

# How Newbury Protected its Invaluable History

## Newbury, Massachusetts

Population: About 6,500, including the Village of Byfield

Date of oldest record: 1635

The need: Preservation and digitization of the town's oldest records, ensuring they are available for decades to come.

"I was very appreciative that they knew exactly the whole process and guided me the whole way. I never had any questions really. I knew that my books were in good hands."

— Gretchen Girard, Town Clerk



## The Scope

Before she retired, Town Clerk Leslie Haley wanted to ensure Newbury's history would be preserved for generations. In doing so, she cemented her own legacy into 100 volumes of historic materials.

When Haley retired on Dec. 31, 2022, she had secured \$120,730 in funds through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to restore and preserve all 100 volumes. Before this project, the town restored what documents they could, usually no more than 10 volumes per year.

About 30 volumes of the city's oldest history were in danger of disintegrating. The bindings were damaged, acid was wearing away the pages, and some had obvious water stains.

"We were going to lose the information if we didn't do something," said current Town Clerk Gretchen Girard. "Some of the books were falling apart, literally."

These documents included minutes from town meetings from 1688 to 1728, proprietors records dating back to 1635, a document that detailed contributions to the church from 1707, and the Paupers Register spanning from 1828 to 1852. The town has also preserved its unique Book of Earmarks, which tracks cattle ownership through the tags put in their ears — one of only three of its kind that still exists in the nation. The oldest documents outdated the country itself, hailing from Massachusetts' colonial days.

# The Challenge

One of Gretchen Girard's first responsibilities as newly elected town clerk was overseeing the restoration project. Girard was familiar with the goals and scope since she previously served as assistant town clerk. Still, it was a daunting venture.

Fortunately, Kofile Account Executive Carolyn Yetto, guided her every step of the way.

"I was really wet behind the ears. She held my hand through the whole process," Girard said. "She picked up the books, gave me a timeline of what was going to happen. It was very seamless."

# The Results

## Preservation of History

The books were delivered to Newbury by spring of 2024, meeting the town's deadline to spend its ARPA funds. Along with treating the documents to remove acid and restore damage, Kofile's processing team protected each document in plastic sheaths, allowing them to be handled without worry, and rebound the volumes to withstand the test of time.

While most of the public benefits from accessing the documents online, a local genealogist recently came into the clerk's office to inspect a militia record.

"He found everything that he was looking for very easily accessible. He was thrilled. And it was nice that it wasn't a wild goose chase," Girard remembered. "The bindings were easily identified. He knew exactly which book to look in."

## Accessibility of Digital Records

Kofile also scanned each document to create a high resolution digital file for public use. Newbury's entire library of historic documents are now available online.

"It's just easy. Everything's accessible to them, instead of us dragging the books out," Girard said. "People can just go online themselves and look for the information."

## Taxpayer Savings and Peace of Mind

Along with providing a convenient service for residents, the digital documents mean that the city saves staff time and taxpayer dollars in the long run.

"It's a huge time saver for the office," Girard said. "I'm not doing a lot of research trying to hunt down certain things that people are looking for."

Girard considers the work of restoring and digitizing historical documents to be an invaluable investment for future generations: "It's definitely a win-win for everyone. It's so nice to have everything all done."