

**Rt. Rev. Samuel Seabury (1706-1796)**  
**Record Group No. 1 – A1**

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| Repository:           | Archives of the Episcopal Diocese in Connecticut<br>The Commons 290 Pratt St.<br>Meriden, CT 06450                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Call Number:          | Record Group 1 – A1                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                       | Creator: Rt. Rev. Samuel Seabury (1706-1796)<br>Episcopate: 1784-1796                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Title:                | Guide to the Samuel Seabury Papers Record Group No. 1 – A1<br>The papers and Ecclesiastical Acts of The Rt. Rev. Samuel Seabury the first Bishop of the Diocese of Connecticut, and first Consecrated bishop in the United States of America                                                  |
| Dates:                | 1729-1862 (bulk 1766-1796)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Physical description: | Total twelve manuscript boxes, 2 oversized boxes of artifacts and photographs; 2 oversized boxes of photocopies of “Journal B” for 15 cubic feet.                                                                                                                                             |
| Language(s):          | English                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Summary:              | Family records, personal and pastoral correspondence, Ecclesiastic Acts, drawings, portraits and other images, scrapbooks, and published sermons and books.                                                                                                                                   |
| View/Search:          | View or search the entire finding aid in HTML or as a .PDF                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Finding Aid Link:     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Request Materials:    | To view or examine his papers, please contact the archivist for an appointment:<br><a href="mailto:mbsmith@ctepiscopal.org">mbsmith@ctepiscopal.org</a> or<br>Archives of the Episcopal Diocese in Connecticut<br>The Commons 290 Pratt St.<br>Meriden, CT 06450 (203-639-3501 extension 135) |
| Catalog record:       | A record of this information is available in the data base at the repository.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

**Administrative information:**

Provenance: This collection was primarily collected during Bishop Seabury’s lifetime. After his death many of parishioners contributed papers they had long collected and saved, and Churchmen wrote retrospective articles and memoirs of him. Some papers are photocopies collected from other collections, primarily the Diocese of Maryland and the New York Public Library, by the Rev. Cn. Kenneth Walter Cameron.

Information and access: The collection is open for research without restriction.

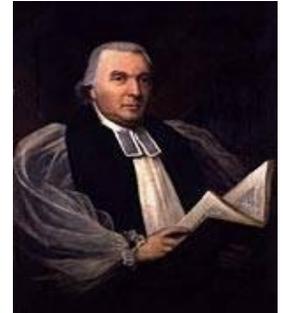
Cite as: Bishop Samuel Seabury papers (RG1-A1) Bishops collection, Archives of the Episcopal Diocese in Connecticut.

Biographical Sketch:

Historical/ Biographical note:

**SAMUEL SEABURY**, *First Bishop in the United States of America*

*Born in North Groton November 30, 1729 to Samuel Seabury, a Congregationalist minister, the younger Seabury may have been destined to become an Anglican priest. His father\* resigned his parish in 1741 to travel to England for ordination, returning as an Anglican missionary at New London for about ten years. Ironically, Samuel Seabury was born on the day of St. Andrew, patron saint of Scotland, which may have presaged his future consecration as the first American Bishop when he was consecrated at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Aberdeen, Scotland on November 15, 1784.*



Graduated from Yale in 1748 and too young to be a candidate for the priesthood, Seabury traveled to Edinburgh to study medicine, as was customary young men considering a future in the priesthood. He may have worshipped with a persecuted Scottish Episcopal congregation while studying abroad. Ordained a deacon and a priest in 1753, he traveled to New Brunswick, New Jersey to serve as an S. P. G. missionary. He also visited parishes in Jamaica, Long Island, Staten Island, and Philadelphia. His father officiated at his marriage to Mary Hicks, the daughter of a retired Philadelphia merchant, and they had five children.

He became rector to the parish in Jamaica in 1756, but after his father's death, accepted a call to St. Peter's, Westchester, where he earned a reputation as a staunch defender of the Church of England. During his participation in the founding of King's College (Columbia University) his four Loyalist pamphlets from "A.W. Farmer" (or *Letters from a Westchester Farmer*) earned him a doctor of letters from Oxford University, while incurring the rage of American patriots. Despite his anti-revolutionary sentiments, Seabury became increasingly concerned that the Colonies needed a bishop. His adversaries, especially the Congregationalists, regarded such a move as a further encroachment of the Church of England, and thus the English Crown, upon the American Colonies.

