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Medfield, Mass. First Parish Unitarian Church records, 1697-1970. RG5309

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English

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Congregational Library & Archives

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Summary Information

Repository:	Congregational Library & Archives
Creator:	Baxter, Joseph, 1676-1745
Creator:	First Congregational Church (Medfield, Mass.)
Creator:	First Parish Unitarian Church (Medfield, Mass.)
Creator:	Prentiss, Thomas, 1747-1814
Title:	Medfield, Mass. First Parish Unitarian Church records, 1697-1970.
ID:	RG5309
Date [inclusive]:	1697-1970
Physical Description:	0.84 Cubic Feet (3 boxes)
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	The First Parish Church was founded in 1751 shortly after the incorporation of the town of Medfield. Rev. John Wilson was the first pastor. A second meeting house was constructed in 1706. The third and current meetinghouse was built in 1789. In 1813 the town and the parish were legally separated with members of the church incorporated as The First Parish. In 1827 a group of members of the First Parish petitioned for permission to withdraw from the First Parish, which was becoming increasingly Unitarian, in order to form an Orthodox church. The original First Parish church was subsequently known as the First Parish Unitarian church. The records of the First Parish Church include both church administrative documentation and some personal records such as legal and financial materials.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], in the Medfield, Mass. First Parish Unitarian Church records, 1697-1970, RG5309. The Congregational Library & Archives, Boston, MA.

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Historical Note

The First Parish Church dates back to the beginning of the town of Medfield in 1649, in which settlers from Dedham and Braintree, Mass. requested the incorporation of a new town by the General Court which was subsequently granted in May of 1651. They founded the Medfield Church of Christ in the same year, calling Rev. John Wilson as their first pastor.

The second minister was Rev. Joseph Baxter, a Harvard graduate and native of Braintree, Massachusetts, who served from 1697-1745. During his ministry the church membership grew from 65 to 375, and a second meeting house was constructed in 1706.

During the pastorate of the fourth minister Rev. Thomas Prentiss, which lasted from 1770-1814, a third meetinghouse was built, dating to 1789. As of 2019, a heavily remodeled version of this building is still standing, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The specifications for the wooden frame of the building are given in detail in the town records and include details of the heavy timbers used in construction, which were hand hewn oak measuring 14 inches square. The building's tower was 52 feet high and surmounted by a belfry and cupola. In 1809 the inside of the church was refurbished, with seats in the body of the meeting house being taken up and replaced with pews, as well as the creation of a segregated gallery seating area for non-white parishioners.

In 1813 the town and the parish began to be legally separated. The members of the church incorporated as The First Parish. In 1816 the trustees of the Medfield Ministerial Fund, Inc. were granted a charter and by-laws by the General Court. The first Sunday school was organized in 1818, officiated entirely by women, with the wife of Rev. Thomas Prentiss playing an active role in its administration.

In 1827 a group of members of the First Parish petitioned for permission to withdraw from the First Parish, which was becoming increasingly Unitarian, in order to form an Orthodox church. An ecclesiastical council was called and granted their request. The Orthodox Church of Medfield was organized officially on February 6, 1828 with 17 total members, and is still active today as the United Church of Christ in Medfield.

The original First Parish church was subsequently known as the First Parish Unitarian church from 1828 onwards. The meeting house was extensively remodeled again in 1839, including a complete reorientation of the front of the building from east to south, and the construction of a larger spire. During the hurricane of 1938, the taller spire which had been added when the building was remodeled in 1839 was destroyed, and remains un-replaced.

By the 1970s the congregation had diminished to 10 members and was in danger of dissolution. Growth increased in the following decades, however, to the extent that the Unitarian Universalist Association granted the church an award in recognition of their revitalization. The church continues to serve the Medfield community today.

Ministers

John Wilson Jr.	1651-1691
Joseph Baxter	1697-1745
Jonathan Townsend	1745-1769
Thomas Prentice	1770-1814
Daniel Clarke Sanders	1815-1829
James Augustus Kendall	1830-1837
Charles Robinson	1839-1850
Rushton Dashwood Burr	1852-1857
Solon Wanton Bush	1857-1865
James Henry Wiggin	1867-1873
Charles Chauncy Sewell	1873-1877
Granville Pierce	1877-1881
Joseph Nelson Pardee	1882-1884
James Johnson Twiss	1884-1887
William Willis Hayward	1888-1892
John Arthur Savage	1892-1907
Albert Hague Spence Jr.	1908-1913
Horatio Edward Latham	1913-1916
Leonard Cushman	1917-1919
Franklin Zeiger	1919-1921
Manly Bacon Townsend	1922-1926

