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Harwich, Mass. First Congregational Church records, 1726-1982. RG0089

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English

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Congregational Library & Archives

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Summary Information

Repository:	Congregational Library & Archives
Creator:	Church of Christ (Harwich, Mass.)
Creator:	First Congregational Church (Harwich, Mass.)
Creator:	Washburn, Geroge Y.
Title:	Harwich, Mass. First Congregational Church records, 1726-1982.
ID:	RG0089
Date [inclusive]:	1726-1982
Physical Description:	2.53 Cubic Feet (3 boxes, 2 reels)
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	The First Congregational Church of Harwich, Massachusetts, was founded in 1747 when the town of Harwich was split into the North and South Parishes. On April 8, 1747, the precinct voted to complete construction on a meeting house which was finally completed in 1748. In 1792, the second meetinghouse was completed after the first had been condemned a year earlier. The church officially became known as the First Congregational Church of Harwich when the church became incorporated in 1898 at the behest of the Rev. George Y. Washburn. The First Church of Harwich continues to serve the community today. The collection documents the history, administration, and life of the church and includes membership lists, church and parish records, and administrative/legal documents.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], in the Harwich, Mass. First Congregational Church records, 1726-1982, RG0089. The Congregational Library & Archives, Boston, MA.

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Historical Note

Prior to the arrival of European colonists, the lands that encompass today's Harwich were inhabited by the Wampanoag. Harwich was first settled by Europeans in 1670 as part of Yarmouth. Harwich was separately incorporated in 1694.

The First Congregational Church of Harwich, Massachusetts, was founded in 1747 when the town of Harwich was split into the North and South Parishes. Efforts to split the town in half had begun in 1744 when families from the south side of Harwich petitioned the town meeting to separate the southern portion into its own distinct precinct. This and several other attempts were denied until a petition to the Massachusetts General Court resulted in the eventual separation of Harwich into two "distinct and separate precinct[s]" effective January 16, 1747. On April 8, 1747, the precinct voted to begin construction of a meeting house with construction being completed the following year. Also, in April of 1747, Edward Pell, a Harvard graduate and Boston native, preached to the South Parish. Not long after, he was called by the South Parish to become the first pastor of the South Parish, a call he accepted graciously. Pell was ordained to the office on November 12, 1747. As part of his salary, Pell was given a "convenient hovel." This structure was finally completed in 1751. Pell perished in 1752 and his widow left to Maine in 1753. At this time, their home became the parsonage and "Ministerial House" for future pastors. It did not remain as such for long as in 1782 the house and barn were sold to cover precinct expenses. The period between 1773 and 1792 was particularly rocky for the church, marked by numerous religious dissensions, shared pulpits with the West Harwich Baptist Church, and general unrest which resulted in the quick succession of multiple pastors during this period.

In 1792, the second meetinghouse was completed after the first had been condemned a year earlier. With the new meetinghouse came a new minister, Nathan Underwood, whose name became synonymous with the second meetinghouse. Underwood served the parish for thirty-six years, the longest ministry at the church. During his time at the First Congregational Church, Underwood expanded the membership of the church, advocated for further independence for the South Precinct, and taught numerous others "scientific" farming. He retired from active service in 1819, though he continued to offer support until 1828 when his relation with the church was formally dissolved. Shortly before his death, Underwood sold his home to the town for use as an almshouse. By 1832 the second meetinghouse needed to be replaced, and by the fall of that year Moses B. Lakeman completed construction. Financial difficulties and short pastorates marked the church's history until 1851 when the Rev. Moses Hale Wilder began a complete reorganization of the church's administration. He also oversaw the first expansion of the third meetinghouse in 1854.

The church officially became known as the First Congregational Church of Harwich when the church became incorporated under Massachusetts state law on December 19, 1898 at the behest of the Rev. George Y. Washburn. Washburn, further, celebrated the 150th anniversary of the church by writing a history of the congregation in 1897.

The first third of the 20th century was again marked by financial and parishioner distress with few pastors remaining long and the congregation growing smaller. That changed in 1933 with George Hunt who helped to revitalize the church community. His wife, Ruth Hunt, became the first woman to preach at the First Church after her husband fell ill one weekend. After World War II, Harwich, along with the rest of the Massachusetts cape, had become something of a tourist resort town. The result has been a revitalized church which has become welcoming to locals and visitors alike. The 200th anniversary of the church saw a complete renovation of the third meetinghouse. In 1954, a chapel first built by the Ladies of the Sewing Circle in 1881 was repurposed into the Parish House. In 1961, the church voted to become a member of the United Church of Christ. The First Church of Harwich continues to serve the community today.

