

Congregational Library & Archives Collections Development Policy

Revised: May 25, 2022

Overview

Introduction and Statement of Purpose

The Congregational Library & Archives (CLA) fosters a deeper understanding of the spiritual, intellectual, cultural, and civic dimensions of the Congregational story and its ongoing relevance to contemporary society. To this end, the library collects material related to all aspects of Congregationalism as practiced historically and presently, as well as material that provides necessary historical context and that supports the study of the same.

This document provides information about the history and current state of CLA's collections in order to provide guidance for acquiring and removing material from the collections and to align these decisions with CLA's mission and needs of its users.

History of the Collections

CLA was founded in 1853 with the donation of 56 books from the personal collections of a number of Boston ministers. In part, the founding of the library was an attempt at solidifying a denominational identity at a time when other Protestant denominations were engaged in similar efforts. Many of the collections' "treasures", such as the Cambridge Platform and the Eliot 'Indian Bible', were acquired with this rationale in mind.

In 1898, the library relocated to 14 Beacon St, its current location. The building, known as Congregational House, was built not just to house the library, but to serve as the headquarters for a number of Congregational and other Protestant religious and benevolent organizations such as the American Board for Commissioners of Foreign Missions and the Boston City Mission Society. Over time, CLA added material and records from these organizations to its collections.

For many years, CLA served as a resource for Congregational ministers in the day to day workings of their churches. As a result, the collections are rich in material on liturgical practices and all aspects of church management. The collections reflect shifting trends in theology and social concerns as well as the reactions of Congregationalists to various intellectual movements and discoveries.

As CLA moved into the 21st century, the focus of the collections shifted to provide resources for the study of Congregationalism's impact on American and world history as well as its status as a religious tradition practiced today. For example, in 2011 and 2014, CLA received donations of

archival and library material from the Chicago Theological Seminary Library which significantly expanded the library's holdings of material by and about Congregational churches and organizations in Chicago and the Midwest. In addition, CLA has endeavored to make its collections and other resources more widely available through the creation of an online catalog and digitization projects like New England's Hidden Histories.

Audiences For and Programs and Activities Supported by the Collections

CLA's collections are available to the public at no cost. As the history of Congregationalism is intimately bound up with the history of America, the collections support a broad range of research interests from amateurs and professionals alike. As such, the collections are intended to support users with a wide range of experience working with historical materials from experienced historians to those who may be encountering primary source materials for the first time; from life-long practicing Congregationalists to those who have little to no familiarity with the denomination.

The collections also support educational programming such as lectures about Congregationalism and its impact on history, group tours and presentations, and publications such as the *Bulletin of the Congregational Library*.

Collections Scope

Collections Strengths and Areas of Specialization

CLA's collections are rich in unique, rare, and distinctive material. Highlights include:

- The records of historically significant churches such as Park Street Church and Old South Church, often dating back to the earliest arrival of European settlers to an area. These materials are invaluable for historical and genealogical research.
- Matheriana—material in both manuscript and print form by Cotton Mather and his relations covering the 17th through the 19th century
- Works on the topic of English Nonconformity
- Works by and about early American Puritans
- Over 12,000 sermons from the 16th century through the 20th century in both manuscript and print.
- Missionary memoirs and unique records related to the operation of the American Board for Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM) such as the activities of the Prudential Committee.
- The Pratt Bible collection, which includes many rare and distinctive examples of Bibles and Biblical literature in a variety of languages, some appearing in print for the first time.

Current Collecting Focus and Priorities

CLA collects materials relevant to the history, practice, and study of Congregationalism and the Congregational story. In addition to material directly related to Congregationalism, CLA also collects material to provide context and support for the study of Congregationalism and materials which have historically influenced Congregational theology and practice.

As Congregationalism is practiced all over the world, CLA does not limit the material it collects by geographical region, although the collections are particularly strong in material from New England and Chicago. In evaluating donations of records from organizations, churches, and individuals outside the Northeast, CLA considers accessibility of the material, the availability of other repositories, fit with the existing collections, and preservation needs in determining whether CLA is the most appropriate home for the material.

CLA generally collects material in English, in German when related to the German Evangelical church, and in Indigenous languages. Under certain circumstances, it may accept material in other languages such as Japanese when related to Doshisha college or other languages when related to Congregational missionary activities.

CLA collects material in a variety of formats including print, audio-visual, and born-digital.

Generally, CLA collects material in the following areas:

- Works on Congregational history, theology, and polity. This includes material from national bodies such as the NACCC, CCCC, and UCC and their member churches as well as material both before and after the 1957 merger of the Congregational Christian Church and the Evangelical and Reformed Church.
- Material about and records of individual Congregational churches, both open and closed, including all types of record books, correspondence, church organization records, photographic material, building records, published histories, etc.
- Material about and records of Congregational organizations, including national and regional conferences, missionary organizations (ABCFM, AMA, AHMA, etc.), benevolent societies, etc.
- Material about and personal papers of ministers or other prominent Congregationalists (missionaries, etc.) including diaries, correspondence, manuscript sermons, etc.
- Periodicals related to Congregationalism as well as general Protestant periodicals from New England.

