Recovered Public Treasures
Manuscripts reclaimed and donated to the New Jersey State Archives

New Jersey Day Exhibition, 24 June 2016
This 48-page document was the Elizabethtown Associates’ response to the East Jersey Proprietors’ Bill in Chancery (1745). Both sides believed they had the right to sell and own land around Elizabethtown. The Associates had been granted the land from the Duke of York’s governor, Richard Nicholls. However, the Proprietors title claim was based on the Duke’s grant to Sir George Carteret. The Answer to the Bill in Chancery was penned by William Livingston. This land dispute was never officially resolved.
2. “An Act to enable sundry of the Owners and Possessors of Meadows and Tide-Marsh lying on English’s Creek, in the County of Burlington, to erect and maintain a Bank, Dam and other Water-works …,” 26 September 1772.

Received from the Society of Colonial Wars in the State of New Jersey, 2014.

Now cataloged in: Department of State, Secretary of State’s Office, Enrolled Laws.

This law allowed several landholders in Mansfield Township, Burlington County, to build and maintain a dam to prevent overflow into English’s Landing. On 25 January 1854, the act was repealed since local residents found the legislation to be “oppressive.”

Received from Campbell Library, Rowan University, 2015.

Now cataloged in: Department of State, Secretary of State’s Office, Enrolled Laws.

“An Act for the preservation of the publick Records of the State of New Jersey

Whereas the preservation of the publick Records is of the Utmost Importance to the Inhabitants of this State. Therefore

Be it Enacted by the Council and General Assembly of this State and it is hereby Enacted by the Authority of the Same that Charles Pettit, Bowes Reed and Joseph Newbold Esquire, and any of them, and they and any one of them, are hereby Authorized and Impowered as soon as Causion may require after the publication of this Act to remove at the Expence of the State the publick Records and at Burlington, from thence and Deposit them in such place or places as they or any one of them shall from time to time Judge necessary & in the greater Safety thereof and to Deliver the said Records into the Care and Custody of such person and persons during their Absence from the Secretary’s Office as the said Charles Pettit shall by writing under his hand appoint for that purpose.”
4. “An Act to prevent Persons from passing through the State without proper Passports,” 10 June 1779.

Received from Campbell Library, Rowan University, 2015.

Now cataloged in: Department of State, Secretary of State’s Office, Enrolled Laws.

“An Act to prevent persons from passing through this State without, proper passports.
Whereas the Liberties of the United States may be greatly endangered while Spies and other disaffected persons are suffered to travel at large and carry intelligence to the Enemy for preventing of which in this State 1. Be it, Enacted by the Council and General Assembly of this State and it is hereby enacted by the Authority of the same, that from and after the publication of this Act, no person or persons whatsoever residing within the State except the Members of the Legislature and publick Officers of Government shall be permitted to pass and repass throughout part of this State, other than the County in which he, she or they reside, without having a Commission under this State or the United States or a Certificate from his Excellency the Governor or from one of the Members of the Legislative Council or General Assembly of the Country in which he, she or they reside, or from one of the Judges of the Supreme Court, or one of the Judges of the Courts of Common pleas or Justices of the Peace of such County certifying that the Bearer is an Inhabitant of the County of and a person of good repute and generally esteemed a friend to the present Government, as established under the Authority of the people, in which Certificate shall be inserted the name and Rank of the person, and the Town and County in which he resides, Which Commission or Certificate shall entitle …”
5. “An Act granting unto Henry Guest, for a limited Time, the sole Right if making and selling the Blubber by him lately invented,” 14 December 1779.

Received from Campbell Library, Rowan University, 2015.

Now cataloged in: Department of State, Secretary of State’s Office, Enrolled Laws.

Before the federal government began issuing patents, this responsibility fell to the individual states. Henry Guest had developed a method for making blubber, of which aided in the curing of leather and the importation of dye. Guest not only received a five-year patent from New Jersey, but also New York and Pennsylvania.

Received from Campbell Library, Rowan University, 2015.
Source: Department of State, Secretary of State’s Office, Enrolled Laws.