Ministers	
Edward Pell	1746-1752
Benjamin Crocker	1754-1756
John Dennis	1756-1761
Benjamin Crocker	1761-1765
Jonathan Mills	1766-1773
No regular minister	1774-1776
Joseph Litchfield	1777-1778
Samuel Nickerson	1778-1787
Jonathan Jeffers	1787-1789
Asa Hunt	1790-1791
Nathan Underwood	1792-1828
Isaac W. Wheelwright	1826-1827
William M. Cornell	1828-1829
Lucius Field	1830
Powers	1831

Caleb Kimball	1832-1834
William Withington	1835
Charles S. Adams	1835-1838
John H. Avery	1838-1839
William Marchant	1840-1841
James D. Farnsworth	1841
William H. Adams	1841-1844
Cyrus Stone	1844-1848
Theophilus F. Sawin	1848-1851
Moses Hale Wilder	1851-1858
Joseph Rice Munsell	1858-1868
William H. Beard	1869-1870
Charles S. Whitney	1871-1872
Bradish G. Ward	1872-1876
Joseph Hammond	1876-1877
Smith Norton	1878-1879
S.W. Powell	1880
Rufus B. Tobey	1880-1883
Cassius M. Westlake	1884-1885
Henry P. Cutting	1885-1888
F.J. Ward	1890

John C. Staples	1891-1892
J. Walter Sylvester	1893
J.H. Whittaker, Jr.	1893-1894
Artemas J. Haynes	1894-1896
George Y. Washburn	1896-1899
Charles H. Rowley	1899-1904
Henry A. Ryder	1905-1910
Frederick T. Knight	1910-1912
George W. Clark	1913-1918
Jack Hyde	1919-1920
F.B. Noyes	1920-1922
F.W. Hoisington	1923-1924
B.D.F. Lindsay	1924-1928
Howard R. May	1928-1929
Walter M. Stone	1930-1931
Leon S. Kelley	1931-1932
George A. Hunt	1933-1936
Henry D. Newell	1936-1943
George Loring Thurlow	1943-1953
Harry L. Meyer	1953-1959
J. Edward Elliot	1960-1971

Albert C. Ronander	1971-1978
H.L. Meyer	1976-1982
J.R. Williams	1981-1984
M.B. Carver-Schad	1981-2007
C.T. Newberry	1985-2006
L.C. Toppan	1986-1995
E. Deasy	1988-1989
J.N. Erickson	1990-1997
J.C. Pearsall	1997-1998
A. Weirch	1998-2001
T.C. Leinbach	2006-2017
Susan E. Thomas	2021-present

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Scope and Contents

The Harwich, Mass. First Congregational Church records document the history, administration, and life of the church, including membership lists, church and parish records, meeting minutes, financial documents, society records, legal documents, church publications, committee reports, subscription lists, a manuscript by George Y. Washburn, and microfilmed copies of original records.

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Arrangement

The collection is divided into the five series listed below. The records are arranged primarily by chronological order and then topic.

Series 1: Church and Society Records, 1745-1974

Series 2: Administrative Records, 1726-1982

Series 3: Church Subscriptions, 1832-1857

Series 4: Rev. George Y. Washburn Manuscript, circa 1897, 1972

Series 5: Microfilm, 1981

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Revision Description

Zachary Bodnar: Minor additions to subjects and agents. Zachary Bodnar: Accrual integrated into collection. 2020-03-30 2022-09-15

Restrictions on Access

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Restrictions on Use

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Acquisition Information

Materials deposited to the Congregational Library & Archives by the First Congregational Church of Harwich in 1981; no accession number.

The Draft deed was donated to the Congregational Library & Archives by the First Congregational Church of Harwich in 2022, 2022-18.

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](#).

Processing Information

Originally processed in 1982. Re-processed by Zachary Bodnar, September 2017, using DACS Second Edition.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Baptismal records.
- Church finance.
- Church lands.
- Church membership.
- Church records and registers.
- Creeds.
- Marriage records.
- New England's Hidden Histories.
- Church of Christ (Harwich, Mass.)
- First Congregational Church (Harwich, Mass.)