Anita Trueman Pickett	1926-1928
Harold Lionell Pickett	1926-1928
Paul Leicester Muder	1929-1931
Cicero Adolphus Henderson	1931-1933
Francis Galarneaux Ricker	1936-1939
Eric Alton Ayer	1939-1948
Kendrick Raymond Lee	1948-1951
Albert Nicholas Kaucher	1951-1955
William R Moors	1956-1965
Donald Vaughn	1965-1967
Robert Thayer	1968-1977
Glenn Snowden	1979-1984
Virgil Murdoch	1984-1986
Alice B Lane	1987-1989
Judith Deutsch	1991-2000
Robert William McKetchnie	2001-2011
Meg Soens	2013-2016

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Scope and Contents

The records of the First Parish Church in Medfield include a broad array of both church administrative documentation and some personal records such as legal and financial materials.

There is a single bound volume of church records dating from 1738-1880. Other administrative documentation includes a folder of loose records found inside the volume, official church correspondence, membership records, meeting minutes, relations, and a collection of 17th-18th century prayer requests. Also included are records relating to the ministry, including correspondence from ministers, and a volume of sermons spanning several decades from the 1740s-1780s. Personal records include legal and financial records, and a single item of personal correspondence regarding provisions for a ship. Additionally, a small volume of printed materials consisting of a 19th-century order of service and a newspaper cutting from 1970 detailing preservation of the colonial-era relation of faith documents within the collection.

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Arrangement

Files have been arranged in chronological order by start date, and their contents are ordered chronologically, except in the case of the relation of faith documents, which are ordered alphabetically by surname.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Revision Description

Some adjustments made to the physical arrangement of materials; "Miscellaneous records, circa 1700-1799" added to the finding aid. 2022-03-03

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 permanently loaned to the Congregational Library & Archives by the First Parish Unitarian Church (Medfield, Mass.) in April 2018; 2018-09

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 and described by Jules Thomson, August 2019, using DACS Second edition.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Baptismal records.
- Church records and registers.
- Church membership.
- Necrologies.
- New England's Hidden Histories.
- Prayers.
- Sermons, American -- Early works to 1800.
- First Congregational Church (Medfield, Mass.)
- First Parish Unitarian Church (Medfield, Mass.)
- Medfield (Mass.) -- Church history.

Technical Requirements

To access digital materials on our digital archive, it is strongly recommended that you use the latest available version of Microsoft Edge, Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, or Safari (Apple).

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Bibliography

Henderson, J. Hardy. *Historical sketch of the First Congregational Parish (Unitarian), 1651-1951*. Medfield, 1951. 17.11.1 M46.65 FIRPUC

"Our History." *First Parish UU of Medfield, MA*. Accessed August 13, 2019. <https://www.firstparishmedfield.org/our-history/>

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Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances
Relations, A-G, 1714-1788	box 1 folder 1

Scope and Contents

This folder contains relations of faith by parishioners seeking to join the church in Medfield, with surnames beginning with A-G. The documents are organized alphabetically by last name.

Relations, H-Z, 1697-1766

box 1

folder 2

Scope and Contents

This folder contains relations of parishioners with surnames beginning with H-Z, as well as unattributed relations

Ministerial records, 1709

box 1

folder 3

Scope and Contents

These documents relate directly to the office of the ministry and include correspondence of Rev. Joseph Baxter regarding dissatisfaction with his ministry, a letter of acceptance of the ministerial call from Rev. Thomas Prentice, and an undated sermon fragment.

Membership records, 1713-1813

box 1

folder 4

Scope and Contents

This folder contains letters regarding dismissals, admonitions, and excommunication of Medfield church members.

Legal records, 1725-1842

box 1

folder 5

Scope and Contents

This folder contains land deeds, wills, and a court summons. These include a deed from David Whitmarsh to Nathaniel Bosworth (5/15/1789), a fragmentary will and inventory by a member of the Baxter family (undated), and a court summons by Jonathan Bishop (Justice of the Peace for the Commonwealth of Mass.) to members of the First Congregational Society In Medfield (12/3/1842).