Rutgers University, originally Queens College, is the eighth-oldest college in the United States. Named after the Queen Consort Charlotte, it was formed by a group of Dutch Reformed clergymen who wanted to educate ministers in the colonies. The original charter was granted in 1766 by Governor William Franklin. This act amended the charter a few years after the American Revolution. New Jersey was the only one, of the original 13 colonies, with two institutions of higher learning: The College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) and Queens College.
7. “An Act to authorize the People of this State to meet in Convention, deliberate upon, agree to, and ratify the Constitution of the United States, proposed by the late General Convention,” 1 November 1787.

Received from Campbell Library, Rowan University, 2015.

Source: Department of State, Secretary of State’s Office, Enrolled Laws.

“State of New Jersey

An Act to Authorize the People of this State to meet in Convention, deliberate upon, agree to, and ratify the Constitution of the United States proposed by the late General Convention. Be it enacted by the Council and General Assembly of this State and it is hereby enacted by the Authority of the same, that it shall and may be lawful for the People thereof by their Delegates to meet in Convention, to deliberate upon and if approved of by them to ratify the Constitution for the United States proposed by the General Convention held at Philadelphia and every Act matter and clause therein contained, conformably to the Resolutions of the Legislators passed the twenty ninth day of October seventeen hundred and eighty seven, any Law usage or custom to the Contrary in any wise notwithstanding.”

Received from Springfield Free Public Library, 2016.

Source: Department of State, Secretary of State’s Office, Enrolled Laws.

Sergeant Samuel Dowdney was a Revolutionary War soldier in the New Jersey Continental Line, 3rd Regiment, serving under General George Washington. By 1789, Dowdney had lost his promissory note for three fourth parts of the depreciation of his pay. By this act, the Legislature allowed the State Treasurer to issue another note to the sergeant providing for his pay.
In 1758, the Delaware Indians of New Jersey, who had sided with the French in their war against Great Britain and its colonies, sought a peace settlement with New Jersey. This was granted on the condition that the Indians release any collective claim to New Jersey lands and agree to reside on a reservation. The property purchased in Burlington County, referred to as the Brotherton Tract, was never home to more than 100 Indians. In 1802, New Jersey’s tribesmen joined the Oneida in New York. By 1822 they had relocated to Green Bay, Michigan Territory. That year, as authorized by the law shown above (left), the reservation in New Jersey was sold and the proceeds given to its former residents. A decade later, by virtue of another act of the Legislature (above right), all remaining collective land rights of the Delaware Indians in New Jersey were extinguished in consideration of $2,000 compensation.
Under this colonial law, no-one in the Province of New Jersey could own a trap weighing more than three and a half pounds. Anyone discovered to be in possession of such a device would be fined the same penalty as if they actually had set the trap. The legislation, which prescribed where traps could be set and for which animals, related to both public safety and preventing the depletion of wildlife populations.

Received from the Estate of Mary L. Hamelberg through Cowan’s Auctions, 2015.

Now cataloged in: Department of State, Secretary of State’s Office, Enrolled Laws.

“An Act explaining the Right of Voting at Town Meetings and the Elections of Township Officers.

For the Better ascertaining What Persons Shall have a Right to Vote at Town Meetings and the Elections of the Township and Precinct Officers, at the Town Meetings to be hereafter Held in Each Respective Township and Precinct within this Colony.

Be it enacted by the Governor, Council and General Assembly of this Colony of New Jersey, and it is hereby Enacted by the Authority of the same, That from and after the Publication of this Act no Person or Persons Except in Towns Corporate shall have the Previledge to Give his or their Voice or Vote at any Town Meetings for Electing any Town or Precinct Officer or Officers or other Business to be done or Transacted at any of the said Town Meetings unless the Person Offering such Vote is a Freeholder, a Tenant for Years, or Householder and Resident in Such Township or Precinct. And all Powers Given to the Inhabitants of this Colony at their said Meetings, by any Act or Acts of the General Assembly of this Colony Shall be Understood to Extend only to the Freeholders, Tenants for Years or Householders, being Residents in such Township or Precinct and no others any Law, Custom or Usage to the Contrary thereof in any Use Notwithstanding.”
13. Petition of the Justices and Freeholders of Somerset County to the Legislature for an Act to Allow for Commitment of Prisoners to Adjacent Counties’ Jails after the Burning of their Courthouse by the British, 3 December 1779.

Received from Freeman’s Auctions, 2016.