- Harwich (Mass.) -- Church history.

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.

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

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Bibliography

History: First Congregational Church Harwich, Massachusetts 1747-1972. Harwich: Jack Viall, 1972. 17.11.1 H26.67 FirCC

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Collection Inventory

Church and Society records, 1745-1974

Physical Description: 16 Volumes

Scope and Contents

This series includes the records of the church and parish as well as records of societies attached to the church. Included within the records are meeting minutes, baptismal records, marriage records, committee reports, financial documents, annual reports, and historical notes.

Title/Description	Instances
Parish records, 1746-1792	box 1 volume 1

Physical Access

These records are unavailable for patron use due to fragility. Use the 19th century copy of these records.

Contact the archivist for special permission to view the originals.

Location of Copies:

Location of Copies

These records were transcribed and edited by Obed Brooks and made the first part of the Records of the First Parish, 1745-1899.

Proprietors' records, 1791-1793

box 1

volume 2

Scope and Contents

The Proprietors' Records include meeting minutes, financial records, receipts, pew deeds, treasurer reports, and the church ledger for the years 1791-1793.

Church records volume 1, 1792-1835

box 1

volume 3

Scope and Contents

This record book contains church records dating from 1792-1835. Included within these records are the Church Covenant, church proceedings, lists of admitted members, lists of members received from other churches, lists of members removed to other churches, baptismal records, dates for the administration of the supper, and marriage records.

Church records volume 2, 1792-1857

box 1

volume 4

Scope and Contents

This record book contains parish records dating from 1792-1857. Included within these records are the minutes of church and parish meetings, minutes of government meetings, legal calls of assembly, and financial records.

Records of the First Parish, 1745-1899, 1830-1899

box 3

Scope and Contents

This record book contains the records of the First Parish from 1745-1899. The records dating from 1745-1803 are handwritten transcribed copies of the original oldest records of the church. They were transcribed by Obed Brooks who also edited and annotated the records. The Congregational Library & Archives holds an incomplete collection of those original documents which are now considered too fragile to handle. All records in the book from 1830-1899 were original. Included within these records are the minutes of church and parish meetings, minutes of precinct meetings, legal calls of assembly,

church correspondence, the original members list, and treasurer accounts.

Minister's records, 1832-1855	box 1	volume 5
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Scope and Contents

This record book contains parish records dating from 1832-1855. Included within these records are building dedications, the form of the first covenant, the Confession of Faith, the Church Covenant, the Confession of Faith and Covenant, records of church business, admissions lists, baptismal records, lists of dismissions, church by-laws, records pertaining to the organization of the church, marriage records, church meeting minutes, lists of deaths and funerals, lists of subscribers, and membership lists.

Church and Parish meetings, 1855-1899	box 1	volume 6
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Young Peoples' Society records, 1887-1895	box 1	volume 7
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Records of the First Congregational Church of Harwich, 1900-1940	box 1	volume 8
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Records of the First Congregational Church of Harwich, 1941-1954	box 1	volume 9
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Records of the First Congregational Church of Harwich, 1956-1960	box 1	volume 10
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Records of the First Congregational Church of Harwich, 1961-1962	box 1	volume 11
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Records of the First Congregational Church of Harwich, 1963-1964	box 2	volume 1
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Records of the First Congregational Church of Harwich, 1965-1966	box 2	volume 2
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Records of the First Congregational Church of Harwich, 1966-1971	box 2	volume 3
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Records of the First Congregational Church of Harwich, 1971-1974	box 2	volume 4
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Administrative records, 1726-1982

Physical Description: 15 Files (5 volumes, 10 folders)

Scope and Contents

This series includes records related to the administration and functions of the First Congregational Church. Included in the records are legal documents such as land deeds and calls of assembly, correspondence, reports of the treasurer and committees, and church publications.

Title/Description	Instances	
Deed of land, 1726-1727	box 2	folder 1
Church register, 1746-1747	box 2	folder 2

Physical Description: 2 Items

Scope and Contents

This folder includes two documents which cover the founding of the First Congregational Church of Harwich in the newly established South Parish. Included in the documents is a list of the founding members of the church and a copy of the petition to the Massachusetts General Court which resulted in the formation of the South Parish.

