stock taken in Grey's raid; Norton to receive 33 1/3% of whatever shall be obtained and no more; responsible for his own expenses should he not obtain payment for the stock; Norton puts up a bond of £2000 "in Spanish Mill'd dollars at Six Shillings Each." Order of Maj. Gen. Pattison giving permission for Beriah Norton to reside in New York City.

Folder 5: Grey's Raid – August 29, 1780 – April 3, 1782

Permission for Beriah Norton to "proceed to London on board the ship *Harrison* Captain McLean. Lord North, Lord Palmerston, Mr. Butler; read General Grey's letter dated 19 Dec. 1780 regarding Beriah Norton's memorial; Grey "of the opinion the conduct of the Inhabitants of Martha's Vineyard does not by any Means entitle them to the indulgence prayed for"; "Acquaint Mr. Norton" that Board cannot grant the petition.

Recounts events to date concerning Beriah Norton's petition to the Treasury; matter being referred by the Lords at Norton's request.. Notice from Captain Smith to Beriah Norton that Board has been "appointed to sit tomorrow forenoon . . . to take his Claim upon Government into Consideration."

Folder 6: Grey's Raid – April 4, 1782 – April 18, 1782

William Seton, Secretary, to Beriah Norton, Agent for the Inhabitants of Martha's Vineyard; by order of the Board of General Officers, forwarding copy of General Grey's Report to the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury on Your Memorial to them. William Seton, Secretary, to Beriah Norton; meeting of the Board [of General Officers] delayed from tomorrow to the 15<sup>th</sup> at noon.

Beriah Norton, Agent for the Inhabitants of Martha's Vineyard to the Board appointed by his Excellency the Commander in Chief; long and detailed account in explicit response to Grey's account provided to the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury. William Seton, Secretary, to Beriah Norton; Papers being returned and Board of Officers has been dissolved as of this date.

Folder 7: Grey's Raid – June 1, 1782 – July 9, 1782

Copy of petition to Sir Guy Carleton from Beriah Norton, Agent for the Inhabitants of the Island of Martha's Vineyard; refutes Grey's account and appeals to Carleton and to the "rules of Justice and Equity." Statement by Shubael Cottle and Mattatiah Davis addressed to Sir Guy Carleton and Rear Admiral Digby concerning the events of 10 September 1778. Notice to Beriah Norton that Major General Paterson "is directed to assemble the Board" to hear further arguments in favor of Martha's Vineyard claims. The Board, Major General Paterson President, will meet at 10:00 am on the 11<sup>th</sup>.

Folder 8: Grey's Raid – May 13, 1783 – June 14, 1783

Note to Beriah Norton that the general will see him any time before the general's dinner. Copy of Sir Guy Carleton's order to pay Beriah Norton, Agent for the Inhabitants of Martha's Vineyard, £3000 in partial payment "for Cattle, Sheep, & Hay furnished General Gray in the month of September 1778." Order from Commander in Chief (Sir Guy Carleton); Claims of Inhabitants of the Island of Martha's Vineyard to be referred to "the Board of which Gregory Townsend Esqr. is President. Copy of Beriah Norton's petition to the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury requesting some allowance for his previous voyage to England on grounds that he has been of service to England and that Sir Guy Carleton warranted that he should receive some allowance.

Folder 9: Grey's Raid – September 6, 1784 – April 18, 1787

Authorization "to appear and act in all matters respecting [Grey's raid compensation] in as full and ample a manner as I could do if personally present.." Brief review of case to date; second voyage unsuccessful due to coming of peace; now on third voyage to England to secure balance of money. Complements of Lord Sydney and request for Norton to call between 9 and 10 tomorrow. Testimonials on reverse sides of single sheet; W. Peppernell and Robert Digby; Norton, pro-King's cause, anti-Independence, supporter of returned Loyalists.

Folder 10: Grey's Raid – April 18, 1787 – March 13, 1800

True copy attested by Beriah Norton of Robert Digby's testimonial to Norton. Mr. Jay presents his complements, and encloses a letter for Mr. Adams, wishes for a good voyage and a successful conclusion to his business. Beriah Norton to President of the U.S. John Adams. "The Town not sending any member to the General Court this year"; unable at present to "make you any remittance of the favours I rec'd of your Excellency when in London." Requests advice or assistance in obtaining £4923 still

owed by the British. Memorial was committed to the Committee of Claims March 4<sup>th</sup>; can't be heard until tomorrow; extreme press of business in Congress due to Mr. [Edward] Livingston's Resolution "Containing a Charge against our Good President [Adams]"; accounts of conversations with President Adams, Mr Pickering, and the British Minister relevant to the claims; addendum March 11: had full hearing yesterday. Report of the Committee of Claims of the US Congress on Beriah Norton's memorial with regard to the Grey's raid claims; has requested assistance from Congress "to obtain a complete and full settlement"; any proper aid from the department of state will be extended; "it would not be expedient for Congress to make a grant of money"; prayer of the petitioner not granted.

