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Haverhill, Mass. West Congregational Church records, 1734-1900. RG5067

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English

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Congregational Library & Archives

14 Beacon Street

Boston, MA 02108

info@14beacon.org

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

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Summary Information

Repository:	Congregational Library & Archives
Creator:	Third Church (Haverhill, Mass.)
Creator:	West Congregational Church (Haverhill, Mass.)
Title:	Haverhill, Mass. West Congregational Church records, 1734-1900.
ID:	RG5067
Date [inclusive]:	1734-1900
Physical Description:	.44 Cubic Feet (1 box)
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	When the western part of Haverhill became too populous for one church in 1734, the West Parish of Haverhill was established by a petition to the General Court of Massachusetts, and the church, initially known as the Third Church, was itself established in 1735. In the first half of the 19th century, the governance of the parish was controversially distributed between multiple denominations, but in 1852 it was relinquished again to the Congregationalists. This collection contains the earliest records of the West Congregational Church and continuing administrative documentation up until 1900.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], in the Haverhill, Mass. West Congregational Church records, 1734-1900, RG5067. The Congregational Library & Archives, Boston, MA.

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Historical Note

When the western part of Haverhill became too populous for one church in 1734, the West Parish of Haverhill was established by a petition to the General Court of Massachusetts. 77 members were dismissed from the First Parish Church and constructed a new meeting house, located "on the southeasterly corner of Samuel Eatton's pasture". The building, which was intended for both secular and religious use, was dedicated on Oct. 22, 1735. After two trial preachers, the church successfully settled

and ordained the Rev. Samuel Bachellor, a Harvard graduate, in July of 1735. During his ministry 118 new members were admitted to the church.

In 1738, soon after the Parish was incorporated, the committee acquired land to be used for a burying-ground and roads. In 1739, the parish voted to gift Rev. Bachellor all the parsonage lands belonging to the West Parish, in addition to 70 acres which he had already been gifted by town proprietors. The parish committee also granted Rev. Bachellor several additions to his salary over the years, in order to offset currency depreciation which was endemic in mid-18th-century New England. Rev. Bachellor also owned at least one slave, identified in a death record of March 24, 1785 only as "Nero, servant to ye Revd Mr Bachellor." Theological differences between Rev. Bachellor and his congregation led to increasing strife within the church. In 1755, a number of congregants led by Mr. Joseph Haynes accused him of heresy, specifically for alleging in a sermon that Christ had declared that the work of redemption was "finished" during the crucifixion. He was ultimately removed in October of 1761 after ongoing disputes. After his dismissal the parish was without a settled pastor for 9 years.

In 1762 the church and parish voted to adopt the Cambridge Platform of church discipline. In the same year Rev. Nathaniel Noyes was called to the ministry after a trial period, but ultimately declined, as did subsequent trial ministers until March, 1769, when "a great majority" of the parish voted to invite Rev. Phineas Adams to the ministry. Rev. Adams was eventually ordained in January of 1771. He continued in the role until his death in 1801. In 1751 the parish voted to build a schoolhouse, though construction did not occur until 1791. In 1770, the parish voted "to continue to sing Dr. Watts' Psalms & Hymns in the congregation." This is the first allusion to singing in the parish records, and there is also mention of a "Singers Pew" which was enlarged in 1788 and again in 1794. In 1810 the parish approved 13 dollars toward the support of a singing school.

After the death of Rev. Adams in 1801, the parish was without a settled minister for 25 years. This was exacerbated by a substantial change in the organization of the parish in the early 1800s, in which Baptist, Methodist, and Universalist residents increasingly shared governance. In 1806 it was voted to divide the parish funds between the different denominations based on their respective tax contributions, and in 1809 a committee composed of one representative each from the Congregationalist, Methodist, and Universalist denominations was appointed to oversee the division of parish funds. Discord followed in the wake of these structural changes. In 1818, the Congregationalists attempted to regain control of the entire parish but were unsuccessful. From 1821-1824 the parish attempted to settle three different ministers, none of which were ultimately approved by the Congregationalists.

Finally, in September, 1826, the church unanimously invited the Congregationalist Rev. Moses Grosvenor to the ministry. The parish approved the decision, and Mr. Grosvenor accepted the invitation and was ordained in December of 1826. The other denominations within the parish remained unsatisfied, and petitioned in 1828 for money to hire additional ministers. The parish committee ruled 50-53 against their request, but subsequently voted to dismiss Rev. Grosvenor, with "three months' notice to withdraw his pastoral connection". The Congregationalists then decided to withdraw and organize a new society. This division created a distinct Parish (Universalist) Society and a Church (Congregationalist) Society, a state of affairs which lasted from 1828-1852. The Church Society built a new brick meeting house one mile west of the old parish meeting house', and in 1829 petitioned the parish to settle the Rev. Abijah Cross of Salisbury, New Hampshire. The request was granted and Rev. Cross accepted and was installed in 1831. In 1832, it was voted to move the old meeting house 1.25 miles west to the center of the parish, which was accomplished by 1834.

