

**The Burke Library Archives, Columbia University Libraries,  
Union Theological Seminary, New York**

Missionary Research Library Archives: Section 10

Finding Aid for

**John Eliot Papers, 1882 – 1958**

Finding Aid prepared by: Brigette C. Kamsler, August 2011  
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**Summary Information**

Creator: David Chamberlain  
Title: John Eliot Papers, 1882 – 1958  
Inclusive dates: 1882 – 1958  
Bulk dates: 1921 – 1934  
Abstract: John Eliot, 1604-1690, was a Puritan minister and translator of the Bible into the Native American Algonquian language, originally published in 1663. His translation was the first Bible printed in North America. The collection, gathered by Eliot biographer David Chamberlain, includes articles, illustrations, photographs, pamphlets and correspondence related to Eliot's work, as well as the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Massachusetts.  
Size: 1 boxes, 0.50 linear feet  
Storage: Onsite storage  
Repository: The Burke Library  
Union Theological Seminary  
3041 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027  
Email: [burkearchives@library.columbia.edu](mailto:burkearchives@library.columbia.edu)

### Administrative Information

- Provenance:** Originally part of the independent Missionary Research Library, these records were moved with the MRL to the Brown Memorial Tower of Union Theological Seminary in 1929. The material in this collection was gathered by David Chamberlain when he wrote his book on John Eliot, and includes information on the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Massachusetts. The MRL received the collection on November 4, 1964. In 1976 the records were accessioned to the Burke Library archives with the closure of the MRL.
- Access:** Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to [burkearchives@library.columbia.edu](mailto:burkearchives@library.columbia.edu), or by postal mail to The Burke Library address on page 1, as far in advance as possible. Burke Library staff is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on archival or special collections research.
- Access Restrictions:** The collection is unrestricted to readers. Certain materials, however, are in a fragile condition, and this may necessitate restriction in handling and copying.
- Preferred Citation:** Item description, MRL 10: John Eliot Papers, 1882-1958, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

### Biography

John Eliot, born in England 1604, studied at Jesus College, Cambridge University and graduated 1622. In 1631, Eliot traveled to New England and was ordained the following year in Roxbury, Massachusetts, where he soon became minister of the First Church of Roxbury. Eliot began studying the Massachusetts language in 1646 with the help of a Native American captive from the Pequot War. This language was a highly inflected Algonquian dialect. In 1650, Eliot gathered his converts into one settlement or “praying town” called Natick, on a tract of two-thousand acres on the Charles River, eighteen miles southwest of Roxbury. Residing at this location were Nonantum, Neponset, Musketaquid and Nipmuck Indians.

Eliot spent years translating the Bible, which culminated in the publication of the Old and New Testament in 1663. Eliot’s translation was the first Bible printed in North America. He continued to translate Christian literature for the Native Americans, including Baxter’s *Call to the Unconverted* and other practical books; prepared an Indian catechism; Psalter; *Indian Primer*, and *The Indian Grammar Begun*.

According to the Missionary Research Library *Occasional Bulletin*, published June 25, 1958, “John Eliot’s work...was assumed as the primary responsibility of the earliest organization established by Protestant Europe to work with the American Indians. It was known as the “Corporation for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Indians of New England,” and was established in England in 1649.”

Eliot is perhaps better known as one of the translators behind the publication of the famous Bay Psalm book, published in Cambridge, Mass in 1647.

Sources:

- Bowden, Henry W. and James P. Ronda. *John Eliot's Indian Dialogues: A Study in Cultural Interaction*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980.
- Cogley, Richard W. *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians before King Philip's War*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Cryer, Neville B. "John Eliot," in *Five Pioneer Missionaries*, edited by S. M. Houghton, 171-232. London : Banner of Truth Trust, c1965.
- Tinker, George E. *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*. Minneapolis : Fortress Press, c1993.
- The Eliot Tracts: With Letters from John Eliot to Thomas Thorowgood and Richard Baxter*, edited by Michael P. Clark. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2003.
- Winslow, Ola Elizabeth. *John Eliot: Apostle to the Indians*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968.

**Collection Scope and Content Note**

This collection was constructed from secondary material about John Eliot and contains publications, pamphlets, and histories recounting Eliot's life and pastoral work, and general observations of the Native Americans. It includes illustrations and photographs depicting Eliot's work, as well as buildings and people from the time period. The correspondence is responses to creator David Chamberlain as he was searching for information on Eliot.

**Processing**

Materials were placed in new acid-free folders. Acidic items were separated from one another by interleaving with acid-free paper as needed. Preservation photocopying of newspaper clippings for retention of information was performed. Photographs were sleeved with Mylar. Collection contains one nitrate negative which was placed in acid-free paper and enclosed in an acid-free paper envelope.

*Note – The collection is housed in the same box as MRL10: Martha Letitia Edwards.*

**Contents list**

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
1	1	1	Collected Publications, Pamphlets and Newspaper Clippings
1	1	2	Correspondence
1	1	3	Histories
1	1	4	Illustrations
1	1	5	Photographs and related information