Draft deed, 1747, 1747	box 2	folder 18
Sale of land, 1748	box 2	folder 3
Calls to assembly, 1789-1796	box 2	folder 4
Church communications, 1792-1828	box 2	folder 5

Physical Description: 4 Items

Digital Copies:

Digital Copies

These church records were digitized as part of the New England's Hidden Histories project. Digital reproductions are [available to view online](#).

Scope and Contents

Included in this folder are four documents which generally represent communications and correspondence from the church. Included is a receipt, a letter by Rev. Nathan Underwood, a call to vote for church officers, and a communication to Rev. Underwood regarding his official end of pastoral duties.

Articles of Faith and Covenant, 1832	box 2	volume 5
Treasurer's report, 1832-1838	box 2	volume 6

Scope and Contents

This volume contains 30 pages of financial records dating from 1832-1855. Included within these records

are the church ledger, receipts, pew numbers and prices, and lists of contributions collected.

Harwich Sunday School class book, 1836	box 2	volume 7
Church correspondence, 1838-1876	box 2	folder 6
Town disturbance, 1863	box 2	folder 7
Discipline of Obed Brooks, 1874-1875	box 2	folder 8
Manual of the Congregational Church, 1881	box 2	volume 8
Church By-laws, 1898	box 2	volume 9
Committee notes and reports, 1941-1965	box 2	folder 9
Church publications, 1981-1982	box 2	folder 10

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Church Subscriptions, 1832-1857

Physical Description: 5 Files (4 volumes, 1 folder)

Scope and Contents

This series includes records related to church subscriptions as part of fundraising for building projects. Included in the records are subscriptions lists and receipts.

Title/Description	Instances	
Subscription receipts, 1832-1835	box 2	volume 10

Scope and Contents

This volume contains 55 pages of records dating from 1832-1835. Included within these records are receipts which list the date issued, the holder of the receipt, and the date that the receipts were paid off. Also included is a list of members who had paid dues.

Subscription receipts, 1832-1838	box 2	volume 11
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Scope and Contents

This volume contains 32 pages of records dating from 1832-1838. Included within these records are receipts which list the date issued, the holder of the receipt, and the date that the receipts were paid off. Also included are brief financial notes.

List of subscriptions, 1836	box 2	volume 12
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Scope and Contents

This volume contains 25 pages of records dated 1836. Included within these records are a list of

members not paid, additional subscription receipts,
subscriptions paid by labor, and financial calculations.

Subscription paper, 1854	box 2	folder 11
Subscriptions: Remodeling of the Church, 1855-1857	box 2	volume 13

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Rev. George Y. Washburn Manuscript, circa 1897, 1972

Physical Description: 6 Folders

Scope and Contents

This series includes the a manuscript written by the Rev. George Y. Washburn on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the First Congregational Church which covers the history of Harwich and the church. Also included in the materials are Washburn's collected notes and contemporary summaries of Washburn's work made in preparation for the 225th anniversary of the church.

Title/Description	Instances	
Washburn manuscript, circa 1897	box 2	folder 12
Washburn summaries, 1972	box 2	folder 13
Washburn notes I, undated	box 2	folder 14
Washburn notes II, undated	box 2	folder 15
Washburn notes III, undated	box 2	folder 16
Washburn notes IV, undated	box 2	folder 17

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Microfilm, 1981

Physical Description: 2 Reels

Scope and Contents

Included in this series are two reels of microfilmed copies of church and parish records.

Existence and Location of Originals:

Existence and Location of Originals

Originals of microfilmed records can be found within this collection.

Title/Description	Instances	
Records of the First Congregational Church of Harwich, 1981	box H2	reel 1

Index

- 1 Original Deed
- 2 Records: 1745-1899
- 3 Ministers Record: 1792
- 4 Records: 1792-1855
- 5 Ministers Records: 1832-1855
- 6 Church & Parish Meetings: 1855-1899
- 7 Records: 1940-1966

Records of the First Congregational Church of Harwich,
1981

box H2

reel 2

Index

- 1 Records: 1966-1975
- 2 Washburn papers
- 3 Benjamin Smalley and Sam Nickerson
Petition to Gen. Court
- 4 Articles of Faith: 1840
- 5 Manual: 1887
- 6 Subscriptions: 1832, 1855-1857
- 7 Church by-laws: 1898
- 8 Christian Endeavor

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