In 1852, after protracted arguments between the Parish and Church societies over the allocation of endowments, the parish was transferred back to the Congregationalists and the Universalist society was re-organized as The First Universalist Society in the West Parish of Haverhill. In 1853, Rev. Cross was dismissed from the Congregational church and society at his own request, and Rev. Asa Farwell was subsequently settled as pastor. During his pastorate, 86 new members were admitted, many of them during an 1863 religious revival brought on by the turmoil of the Civil War. After Rev. Farwell was dismissed in 1866, Rev. Ephraim Allen was settled as pastor and remained in the position until 1876. In 1874-5 the meeting house was extensively remodeled at a cost of about 9,000 dollars.

The church was officially incorporated in 1921. It is now known as West Congregational Church, and continues to serve the Haverhill community as a member of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC).

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Scope and Contents

This collection contains the earliest records of the West Congregational Church, and continuing administrative documentation up until 1900. including the articles of agreement for the construction of the first meeting house, administrative records, membership information, and financial accounting. There is also a "new building book" containing records relating to the construction of the second meetinghouse in 1828.

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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

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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Acquisition Information

Loaned to the Congregational Library & Archives, for digitization, by the West Church in Haverhill, Massachusetts, March 2011; There is no accession number for this collection.

Location of Originals

The physical records are held and maintained by the West Church in Haverhill, Massachusetts.

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 and described by Jules Thomson, October 2019, using DACS Second Edition.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Admonition.
- Baptismal records.
- Church discipline.
- Church membership.
- Church records and registers.
- Covenants (Church polity).
- Marriage records.
- Necrologies.
- New England's Hidden Histories.
- Ordination.
- Haverhill (Mass.) -- Church history.
- Third Church (Haverhill, Mass.)
- West Congregational Church (Haverhill, 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

Excercises Commemorative of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the West Congregational Church, Haverhill, Mass. Haverhill: C. C. Morse & Son, 1886. 17.11.1 H29.45 WESCC

Chase, George Wingate. *The history of Haverhill, Massachusetts, from its first settlement, in 1640, to the year 1860.* Haverhill: George W. Chase, 1861.

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Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances
<p>Articles of agreement, 1734</p> <p><u>Digital Copies:</u> Digital Copies</p> <p>These church records were digitized as part of the New England's Hidden Histories project. Digital reproductions are available to view online.</p> <p>Scope and Contents</p> <p>This document details the plans and budget for the construction of the first meetinghouse in the West Parish.</p>	
<hr/> <p>Parish records, 1734-1802</p> <p><u>Digital Copies:</u> Digital Copies</p> <p>These church records were digitized as part of the New England's Hidden Histories project. Digital reproductions are available to view online.</p> <p>Scope and Contents</p> <p>This volume contains the earliest administrative and financial records of the Haverhill West parish and the Third Church, including the ordination of Samuel Bacheller, pew sales, the election of officers, and parish expenses.</p>	
<hr/> <p>Church records, 1735-1761</p> <p><u>Digital Copies:</u> Digital Copies</p> <p>These church records were digitized as part of the New England's Hidden Histories project. Digital reproductions are available to view online.</p> <p>Scope and Contents</p> <p>This volume was kept by the Third Church's Rev. Stephen Bachellor. It primarily contains membership records, including baptisms, marriages, admissions, dismissions, and narrative accounts of several prominent families. It also contains the covenant signed by the founding members.</p>	
<hr/> <p>Church records, 1762-1826</p> <p><u>Digital Copies:</u></p>	

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

This volume contains membership records, transcribed correspondence, records of several disciplinary cases, and information about the ministers who served during these years.

Treasurer's book, 1815-1900

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

The treasurer's ledger contains itemized records of the church's income and expenses, including taxes, pew fees, materials and labor for maintenance of the meetinghouse, and the minister's salary. There are regular audits of the church's accounts by the treasurers and committee members.

Church records, 1826-1838

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

This volume contains interspersed administrative, financial, and membership records.

New building book, 1828-1852

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

This book contains the planning and financial records relating to the construction of the church's second meetinghouse, as well as the annual renewal of Rev. Cross's contract. The end

of the volume contains the will of David Webster, which includes provisions for a trust to pay the church's ministerial salary.

Church records, 1870-1880

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

This volume contains interspersed administrative, financial, and membership records continuing from the previous books. It also includes several printed materials that have been sewn or glued into the book adjacent to the related records.