#### Folder 11: Grey's Raid - No Dates

Details hopes (and fluctuating expectations) for reconciliation between Colonies and England; expected appointment of Sir Guy Carlton would increase chances of reconciliation; still hopes to be instrumental in reconciliation. Colonel Symes to Mr. Norton; exchanging unsuccessful visitation attempts in London. James Athearn and Shubael Cottle to Sir Henry Clinton, providing "exact accounts" of stock and forage provided in Sept. 1778; draft sent by Timothy Folger of Nantucket not authorized and possibly inflated figures; enclosed figures based on exact accounts taken at the time; lists of numbers of sheep taken and names of owners. Incomplete letter by Beriah Norton; "further statements" additional to information provided to the Lords of the Treasury in a Memorial on 20 July last; claim confirmed by Sir Guy Carlton, about to leave England to take command appointment. List of 21 documents (documents dated 9 March 1777 to 20 August 1780) left with William Seaton, Secretary to the Board of General Officers, in support of claim on government.

Folder 12: Grey's Raid -Photocopies of documents from the University of Michigan, 1778-1782

### Series II: Legal Documents

Box 1 of 1

Folder 13: Legal Documents - December 10, 1762 - 1771

A deed, transferring plot of Edgartown land at Farm Neck from Fortunatus Mayhew to John Cosens, David Davis, Innkeeper, and Beriah Norton.

Order of Probate Judge Matthew Mayhew to Beriah Norton; April 14, 1766 of deceased John Cousins was approved and Zachariah Mayhew and Jemima Cousins (Widow) named executor and executrix. Order of Enoch Coffin, Justice of the Peace.

Deed transferring from Noah Norton to Beriah Norton "one seventh part of a tract or parcel of meadow" formerly belonging to Phineas Norton.

Folder 14: Legal Documents - January 15, 1774 - October 10, 1778

Two-sided document; will of Matthew Norton (Beriah Norton's father.

Receipt signed by Daniel Leonard; two guineas received from Norton for case, Beriah Norton. Order signed by Enoch Coffin to Peter Norton, Brotherton Daggett, Benjamin Smith, Beriah Norton, Ebenezer Small, Ebenezer Norton, Lemuel Kelley, Obediah Norton Jr. (houseright [sic]); to appear in court at Barnstable on 14 May to give evidence in case between John Fish and Samuel Norton. Beriah Norton given power attorney by Ichabod Cleaveland and Anthony Pent.

Folder 15: Legal Documents – February 16, 1779 – October 12, 1787

A deed transferring land from David Dunham to Beriah Norton.

Deed transferring 13 acres in Edgartown from Timothy Vinson to Beriah Norton. Copy of deed transferring farm with dwelling house in Edgartown from Beriah Norton to Jonathan Amory. Deed transferring from Beriah Norton to Ezra Allen “tracts of upland and saltmarsh.

Folder 16: Legal Documents – October 17, 1787 – April 7, 1794

Deed transferring from Beriah Norton to Matthew Norton “two-thirds of the fifteenth Lott in the first division in the old purchis.” Testimony of Cornelius Norton Jr.; account of threats and accusations of Thomas Cooke against Beriah Norton in November 1789; sworn before Solomon Freeman, Justice of the Peace, 20 September 1791.

Note of Resolution of the House of Representatives deciding in favor of Beriah Norton against James Athearn and Thomas Cooke and awarding Norton \$100

Deed transferring from Beriah Norton to Thomas Smith one tract or lot of land in Edgartown.