During the Revolutionary War, Seabury was arrested at his school and taken to New Haven to be publicly paraded and imprisoned. Later, while searching for Seabury in hiding, soldiers would beat his children and lay plunder to his farm. He managed to remove his family to Long Island and New York, where he practiced medicine, and received a small sum as chaplain. Many other royalist sympathizers formed a miserable group of refugees in New York. His wife died during this bitter period, and Seabury believed that his only alternative would be exile.

However, in the spring of 1783, he received a message from a group of clergy in Connecticut, who had met at [The Glebe House](#) and elected him bishop on the second ballot. (They first elected the Rev. Jeremiah Leaming, who declined the office because of his age and infirmity.) When he sailed to England, it was as a candidate for bishop, rather than an exile. Because he could not swear allegiance to the Crown, Seabury was consecrated by three Scottish bishops, on the condition that the Church in America adopt the Scottish Rite for the Communion Office, which he accomplished, with some variation in the prayers by 1764. The Concordat, or agreement with the Scottish bishops can be seen in the diocesan archives

Upon his return, Seabury became rector of St. James's Church, New London, where he remained until his death. This period of Seabury's life was one of the busiest in the history of the American Church. On August 12, 1785, following American independence and the first Convocation, he authorized the adoption of prayers for the state in his first pastoral letter. A liturgy of a slightly altered version of the Scottish Communion Office of 1764 was published with the advice of the clergy. Constantly traveling over rough roads and in all weather, Seabury performed long-absent ecclesiastical acts in an effort to build his diocese. Between May of 1791 and November of 1795, he spent weeks visiting parishes in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. Most of New England regarded him as their bishop, and he often visited Long Island. In his journal, he records traveling between fifteen hundred and two thousand miles and administered eighteen

hundred confirmations, fifteen ordinations, the consecration of six churches, and the bishop of Maryland, Thomas J. Claggett. In fewer than 11 years, he ordained 93 deacons and priests. Candidates from even the middle and southern states would seek him out. In 1811, he performed his last ordination of Alexander Viets Griswold, who would later become Bishop of all of New England except for Connecticut.

Such exhausting demands took their toll, and Seabury missed his first appointment in late 1794. On February 25, 1796 while visiting the home of the warden of his New London church, Seabury suffered a heart attack and died. With all his activity to build the church, it is easy to wonder how he had time to write sermons, and lift his following from a languid to a faith-filled community. A controversial figure for his teaching and personality (his enemies called him a “pensioned Tory”) Seabury was yet a champion of “revealed” religion, where he saw no conflict with reason. His oratory was more dramatic than favored at the time, but his sermons were rooted in profound biblical knowledge. Without sacrificing practical virtues and personal religion, he emphasized the Church’s polity and sacraments, including baptism, confirmation, penance, frequent reception at the Eucharist and the apostolic origin of the ministry.

Within 50 years of his death, his significance was already recognized. Perhaps no other man could have worked so vigorously in building up the Church in the face of criticism and opposition as did Samuel Seabury. Some of his enemies accused him of acting pompous and regal. Yet, Seabury was humble before his God, as can be verified in his writing. Each time he set out upon yet another journey, he would ask God’s guidance and blessing as his entry for May 1795:

*May God Almighty, who has ever been gracious to me, protect me in this journey; dispose my heart to fear and serve him; enable me to do my duty to his Church with uprightness of heart; and bless this ministers and people under my care with his grace and Holy Spirit.*

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Burr, Nelson Rollin, *The Story of the Diocese of Connecticut: a new branch of the vine*. (Hartford, CT: Church Missions Publishing Company, c1962)

Seabury, Samuel, *Miles to go before I sleep: Samuel Seabury’s Journal from 1791-1795*, edited by Anne W. Rowthorn (Hartford, CT: Church Missions Publishing Company, c1982)

\*Samuel Seabury, the elder, was a descendent of Elizabeth Alden Seabury who was granddaughter of John Alden and Priscilla Mullins of the *Mayflower*.

[A Brief History of the Scottish Episcopal Church](#)

An online history of the SEC based on Gerald Stranraer-Mull’s book *A Church for Scotland*

Arrangement: The papers are arranged chronologically, followed by Journal B, artifacts and scrapbooks. Episcopal Acts are filed separately.