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Lancaster, Mass. First Congregational Church records, 1708-1846. RG5329

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English

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Congregational Library & Archives

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Summary Information

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| Repository: | Congregational Library & Archives |
| Creator: | First Church of Christ (Lancaster, Mass.) |
| Title: | Lancaster, Mass. First Congregational Church records, 1708-1846. |
| ID: | RG5329 |
| Date [inclusive]: | 1708-1846 |
| Physical Description: | 4 Volumes |
| Language of the Material: | English |
| Abstract: | <p>The town of Lancaster and the First Congregational Church in Lancaster were established on November 28, 1653. The first and second meeting houses both were destroyed during Native American raids as part of larger geopolitical movements. The third meeting house was constructed in 1706 and the fourth in 1743. During Rev. Timothy Thayer time as minister, the church adopted Unitarian tenants and the fifth meeting house, designed by Charles Bulfinch, was constructed. In 1970 the church joined the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship. The First Church of Christ, Unitarian, in Lancaster continues to serve the local community. This collection contains the earliest extant records of the church and includes administrative records, vital records, financial records, pew records, and church covenants.</p> |

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], in the Lancaster, Mass. First Congregational Church records, 1708-1846, RG5329. The Congregational Library & Archives, Boston, MA.

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Historical Note

The town of Lancaster and the First Congregational Church in Lancaster were established on November 28, 1653, with the signing of a civil covenant by the town's first settlers. In 1654, the town called Joseph Rowlandson, a recent graduate of Harvard, to be the first minister. He married Mary White, the daughter of a wealthy settler, in 1656 and was officially ordained in 1660. The first meeting house and parsonage

were also quickly constructed following the installation of Rowlandson. In 1676, as part of King Phillip's War, Native Americans attacked the Lancaster garrison. During the attack 12 were killed and 12 more captured, including Mary Rowlandson, and a number of buildings were burned including the meeting house. After 11 weeks, Mary Rowlandson was ransomed back to her family and an account of her captivity was published in 1682.

The second meeting house was constructed in 1684 on the same location as the first. It did not survive long as it too was razed during an attack carried out by Native Americans in 1704 as part of ongoing hostilities between France and England. A third meeting house was constructed in 1706 and the first minister to preach in the new building was Rev. John Prentice who was installed in 1708. During the First Great Awakening, Rev. Prentice kept the Lancaster Church aligned more closely with the traditionalist "Old Lights" than with the revivalist "New Lights." The third meeting house was torn down in 1743 and swiftly replaced by the fourth meeting house that same year. Rev. Timothy Harrington was the minister of the Lancaster church during the American Revolution. In 1777 he was accused of being a Loyalist in part because "he was in charity with a professed Roman Catholick." The chargers were dropped after Harrington gave an impassioned defense in which he pointed to the principals of religious freedom.

Due to the advanced age and failing health of Rev. Harrington, the town voted to settle a junior minister in 1792. In 1793 the town voted to accept Timothy Thayer as the new minister and he was ordained in the summer of that year. Rev. Thayer was a member of the Unitarian movement and almost immediately began to liberalize the church and make membership into the church significantly easier. Due to the move towards Unitarianism, some members of the church withdrew and formed the Evangelical Congregational Church of Lancaster in 1839. The fifth, and final, meeting house was built in 1816 on the Lancaster green and on January 1, 1817 a dedication ceremony was held. The meeting house was designed by Charles Bulfinch, one of the earliest American-born professional architects, and was entered into the National Register of Historic Places and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1970.

