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Pittsfield, Mass. First Church of Christ records, 1764-1864. RG5411

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Congregational Library & Archives

14 Beacon Street

Suite 200

Boston, MA 02108

Business Number: 617-523-0470

info@14beacon.org

URL: <http://www.CongregationalLibrary.org>

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Summary Information

Repository: Congregational Library & Archives

Creator: Allen, Thomas, 1743-1810

Creator: First Church of Christ (Pittsfield, Mass.)

Title: Pittsfield, Mass. First Church of Christ records, 1764-1864.

ID: RG5411

Date [inclusive]: 1764-1864

Physical Description: 0.66 Cubic Feet (2 boxes)

Language of the Material: English .

Abstract: The First Church of Christ in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, was first organized in February 1764. Thomas Allen was called to be the first minister of the church and he was ordained as pastor on April 18, 1764. Construction on the first meeting house was completed in 1770 and construction on the second meeting house was completed in 1793. Thomas Allen's political beliefs resulted in a schism in 1809 which resulted in the formation of the Second Union Church. The churches reunited in 1818 under the pastorate of Dr. Heman Humphrey. In 1846, black members of the church withdrew to form the Second Congregational Church and in 1850 another group of members withdrew to form the South Congregational Church. The second meeting house was partially destroyed in 1851 and construction was completed on the third meeting house in 1853. In 1952, the church underwent a major renovation. The First Church of Christ continues to serve the Pittsfield community today. This collection contains administrative and vital records for the church and includes vital member records as well as church meeting minutes and ministerial records. The collection also contains ministerial records relating to the last decades of Thomas Allen's pastorate, including records related to the political schism of the church.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], in the Pittsfield, Mass. First Church of Christ records, 1764-1864, RG5411. The Congregational Library & Archives, Boston, MA.

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Historical Note

The First Church of Christ in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, was first organized in February 1764. Construction on the first meeting house was begun in 1761 but work was not completed until 1770. Thomas Allen was called to be the first minister of the church and he was ordained as pastor on April 18, 1764. Planning for a second meeting house began in 1789 in order to meet the needs of the growing congregation and construction was completed in 1793.

Thomas "Parson" Allen was also called the "Fighting Parson" and was well remembered for his strong support for the American Revolution. He was said to carry his musket into his pulpit and was supposed to have fired the first shot against the British at the Battle of Bennington. Thomas Allen also had strongly held political beliefs. During the American Revolution, Allen was very anti-loyalist and following the American Revolution Allen's political beliefs became anti-federalist. This led to a schism within his church along political lines during the last years of his ministry; Allen even offered to resign in 1809 over the schism though ultimately poor health and eventually his death in 1810 meant that his resignation was never accepted. From this schism the Second Union Church of Pittsfield was formed by Federalists in 1809.

Thomas Allen's son, William Allen took over the pastorate of the First Church of Christ following his father's death. By 1816, there was talk of reuniting the First Church of Christ and the Second Union Church and in 1818 both were reunited under the pastorate of Dr. Heman Humphrey. Under Humphrey the Pittsfield Sabbath School Association was formed which included Congregationalists, Methodists, and Baptists. Humphrey resigned from the pastorate in 1823 to become the president of Amherst College. In 1846, black members of the First Church of Christ withdrew to form the Second Congregational Church. In 1850 another group of members withdrew to form the South Congregational Church.

During the ministry of John Todd, on February 9, 1851, the second meeting house was partially destroyed by a fire. Construction on the third meeting house, which was designed to be a stone building, began in May 1852 and was completed on July 1853. A parish house and chapel was added to the building between 1868 and 1870. This was renovated and expanded in 1893. In 1899, the French Church in Pittsfield was established with members meeting at the third meeting house and the Italian Church was likewise established not long after in 1908. The First Church of Christ became the first Congregational church in the United States, in 1907, to join the home missions movement on its own by sponsoring T. S. Whitey and his

work in Wyoming. In 1952, the whole church was renovated; that same year the church and parish were incorporated as a single entity. Three years later, in 1955, the French and Italian churches formally merged with the First Church of Christ.

