

First Universalist Society of Methuen Collection, 1824-1959

General Information

Repository: Lawrence History Center

Creator: First Universalist Society of Methuen

Dates: 1824-1959

Accession Number: 2002.088

Quantity: One Banker's Box

Processed By: Veronica Denison

Access: Open for research

Provenance: These records were created by the First Universalist Society of Methuen. They were donated to the Lawrence History Center by the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Andover, MA on September 18, 2002.

Related Materials: The Lawrence History Center also holds the records of the following two collections; "First Spiritual Church of Methuen Collection, 1887-1974" 2002.016 and "Church of the Good Shepherd Unitarian Universalist Collection, 1847-1980" 2002.087.

Historical Note: The First Universalist Society of Methuen, MA was organized in 1824. The members of this society called themselves the Gleason Memorial Universalist Parish. On October 9, 1835, the parish voted to build "a house of worship." In 1836, the the parish began building the church on 26 Hampshire Street in Methuen, and the church was organized in 1840 as an "organization for the special expression of Christian faith and consecration, and as a means for Christian culture." In 1932, due to dwindling membership, the members of the society voted on the future of their church. It was decided that they would not join with any other church. The members voted to close the church until the following year. For the next year, they did hold parish meetings intermittently at the church, however many meetings were held in public spaces or members' houses. In 1934, the church disbanded, however the parish remained. The parish still had officers and continued with parish and officer meetings. Many of the parish members joined the Universalist churches in Lawrence, MA, either the First Universalist Society or the Church of the Good Shepherd Universalists. The members still donated money to various funds and organizations and cared for their church property.

The First Universalist Society of Methuen was very generous in their donations. They would often set up funds or donate money to needy families, particularly those who were members. On one occasion the society donated money to the Arlington Day Nursery, and they paid the coal bill for one of their members. In 1904, the church government appointed a Relief Committee of Sympathy and Spirit of the Church to help the poor and needy people in the parish and community. They also participated in the Great Drive of the Universalist Church, where various members of the parish pledged money to give to different funds within the

Massachusetts Universalist Convention, which was an organization of Universalist-heritage churches. It was announced by the Convention that the parish went “over the top” in pledges. There were also different organizations within the society, such as the Ladies Social Union, who served the society members supper at annual meetings, the Sunday School, and the Mission Circle.

In 1944, the society voted to divide their unused church property between the First Universalist Society in Lawrence and the Massachusetts Universalist Convention, but they still maintained control of their various funds. However, in the late 1950s, the money from these funds was given to the Association of Universalist Women at the Church of the Good Shepherd Unitarian Universalist. It is unclear when the First Universalist Society of Methuen disbanded, however it is likely that it was around this time.

Scope and Content: This collection consists of the First Universalist Society of Methuen records. The records include parish meeting minutes and church meeting minutes, as well papers documenting membership, such as letters of request from members wishing to transfer either to or from the church, and a listing of members who served in WWI and the details of their service. There is also correspondence regarding the numerous funds the church and parish donated to as well as the sale of church property. Much of the correspondence is between the First Universalist Society of Methuen and the Massachusetts Universalist Convention. There are also records pertaining to church and parish events. A majority of the records were kept in ledgers.

Arrangement: These records have been arranged into six series, one of which has been further arranged into subseries. The series and subseries arrangement of the records is as follows:

Series 1: Parish Government Records, 1824-1944

Series 2: Church Government Records, 1840-1925

Series 3: Membership, 1836-1953

Series 4: Building, 1940-1945

Series 5: Financial Records, 1903-1959

Subseries 1: Church and Parish Finances, 1903-1911, 1931-1939

Subseries 2: Church and Parish Funds and Donations, 1920-1959

Series 6: Parish and Church Events, 1891-1927

Series 1: Parish Government Records, 1824-1944

This series contains the records of the parish government. Included in this series are member meeting notices, or warrants, which were placed in public places in Methuen by the Standing Committee calling members to meetings and notifying them of what will be discussed. There are also four ledgers that contain parish meeting minutes, member lists, annual reports, treasurer records, and the society’s constitution. These ledgers are dated 1824-1843, 1844-1869, 1870-1900, and 1900-1944. There is also a copy of the front page of the 1824 ledger. Pasted on the front page is a newspaper clipping regarding the state law allowing a group of ten persons or

more to organize a new society, parish or church.

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| 1 | Member Meeting Notices (Warrants) 1904-1909, 1913, 1920 |
| Ledger | Parish Records including Society Constitution and Foundation, Member Lists, Pew Payments, Parish Meeting Minutes 1824-1843 |
| Ledger | Parish Records including Society Constitution, Member Lists, Annual Reports, Treasurer Records, Parish Meeting Minutes 1844-1869 |
| Ledger | Parish Records including Society Constitution, Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports, Financial Reports 1870-1900 |
| Ledger | Parish Records including Parish Meeting Minutes, Trustee Meeting Minutes, Constitution and Bylaws Revisions, Member Lists, 100th Anniversary Program of Events 1900-1944 |
| 2 | “State Laws Regarding Religion” copied from the front page of Parish Records used from 1824-1843 undated |

Series 2: Church Government Records, 1840-1925

This series contains the records pertaining to church government. Included in this series are a profession of faith, a revised church constitution, and information regarding the formation of the church government. There are three ledgers that consist of church meeting minutes and vital statistics, as well as treasurer reports. There is also a Sunday School report, minister reports, and a letter from Minister Libby to the church informing them he has decided to end his pastorate.

