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Charlestown, Boston, Mass. First Church records, 1632-1927. RG0049

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Congregational Library & Archives

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Summary Information

Repository:	Congregational Library & Archives
Creator:	First Church (Charlestown, Boston, Mass.)
Creator:	Winthrop Church (Charlestown, Boston, Mass.)
Title:	Charlestown, Boston, Mass. First Church records, 1632-1927.
ID:	RG0049
Date [inclusive]:	1632-1927
Physical Description:	1.80 Cubic Feet (2 boxes, 2 microfilm)
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	<p>Charlestown proper was founded in 1628 and formally settled on July 4, 1629. The First Church of Charlestown was gathered in 1632. The church's third meeting house was destroyed during the Battle of Bunker Hill and the fourth meeting house was not constructed until 1783 after the American Revolutionary War had ended. In 1913, the Winthrop Church merged with the First Church. In 1957, the interior of the church was destroyed by a fire; financial hardship delayed the restoration of the church for many years. In 2014, the First Church partnered with Celebration Church, a Brazilian congregation, to renew and renovate the church. In 2022, the First Church merged with Christ Church Charlestown, who inherited the church building and now worships there. This collection contains important administrative records for the First Church in Charlestown, Boston, Massachusetts as well as the records of the First Parish in Charlestown. The collection includes parish records, building records, and financial records.</p>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], in the Charlestown, Boston, Mass. First Church records, 1632-1927, RG0049. The Congregational Library & Archives, Boston, MA.

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Historical Note

Prior to English colonization, the area today known as Charlestown, Boston, Massachusetts, was inhabited by the indigenous Massachusett. Charlestown was called Mishawum by the Massachusett. The first English colonizers were Thomas and Jane Walford who arrived in Mishawum in 1624. Charlestown proper was founded in 1628 and formally settled on July 4, 1629. A church was founded in Charlestown in 1630, but when John Winthrop accepted William Blaxton's invitation to settle on the Shawmut peninsula, the majority of that early church's membership withdrew. The 35 original members of the church who still resided in Charlestown sought dismissal from the church and recovenanted as the First Church of Charlestown on November 2, 1632. The first meeting house was made from Governor Winthrop's "Great House" and a second meeting house was built in 1636. John Harvard was the church's third minister; he died in 1638. Harvard College was renamed in honor of John Harvard after he had bequeathed his entire library and half of his monetary estate to the college in his will.

The third meetinghouse was constructed in 1715. That building was destroyed during the Battle of Bunker Hill, during the American Revolution, when British troops almost completely destroyed the town. The town did not truly begin to rebuild until after the American Revolutionary War ended in 1783; the fourth meeting house was constructed in 1783. This building was expanded in 1804. The fifth meeting house was constructed in 1834 and the sixth was constructed in 1853. In 1834, a second Congregational Church, known as the Winthrop Congregational Church, was gathered. This church merged with the First Church in 1913 and the Winthrop Church building became the First Church's seventh church building.

In 1957, the church's interior was destroyed by a fire. The church suffered financial hardships following the fire and the building could only be restored after many years. During the racial protests and violence which enveloped Boston between 1974 and 1976, the First Church became a safe haven for African American students. In 2014, the church began a revitalization process with Celebration Church, a Brazilian congregation; the result of this partnership was a refurbished church building in 2016. In 2015, with the installation of Erik Maloy, the church became a member of the Southern Baptist Convention alongside its continued membership with the United Church of Christ. In 2022, the First Church merged with Christ Church Charlestown who inherited the church building and now holds worship there.

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Scope and Contents

This collection contains important administrative records for the First Church in Charlestown, Boston, Massachusetts as well as the records of the First Parish in Charlestown. The collection

includes parish records, building records, especially those related to pews and pew deeds, financial records, Sunday school records, and reproduction of the church's earliest church records.

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Arrangement

Materials in this collection have been organized first by chronological order and then by topic so that closely related materials are listed in sequence.

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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

Items in this collection are subject to U.S. Copyright Law. It is the responsibility of the researcher to determine the copyright status of collection items and to secure any permissions necessary for their reproduction and publication. Requests for permission to publish material must be discussed with the archivist or librarian.