Now cataloged in: Legislature, Petitions, Resolutions, Transactions, Accounts and Miscellaneous Papers, ca. 1700-1845.

The structure referred to here was the second Somerset County courthouse and jail to be destroyed by fire. It was razed by a British raiding party on 26 October 1779. Most of the county’s records were destroyed in the blaze.
14. Tavern License Petition of Benoni Dare to the Cumberland County Court of Common Pleas, 20 November 1792.

Received from Freeman’s Auctions, 2016.

Now cataloged in: Cumberland County, Court of Common Pleas, Tavern License Petitions, 1774-1920.

“To the Honourable, the Judges, and Justices of the Court of Common Pleas, to be held at Bridge Town in November Term, Seventeen Hundred, and Ninety five, in and for the County of Cumberland, and State of West Jersey, We Your Petitioners, Inhabitants, and Freeholders, in the County of Cumberland, and State aforesaid, do Recommend, Benoni Dare, as a Person well Calculated to keep a house of Intertainment, at Port Elizabeth, where he now Lives, and your Petitioners wishes your Honours, to Grant Unto him the said Benoni Dare, Licence, to Continue one year after Date, at the House and Place where he now Lives, for such Intertainment, and In so Doing your Petitioners as In duty bound, will Ever pray &c.”
15. Bergen County Oath of Allegiance and Abjuration to King George II, ca. 1727-1760.

Received from Brian Bicher, 2011.

Now cataloged in: Bergen County, Clerk’s Office, Oaths, 1727-1794.

This Bergen County oath form was used during the reign of King George III for public officials to swear their allegiance to the royal government. It bears the signatures of generations of justices, sheriffs, and county officers. “An Act for the relief of Samuel Dowdney,” 7 November 1789.

Received from Springfield Free Public Library, 2016.

Source: Department of State, Secretary of State’s Office, Enrolled Laws.
New Jersey’s 1804 law for the “gradual abolition of slavery” stipulated that every child born of a slave mother was to be free after a period of servitude to the mother’s owner. Males would be emancipated at the age of 25, and females at the age of 21. However, the legislation also allowed the slave owner to abandon such children during the first year. This list of abandonments in Montgomery Township, Somerset County, dates from about 1806. In 1811, the State repealed the section of the legislation allowing for abandonment.
Issac Harrow of Trenton, “old” Hunterdon County, owned property extending from the present-day New Jersey State House to the Old Barracks. Here he operated a plating and blade mill, making goods such as frying pans, axes, cow bells, ladles, saws, and knives. His mill site is now interpreted in an archaeological park on the State House grounds.
18. Inventory of the Estate of John Coxe, Esq., deceased, of Trenton, 1753.

Received from Winterthur Museum, 2016.

Now cataloged in: Department of State, Secretary of State’s Office, Wills and Inventories.

John Coxe was the grandson and heir of Dr. Daniel Coxe, who controlled vast land holdings in the Colony of West New Jersey. His 1753 estate inventory illustrates the family’s wealth, listing rich furnishings room by room, and rare possessions like maps of the world and the province.

Received from Winterthur Museum, 2016.

Now cataloged in: Department of State, Secretary of State’s Office, Wills and Inventories.

Aaron Burr Sr. was the father and namesake of the third vice president of the United States of America. He was a Presbyterian clergyman and a founder of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University). Rev. Burr died from an illness contracted while presiding over the funeral of Governor Jonathan Belcher in Massachusetts. His wife would die shortly afterward, leaving their daughter and son, of future fame, orphans.
20. Inventory of the Estate of Garet Johnson, deceased, of Hopewell, 1766.

Received from Winterthur Museum, 2016.

Now cataloged in: Department of State, Secretary of State’s Office, Wills and Inventories.

Garet Johnson owned the Johnson Ferry property in Hopewell Township used by General George Washington during his famous crossing of the Delaware River on 25 December 1776. Although Johnson died a decade before the revolutionary event that changed the course of American history, his sons inherited the land and witnessed the Crossing.
James Trent belonged the namesake founding family of our state capital city. His father William had purchased property at the “Falls of the Delaware” for use as a country home, settling there permanently in 1721. His personal possessions at the time of death included several pistols, gold rings, and a looking glass.