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| 3 | Pamphlet: Profession of Faith and Form of Church Government of Methuen Church 1840 |
| 4 | Revised Church Constitution 1914 Apr 5 |
| Ledger | Church Records including Church Meeting Minutes, Baptisms Administered, Communion Services, New Members Admitted to Church, Member Lists, Marriages 1874-1891 |
| Ledger | Church Records including Church Meeting Minutes, Treasurer Reports, Annual Reports, Communion Services 1892-1925 |
| Ledger | Titled “Statistics of the First Universalist Church of Methuen, Mass” includes Foundation of the Church and Constitution, Profession of Faith and Covenant, Member Lists undated |
| 5 | Sunday School Report including Enrollment and Money Collected undated |
| 6 | Reports of Ministers Discussing Events Throughout the Year 1915,1920 |
| 7 | Letter From Minister Libby to End Pastorate 1906 Feb 26 |

Series 3: Membership, 1836-1953

This series contains the records regarding membership. There is a non-resident listing of members, a pew deed for one member, and membership fees listed for one family. There are also letters of transfer for prospective new members to the church, as well as member requests of transfer. This series also includes the Kimball Gleason Colby Resolution. Colby was a member of the church who died, and the resolution is expressing the parish's sense of loss for him and extending sympathy to Colby's widow. There are also records of members who served in World War I, and two letters from members expressing their gratitude towards the church for donations received.

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- 8 Non-Resident Listing of Members and a Letter From a Previous Member Requesting Baptismal Record undated
- 9 Pew Deed for Enoch Stevens and Note of Membership Fees for Ingalls Family (Oversized) 1836, 1924
- 10 Member Requests of Transfer from Methuen Church 1893-1953
- 11 Letters of Transfer For Prospective Members of Methuen Church 1874-1901
- 12 Record of Members Who Served in WWI 1919
- 13 Kimball Gleason Colby Resolution 1928 Mar 28
- 14 Letters From Two Members Expressing Gratitude for Donations Received from the Parish and Church 1939

Series 4: Buildings, 1940-1945

This series contains records on church property, primarily correspondence between the parish and the Massachusetts Universalist Convention. This correspondence is in regards to the church property and the decision of the parish to sell the church property. There is also a letter of appraisal of the church property.

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- 15 Correspondence Between Society and Massachusetts Universalist Convention Regarding the Society's Church and Sale of Property 1940-1945
- 16 Appraisal of Church Property 1943 Feb 1

Series 5: Financial, 1903-1959

Subseries 1: Church and Parish Finances, 1903-1911, 1931-1939

This subseries consists of records that pertain specifically to the church and parish finances. There is a record from the Lawyers Mortgage Investment Corp regarding an interest payment, as well as check stubs from checks payable to Fred S. Woodbury and signed by W. L. S. Gilcreast. Woodbury was once the treasurer for the parish. There is also an indenture of trust

between the society and Bay State Merchants National Bank regarding the society's principal securities.

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- 17 Lawyers Mortgage Investment Corp Interest Payment to Society undated
- 18 Yearly Clerk and Auditor Reports Regarding Parish and Church 1903-1911
- 19 Check Stubs 1931-1938
- 20 Indenture of Trust Between Society and Bay State Merchants National Bank (Oversized) 1939 Mar 23

Subseries 2: Church and Parish Funds and Donations, 1920-1959

This subseries consists of the fund and donation records of the church and parish. These funds include the Charles H. Tenney Fund, Mrs. Addison P. Russell Fund, Low-Colby Fund, Asa Simonds Fund, and A. Gertrude Earl Fund. The records pertaining to these funds include correspondence and the bequeathal of funds to the First Universalist Society of Methuen. Many of these funds were later bequeathed to the Association of Universalist Women at the Church of the Good Shepherd Unitarian Universalist in Lawrence, MA after the disbandment of the society. There is also correspondence regarding a donation to the First Universalist Society of Lawrence to refurbish the kitchen, and correspondence regarding a donation to the Arlington Day Nursery.

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- 21 Documents Regarding Charles H. Tenney and Mrs. Addison P. Russell Funds and Bequeathal of Funds 1920 May-June
- 22 Donation from Mrs. Kendall to the Church and Correspondence Regarding Low-Colby and Asa Simonds Funds 1926, 1929
- 23 Correspondence from Massachusetts Universalist Convention Regarding Funds 1943-1944, 1959
- 24 Correspondence Regarding A. Gertrude Earl Fund and Donation to the Arlington Day Nursery 1944
- 25 Correspondence Regarding Donation to First Universalist Society of Lawrence 1944 Sept 6
- 26 Fund Bequeaths to the Church and Association of Universalist Women of Church of the Good Shepherd Unitarian Universalist (Oversized) 1935, 1959

Series 6: Parish and Church Events, 1891-1927

This series contains records regarding church events. There is a notice regarding an Easter Fellowship meeting and a note outlining the events of three different reverend services. There is a report on Methuen's part in the Great Drive of the Universalist Church, which details pledges of money from members of the society. There are also 100th Anniversary Pageant programs from the parish's anniversary in 1924.

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- 27 Notice Regarding Easter Fellowship Meeting and Note on Three Reverend Services 1891, 1926-1927
- 28 Report on Methuen's Part in the Great Drive of the Universalist Church 1919
- 29 100th Anniversary Pageant Programs, originals and copy 1924