The First Congregational Church and Society were legally incorporated into a single legal entity, the First Church of Christ, around 1908. Beginning in 1918, the First Church of Christ and Evangelical Church held three union services annually, though the practice was discontinued in 1976 at the behest of the Evangelical Church. In 1952, the Rev. Dr. Alexander St. Ivanyi was ordained as the minister of the First Church of Christ. Before joining the church, Ivanyi had been part of the Hungarian anti-Nazi resistance during World War II, was a member of the Hungarian Parliament after the war, as well as the bishop-vicar of the Hungarian Unitarian Church. He was forced to leave flee Hungary after the communist takeover of the state. In 1970, during Rev. Ivanyi's tenure, the First Church of Christ voted to join the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship. Rev. Tom Wintle, who served as minister from 1975-1995, also helped create the Lancaster Historical Society. The First Church of Christ, Unitarian, in Lancaster continues to serve the local community today.

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Scope and Contents

This collection contains the earliest extant records of the First Church of Christ in Lancaster. All earlier records were lost when both the first and second meeting house were razed during wars between English colonists and Native Americans. The volumes contain valuable records related both to the administration of the church and society as well as the vital records of the members of the church. The records include meeting minutes, committee reports, financial records, baptismal records, marriage records, necrologies, a pew plan, and the various covenants and statements of faith adopted by the church during the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries.

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Arrangement

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

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Congregational Library & Archives

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Boston, MA 02108

info@14beacon.org

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

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.

Digital Reproductions are protected by copyright and/or related rights. You are free to use the Digital Reproductions in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. In addition, no permission is required from the Congregational Library & Archives for educational uses. For other uses, you need to obtain permission from the Congregational Library & Archives. For additional information regarding copyright, please consult the Congregational Library & Archives' [Digital Collections Copyright & Use](#) policy.

Acquisition Information

Materials were loaned to the Congregational Library by the First Church of Christ, Unitarian, in Lancaster, Massachusetts, in April 2017; Accession 2017-05.

Location of Originals

The original volumes are held by the First Church of Christ, Unitarian, in Lancaster, 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 by Zachary Bodnar, February 2019, using DACS Second Edition.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Baptismal records.
- Church membership.
- Church records and registers.
- Installation (clergy).
- Marriage records.
- Necrologies.
- New England's Hidden Histories.
- Pews and pew rights.
- Registers of births, etc.
- Unitarian controversy.
- First Church of Christ (Lancaster, Mass.)

- [Lancaster \(Mass.\) -- Chrch 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.

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Bibliography

Wintle, Thomas D. *A New England Village: The First Church in Lancaster*. Lancaster: First Church of Christ in Lancaster, 1985. 17.11.1 L22.72 FirCC NW 1985

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Collection Inventory

| Title/Description | Instances |
|---|-----------|
| <p>Baptisms, 1708-1734, 1730-1734</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> | |
| Scope and Contents | |
| <p>This volume, initially created in 1730, is a record of all baptisms performed by Rev. John Prentice while minister at the church.</p> | |

Church records, 1708-1793

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](#).

Custodial History:

Custodial History

This volume was rebound and interleaved during the 20th century. A note within the volume indicates this work was completed in 1848 however the techniques and materials used are more consistent with the conservation work of the mid-20th century.

Scope and Contents

This volume contains the administrative records of the church as well as the vital records of the church's members. The volume contains meeting minutes, records of important votes, marriage records, baptismal records, necrologies, lists of admitted members and founding documents such as the church covenant. Also included with the volume is a bound manuscript pamphlet of the articles of agreement from 1782.

Parish records, 1742-1794

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](#).

Custodial History:

Custodial History

This volume was rebound and underwent major preservation work, likely during the 20th century. It appears that a company based in Taunton, Mass. may have done the preservation work, though there is no indication what the name of this company may have been or when the preservation work was completed.

Scope and Contents

This volume contains the records of the Lancaster parish and precinct. Included within the volume are pew plans, meeting minutes, financial records, and records of votes.

Church records, 1793-1846

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 the administrative records of the church as well as extensive records pertaining to the members of the church. Included within the volume are meeting minutes, records of votes, membership lists, deacon lists, marriage records, baptismal records, ordination records, council and committee reports, and disciplinary records.