Folder 17: Legal Documents – April 6, 1795 – November 14, 1817

Copy of order to Sheriff of Copy of County of Dukes County to Sheriff of County of Dukes County to summon Ichabod Norton, Executor of will of Peter Norton, to appear before Justices of Common Pleas; details of money owed to Beriah Norton by Peter Norton estate. Notice from Court of Common Pleas of Duke’s County referring the case of Beriah Norton vs. Ichabod Norton, executor for the will of Peter Norton, to Obediah Pease, Benjamin Davis, and Samuel Smith. Account of money advanced toward finishing Esq. Marchant’s chamber so Norton’s [widowed] daughter Huldah [Coffin] could move in. William Allen Jr. to Beriah Norton; returning deed belonging to Norton’s daughter Mrs. Coffin so she can use it to execute a deed by; also writing to Mr. Timothy Coffin.

### Series III: Edgartown Papers

Box 1 of 1

Folder 18: Edgartown Papers – October 29, 1764 – February 12, 1765

Selectmen of Edgartown, authorizing Town Treasurer Peter Norton to pay Rev. Samuel Kingsbury; part is “Third Payment of his Settlement,” part is for his Oct. 1763-Oct. 1764 salary. Edgartown accounts by Peter Norton, Treasurer; attested as correct by John Sumner and William Jernigan; entered on town records by Enoch Coffin, Town Clerk.

John Sumner and Beriah Norton, Selectmen of Edgartown; order Peter Norton, Town Treasurer, to pay Benjamin Coffin for service as Selectman during present year.  
John Norton and Benjamin Coffin order Peter Norton, Town Treasurer, to pay Beriah Norton for serving as "the Town as Constabel" in 1763. Folder 19: Edgartown Papers - February 13, 1765 - January 22, 1778 John Sumner and Benjamin Coffin, Edgartown selectmen, authorizing payment to Beriah Norton for providing a pair of shoes to John Cuningham. John Sumner and Beriah Norton, Edgartown selectmen, authorizing payment to Isaac Norton for boarding Eunice Cuningham.  
Beriah Norton to Peter Norton; notice of appointment as Sheriff of County of Dukes County and advice to appear in town tomorrow to receive commission and be sworn in.  
Beriah Norton, Justice of the Peace, to Sheriff of Dukes County; Complaint sworn by Samuel Smith on Zephaniah Butler and Peter Camp; order to detain Butler and Camp.

Folder 20: Edgartown Papers - April 1, 1795 - January 27, 1813

Current accounting for Edgartown Post Office, from April 1 to July 1 1795; Beriah Norton Postmaster.

Order from the General Post Office at Philadelphia to Beriah Norton, Post-Master at Edgartown, to pay Anslem Dimmick twenty dollars and four cents.

Post Master General in Acct. with Beriah Norton P.M. Edgartown; figures for 27 January 1813 to 1 April 1819. Joseph T. Pease, Cornelius B. Marchant, and Mary West-Pease; attest that Beriah Norton kept first post-office in Edgartown in the front room of the "Margaret Coffin" house.

## Series IV: Requests/Requisitions

Box 1 of 1

Folder 21: Requests/Requisitions - September 1, 1775 - November 1, 1775

A letter sent to John Collins, Commander of the *Nautilus*, signed by selectmen Joseph Allen, Stephen Luce, and Ebenezer Smith; apologies that disputes between Great Britain and the Colonies prevent them from providing provisions; permission to take on water if done during the day and men come unarmed and do not abuse the inhabitants; threat made to "fire on our houses" "will not force the least compliance."

Note from Capt. Ayscough of the Swan; one side addressed to Inhabitants of Martha's Vineyard and dated 17 October 1775, the other to the "good People of Old Town" and dated Wednesday Morning; both sides request eggs, turkeys, roots, sheep, and promise payment. Dated Wednesday, am; from "a Number of the Inhabitants of Edgartown" to Capt. Ayscough on board the Swan; unhappy about "the unhappy Controverse between Great Britain & the Colonies"; pledge to adhere to humane and Christians Principles"; "we send a few such articles as we have on hand"; request that two young Edgartown men being held be "dismissed"; would be considered "an abundant satisfaction" for the articles, more will be sent if they can be collected.

Beriah Norton to Capt. Benjamin Smith; order to order Company to appear at home of Mrs. Sarah Davis to receive advance pay; forward enclosed letter to Nathan Smith.

Folder 22: Requests/Requisitions – January 22, 1777 – September 1, 1778

Account of corn taken by several persons at Edgartown out of Capt. Chase; lists individuals and number of bushels; signed Beriah Norton, account attributed to Peter Camp. Beriah Norton to Capt. Joseph McCartney of the *Ambuscade* on behalf of committee to consider the latter's request; pleads dependence on the Continent, and offers three sheep and a dozen or two fowls; explicit expectation that there will be no further demands. Ford of the *Unicorn* writes to convey; Lord Viscount Howe's request for six pilots for vessels to receive troops according to terms agreed between General Burgoin and General Gates; troops landed this morning in Lumberts Cove but failed to obtain pilots. A response to Captain Collins having been denied "a little milk or a cabbage"; general observation about the state of relations.