Financial records, 1731-1832

box 1

folder 6

Scope and Contents

This folder contains financial records relating to the church and its parishioners, including receipts by John Fisher for payment by John Baxter (10/28/1765), by Edward Davis for payment by John Baxtor (2/2/1753), and by Jonathan Fiske for payment by Heirs of John Baxter (1832). Also included are lists of subscribers for payments toward the spire of Unitarian Meetinghouse

Deuteronomy 32 (first preached at Medfield on June 25, 1750)

James 1:21 (first preached at Medfield on August 5, 1750)

James 1:21 (first preached at Medfield on August 12, 1750)

James 3:17-18 (first preached at Medfield on March 15, 1752)

Proverbs 22:17-22 (first preached Medfield on June 28, 1752)

Matthew 13:36-44 (first preached at Medfield on January 21, 1753)

James 1:27 (first preached at Medfield on August 12, 1753)

James 1:27 (first preached at Medfield on August 12, 1753)

James 4:8 (first preached at Medfield on March 31, 1754)

James 5:12 (first preached at Medfield on June 29, 1755)

James 5:12 (first preached at Medfield on July 13, 1755)

Romans 10:9-10 (first preached at Medfield on January 25, 1756)

Exodus 20:8-11 (first preached at Roxbury on February 1, 1756)

Amos 4:7-8 (first preached on June 20, 1756)

1 Peter 5:7 (first preached November 14, 1756)

Psalms 103:19 (first preached at Roxbury on March 13, 1757)

James 5:7 (first preached at Medfield on June 12, 1757)

Romans 2:13 (first preached October, 1757)

Luke 2:10-11 (first preached at Roxbury on December 25, 1757)

James 1:12 (first preached on January 8, 1758)

Matthew 22:1-14 (first preached at Roxbury on March 18, 1759)

Joshua 1 (first preached at Medfield on 7 May 27, 1759)

James 4:6 (first preached at Medfield on August 19, 1759)

1 Corinthians 15:58 (first preached at Roxbury on September 23, 1759)

James 4:4 (first preached at Medfield on November 25, 1759)

James 4:4 (first preached at Medfield on November 25, 1759)

Sermons, 1760-1766

box 2

folder 3

Scope and Contents

This folder contains a number of manuscript sermons, unattributed but written largely in the same hand. The individual sermon texts and dates are as follows:

Psalms 139:9-100 (first preached June 8, 1760)

James 1:26 (first preached May 10, 1761)

James 5:17-18 (first preached July 19, 1761)

John 21 (first preached October 17, 1762)

Matthew 18:1-14 (first preached January 23, 1763)

Matthew 19: 16-26 (first preached February 27, 1763)

Psalms 91:16 (first preached March 4, 1764)

James 5:13 (first preached March 10, 1765)

James 5:13 (first preached March 10, 1765)

[verse missing] (first preached February 16, 1766)

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (first preached February 23, 1766)

Proverbs 3:3-4 (first preached August 31, 1766)

Sermons, 1771-1773

box 2

folder 4

Scope and Contents

This volume contains a number of manuscript sermons, unattributed but written in the same hand. The verses, locations and dates are enumerated below:

Isaiah 57:20-21 (first preached at Roxbury on August 18, 1771)

Acts 3:20-26 (first preached at Roxbury on November 1, 1772)

Acts 4:13-20 (first preached at Roxbury on November 29, 1772)

Acts 5:1-11 (first preached at Roxbury on January 17, 1773)

Sermons, 1789

box 2

folder 5

Scope and Contents

This folder contains a single manuscript sermon on Psalm 47:7. The sermon is attributed to "Rev. Thomas Prentiss" (Thomas Prentice)

Sermons, undated

box 2

folder 6

Scope and Contents

This folder contains a number of manuscript sermons, unattributed but written largely in the same hand. All but three of the sermons are missing pages or are otherwise fragmentary.

Church records (loose), 1770-1860

box 2

folder 7

Scope and Contents

This folder contains loose records found between pages 167-168 of the bound Church record book (1738-1880). They include a piece of correspondence to the church by Thomas Prentice dated 1770, loose meeting minutes dated 1817-1860, and two loose pages of pencil notes relating to the bound volume of records, with page annotations.

Church correspondence, 1776-1817

box 1

folder 8

Scope and Contents

This folder contains official correspondence both to and from the church in Medfield, largely constituting letters of invitation to ecclesiastical councils and the ordinations of new ministers.

Personal correspondence, 1812

box 1

folder 9

Scope and Contents

This folder contains a single item of personal correspondence, from "N.B." to "Captain Turner" of the sloop Experiment. The writer details his provision of

the ship with a barrel of sweet potatoes and provides instructions for cooking them.

Printed materials, 1857-1970

box 1

folder 10

Scope and Contents

This folder contains printed materials, consisting of an order of service for the installation service of Rev. Solon Bush, and a 1970 newspaper clipping detailing the preservation of the church's relations of faith (1697-1788) by Rev. Robert A. Thayer.

Prayer requests, undated

box 1

folder 11

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 folder contains prayer requests likely dating to the 17th-18th centuries, with the names of parishioners making the request and a brief description of the desired prayer. They include prayers for safe passage, protection of relatives during military service, bolstering of personal faith, and sanctification of deaths occurring in the family.

Miscellaneous records, circa 1700-1799

box 3