Acquisition Information

Materials were loaned to the Congregational Library & Archives by The First Church in Charlestown, Boston, Massachusetts, circa 1979; no accession record.

The Winthrop Church society records were initially a unique collection and given the identifier RG0841. There is no information about this collection. It was merged into this collection as part of the 2023 reprocessing.

Processing Information

Initially processed by Hal Worthley, 1997. Reprocessed by Zachary Bodnar, August 2023, using Describing Archives: A Content Standard.

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Related Materials

Related Materials

The Massachusetts Historical Society holds the larger portion of the First Church's records, as well as the records of the Winthrop Congregational Church which merged with the First Church in 1913. The finding aid for this collection can be found here: [First Church \(Charlestown, Boston, Mass.\) Records, 1631-1980. Ms. N-1248.](#)

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Controlled Access Headings

- Baptismal records.
- Christian union.
- Church buildings.
- Church finance.
- Church membership.
- Church records and registers.
- Marriage records.
- Pews and pew rights.
- Sunday schools.
- First Church (Charlestown, Boston, Mass.)

- Winthrop Church (Charlestown, Boston, Mass.)

Physical restrictions

The photocopied instance of the "Church records (reproduction), 1632-1789, 1880" is the preferred use copy of these records as the bound originals are very fragile.

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Technical Requirements

A microfilm reader is required to access microform materials. One microfilm reader is available to the public upon request.

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Bibliography

Ford, Victor, and Violet Farrell. "First Church, 1632, Charlestown, Mass.," in *First Church Charlestown Congregational, 1632-1982: 350-th Anniversary*. 1982.

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Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
Church records (reproduction), 1632-1789, 1980	box 1	volume 1
Scope and Contents	box 1	volume 12
In 1880, for James Frothingham Dunnewell, 62 copies of a reproduction of the First Church's earliest records were created. Each volume was numbered. The Congregational Library & Archives holds copies two and five, of the 62 copy run, as well as a photocopied copy of copy number 5 which was created due to the fragility of the original. The CLA also holds two microfilm	box 1	folder 1
	box	
	Microfilm	
	postive	

copies, positive and negative, of the 1880 reproduction
which were created in 1980.

box
Microfilm
negative

Parish records, 1784-1803	box 1	volume 2
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Parish records, 1803-1823	box 1	volume 3
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Separated Materials:

Separated Materials

An item was removed from between pages 158 and 159 of this volume, for the purposes of preservation, and placed in the folder "First Parish in the town of Charlestown incorporation, 1812."

Parish records, 1823-1854	box 1	volume 4
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Parish records, 1854-1880	box 1	volume 5
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Pew plans, 1798, 1866	box 2	folder 1
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Pew plan, 1853	folder 7	
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Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This item is extremely fragile and any use of the item is likely to cause further damage. Special permission is required to view this item.

Pew subscribers, 1800	box 1	volume 6
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An act to incorporate a Religious Society..., 1803	box 1	folder 2
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Assessors' accounts, 1803	box 2	volume 3
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Assessors' accounts, 1804	box 2	volume 4
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Assessors' accounts, 1805	box 2	volume 6
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Assessors' accounts, 1807	box 2	volume 5
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Treasurer's records, 1808-1811	box 2	volume 1
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First Parish in the town of Charlestown incorporation, 1812	box 1	folder 3
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Separated Materials:

Separated Materials

This item was removed from the Parish records, 1803-1823, for the purposes of preservation. This item was found between pages 158 and 159.

Committee to supply the pulpit communications, 1819-1820	box 1	folder 4
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Sunday school records, 1830-1834	box 1	volume 7
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Sunday school records, 1832-1835	box 1	volume 8
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Sunday school records, 1834-1841	box 1	volume 9
Winthrop Church society records, 1832-1833	box 1	volume 12
Building committee records, 1833-1835	box 2	volume 8
Building committee cashbook, 1833-1835	box 1	volume 10
An act relating to parishes and religious freedom clipping, 1834	box 1	folder 5
Pew deeds, 1834-1927	box 2	volume 2
Parish Land Company account book, 1835-1838	box 1	volume 11
Treasurer's records, 1856-1878	box 2	volume 7