The First Church of Christ in Pittsfield continues to serve the community to this day.

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Scope and Contents

This collection contains administrative and vital records for the First Church of Christ in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. These records include church meeting minutes, membership records, ministerial records, baptismal records, marriage records, and records of death. The collection also contains ministerial records related to the later years of Thomas Allen's pastorate. Included in those ministerial records are records related to a schism which formed in the church along political lines due to Allen's political beliefs.

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Arrangement

This collection has been arranged in chronological order by start date.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Restrictions on Access

Access to this collection is unrestricted and open to the public.

Restrictions on Use

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Acquisition Information

Materials were temporarily deposited for digitization to the Congregational Library & Archives by First Church of Christ in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in March, 2020; 2020-05.

Location of Originals

Materials in this collection are held and maintained by the [Berkshire Athenaeum](#) in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

Digital Copies

Records within this collection were digitized as part of the New England's Hidden Histories project. Digital reproductions may be accessed online through our [digital archive](#).

Accruals

Additional accruals are expected for this collection in the form of full-text transcription. There is no anticipated date for this accrual.

Processing Information

Processed by Zachary Bodnar, November 2021, according to DACS 2019.0.3.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Baptismal records.
- Church controversies.
- Church discipline.
- Church membership.
- Church records and registers.
- Clergy -- Finance, Personal.
- Clergy -- Salaries, etc.
- Covenants (Church polity).
- Creeds.
- Funeral sermons.
- Installation (clergy).
- Marriage records.
- Necrologies.
- New England's Hidden Histories.
- Allen, Thomas, 1743-1810
- First Church of Christ (Pittsfield, Mass.)

Technical Requirements

To access digital user's copies via online-interface, a java-enabled web browser is required. Internet Explorer 8.x and later, Firefox 5.x and later, Opera 12 and later, Safari 5.x and later, or any version of Google Chrome are recommended.

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Bibliography

A Brief History of the First Church of Christ in Pittsfield, Congregational. 17.11.1 P68.7 FrCC

Plunkett, H. M. *The Old Pittsfield Church and Its Three Meeting-Houses.* Boston: New England Magazine, 1893. 17.11.1 P68.7 FrCC

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Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances
<p>Church records, 1764-1817</p> <p>Scope and Contents</p> <p>This volume of church records contains both the administrative records of the church and vital records for church members and Pittsfield inhabitants. The volume contains copies of the church's covenant and confession of faith, church meeting minutes, records of votes, and records relating to church disciplinary cases, including a list of confessions given to the church. The vital records within the volume also contain membership records, baptismal records, marriage records, and records of deaths.</p>	
Deeds, 1772-1807	
Thomas Allen shorthand manuscripts, 1781-1803	
Thomas Allen papers, 1783-1808	
Thomas Allen sermons and remarks, 1783, undated	
Thomas Allen financial records, circa 1795-1806	
Thomas Allen papers, 1798-1805, undated	
Thomas Allen funeral sermon, 1799, 1961	
Thomas Allen schism records, circa 1805-1809	
Thomas Allen schism records, circa 1807-1809	
Thomas Allen schism records, circa 1807-1809	
Thomas Allen resignation, 1809	
<p>Church records, 1817-1864</p> <p>Scope and Contents</p> <p>This volume of church records contains both the administrative records and vital records of the church. The vital records include lists of baptisms, marriage, deaths, and membership records. The administrative records include church meeting minutes, extensive records of votes, a copy of the church covenant, and records relation to the installation of ministers.</p>	
Church register, 1824-1842	

Scope and Contents

This church registry contains vital records for the church as well as some ministerial records. The records within the volume begin after the installation of Rufus W. Bailey and continue through the pastorates of Henry Philip Tappan, John W. Yeomans, Horatio Nelson Brinsmade, and ends with the installation of John Todd. The register includes records of admissions and dismissions, baptismal records, marriage records, records of deaths, and copies of some ministerial correspondence, as well as copies of standard form letters.

Rome manuscript, undated