Folder 23: Requests/Requisitions – June 22, 1779 – September 1794

Resolution of the State Assembly requiring named representatives for various counties to compile and return to the Secretary's Office lists and particular descriptions of lands and tenements owned by those named in "An Act to confiscate the Estates of certain notorious Conspirators against the Government and Liberties of the Inhabitants of the late province now State of Massachusetts Bay" and "An Act for confiscating the Estates of certain Persons commonly called Absentees"; signed by John Hancock and John Avery. Authorization to Paymaster General at New York to pay Beriah Norton and William Norton "for the within stock." Letter from Beriah Norton to Thomas Cooke; Norton notified in 1780 that a Committee of the General Court of the Commonwealth sought to settle Norton's account for supplying seacoast men on the public books; Norton supplies details to indicate matter should be resolved and asks Cooke to act in his absence if necessary. Brigade Orders to Col. Beriah Norton commanding officer of the Militia in Duke's County to organize the militia and have the several companies choose officers; signed Joseph Dimmick in consequence of a Division order from Major General Goodwin.

## Series V: Miscellaneous

Box 1 of 1

Folder 24: Miscellaneous - September 23, 1775 – October 7, 1778

Letter to Beriah Norton, Representative at Watertown, from Jonathan Allen; his "disorder" requires that he request that no commission appointing him to public business be drawn up as he would only have to decline it.

Beriah Norton to Capt. Benjamin Smith; Complaint against Sergeant William Norton, who threatened and verbally abused BN on a schooner "on or about 10<sup>th</sup> day of March last." Receipt; David Davis 45 pounds from Beriah Norton who received it of [blank] Baker for the "improvement of a farm" belonging to Sara Davis; 1 May 1777 to 1 May 1779.

Original of from J. Wentworth to Beriah Norton is dated Hammersmith House 2 October 1781; Norton to carry letters and packages and to arrange the purchase of a horse (discussed in detail) for Wentworth on return to New York.

Folder 25: Miscellaneous - December 26, 1782 - June 4, 1785

Copy of letter from Beriah Norton William Mayhew; response to letter of 24<sup>th</sup>; Norton sees no grounds for dispute between them. William Mayhew to Beriah Norton in New York; Mayhew revising his directions for materials to be purchased, revisions due to "reports of Peace." Label (?) to Coln. Beriah Norton Esq., Edgartown, from John Jay.

Folder 26: Miscellaneous - April 13, 1791 - October 7, 1877

Beriah Norton to Peter Norton; accounting for moneys given to Jabez Demmick on a draft by Peter Norton. Beriah Norton to Mrs. Thankful Ripley; Norton wishes to meet with her son, Captain Ripley, to see if he will pay anything on a debt owed to Norton by the deceased Ripley sr.; details the difficulties he (Norton) has encountered in his personal life since the debt was incurred. Draft / copy of letter Beriah Norton to the President [James Monroe]; reminds Monroe that Norton dined with him in Richmond; in dire financial straights and seeking support for a petition to the Secretary of War seeking some support in his old age. Copy of letter from Beriah Norton to President Monroe; clean copy of draft dated May 16. Copy of letter from Norton to John Quincy Adams seeking support for Norton's petition for assistance in his old age; content indicates very similar letters to President Monroe written in May may not have been sent.

Folder 27: Reference Documents to Beriah Norton finding aid

## Series VI: Reference Copies

Box 1 of 1

Folder 28: Copies - Multiple items

Folder 29: Copies - No Date

Folder 30: Copies - 1760s

Folder 31: Copies - 1770-1774

Folder 32: Copies - 1775

Folder 33: Copies - 1776

Folder 34: Copies - 1777

Folder 35: Copies - 1778a

Folder 36: Copies - 1778b

Folder 37: Copies - 1778c

Folder 38: Copies - 1779

Folder 39: Copies - 1780

Folder 40: Copies - 1781

Folder 41: Copies - 1782a

Folder 42: Copies - 1782b

Folder 43: Copies - 1783-1784

Folder 44: Copies - 1785-1786

Folder 45: Copies - 1787

Folder 46: Copies - 1790s

Folder 47: Copies - 1800s