- Material related to other denominations that have merged with Congregational churches (Christian Connexion, Evangelical and Reformed Church, German Evangelical) or that have had significant interaction with Congregationalists (Baptist, Quaker, Unitarian, etc.).
- Material about social issues and movements in which Congregationalists have played an active role (e.g., temperance, abolition, social gospel, etc.).
- Histories of towns or other geographic areas where Congregationalists have been particularly active.
- Secondary literature relevant to and that supports study within the collections, including publications that have made use of the material in CLA's collections.

Generally, CLA does not collect:

- Duplicates of items already in the collections.
- Material in such poor physical condition that it prevents use or poses a hazard to other materials in the collections (for example moldy materials, etc.).
- Artifacts, artwork, and physical objects.
- Material widely available through other institutions or digitization unless critical to CLA's mission.
- Archival material with questionable ownership, prior claims, or contested intellectual rights.
- Family or pulpit Bibles printed after 1800.
- Newspaper clippings.

CLA will try to direct donors to other repositories when donors offer materials that do not fit within its collecting parameters.

Consistent with the criteria above, CLA endeavors to expand its collections in the following areas:

- The records of Congregational churches.
- Materials from Black, Indigenous, people of color and other marginalized identities, particularly those related to missionary work and historically Black congregations.
- Material from members of the LGBTQ+ community, particularly related to the Open and Affirming Coalition and other similar movements within Congregational churches.

- Records and other material from nondenominational, pan-denominational and ecumenical organizations in which Congregationalists have played a role, particularly material from the 20th and 21st centuries.

Identified Gaps, Weaknesses, and Limitations

The autonomous nature of Congregational churches means that records from these churches and other Congregational organizations are diffuse. As there is no mandate to deposit material with CLA, collections are often found in churches or local repositories such as state or town archives, historical societies, colleges and universities, and public libraries. CLA recognizes this and endeavors to work with churches and other organizations to find a suitable home for their records that will provide the best possible stewardship and make those records accessible to the communities to which they have the most significance.

Acquisitions

Donation

CLA acquired the majority of the material in its collections via donation. Monetary donations are encouraged to help support the processing, cataloging, and storage of donated material but are not required. Potential donations will be evaluated according to the above criteria.

With rare exceptions, CLA does not accept material on indefinite loan.

Staff are not permitted to appraise donations for their monetary value. Donors seeking appraisals will be referred to the Antiquarian Booksellers of America Association.

Budgeting and Purchasing

Consistent with the organization's annual budget, CLA's Librarian has the authority to make purchasing decisions. Other staff members may pursue new purchases in consultation with the Librarian or after discussion at acquisitions meetings. The Executive Director's approval is required for the purchase of any item that costs in excess of \$500.

CLA's Librarian is responsible for managing the acquisitions budget, tracked in the Acquisitions Budget spreadsheet. Budget numbers will be reported quarterly at acquisitions meetings.

Ethical Considerations

Staff will make every reasonable effort to accept material only from those who are authorized to donate/sell it. If an item has questionable provenance or its ownership is disputed, CLA will not accept it.

If CLA becomes aware that it has received material from someone who was not authorized to donate/sell it, the material will be returned to the owner once one can be determined and the authorities will be alerted, as appropriate.

Staff will make every effort to ensure donors understand the terms of their donation.

Documentation

CLA will use a Gift Agreement for archival materials, rare book materials, and book collections. For donations to the library's general collection, CLA will send an acknowledgement letter to the donor for tax purposes.

Collection Assessment and Needs

Reappraisal, Transfer and Deaccessioning

CLA's Librarian or another designated staff member may withdraw from the collections and properly dispose of books, periodicals, and other materials that do not meet CLA's collecting criteria or which duplicate materials in the permanent collections. These materials may be offered for sale to reputable dealers of published or archival material, donated to other institutions, or disposed of after other avenues have been exhausted. CLA reserves the right, as stated in gift forms, to remove segments of a collection that are duplicative or otherwise inappropriate and dispose of those items in an appropriate manner.

Before the deaccessioning of manuscript material, entire collections, printed material prior to 1820, or items that may have significant monetary value, the Librarian or a designated staff member will consult with the Board of Directors' Library Committee.

Material may be deaccessioned if it is:

- Outside CLA's collecting scope.
- Outdated or superseded.
- Infrequently used.
- In need of preservation where costs outweigh intellectual value.
- Hazardous to staff and users or other materials in the collections.
- Widely available through other institutions.

- In poor physical condition.

CLA purchases replacements and updated editions as warranted.

Portions of the collections will be reappraised periodically on an as-needed basis as determined by CLA's Librarian.

Procedures for Revisiting and Revising the Policy

In consultation with the Board of Directors' Library Committee, CLA's Librarian will annually review the collection development policy and assess its implementation to ensure CLA's responsible stewardship of its collections, alignment with CLA's priorities, and current and future researcher interest.