Local History Resource Center Peabody Institute Library 82 Main Street, Peabody, MA 01960

South Congregational Church Records, 1711-1955

Collection Summary

Reference Code: MPeaI

Repository: Local History Resource Center, Peabody Institute Library, Peabody, MA.

Call Number: MS5

Creator: South Congregational Church

Title: South Congregational Church Records, 1711-1955

Dates: 1711 to 1955; 1839 to 1928 (Bulk) **Size**: 1 Boxes and 25 volumes & manuscripts **Languages (s)**: Collection materials are in English.

Abstract: The South Church Papers include the accounts, reports, correspondence and minutes collected by the church from its beginning in 1711 until 1955. Also included are the accounts of the Congregational Society from 1839 to 1851, minutes and correspondence of the Ladies' Association from 1843 to 1914, minutes of the Woman's Missionary Society from 1871-1920, the yearly minutes of the Vestry from 1900 to 1928, as well as the accounts of the church from 1934 to 1955.

Organizational History

The South Congregational Church was incorporated in 1711. Located at the junction of what is present day Lowell, Foster and Central Streets, the original church was 51 feet long and 38 feet wide. It was built with the help of subscribers who donated the funds for its construction.

Once the building was completed on November 16, 1711, Samuel Gardner, Samuel Stone, Samuel Marble, James Holten and David Forster were chosen to search for a minister. On February 15, 1712, Benjamin Prescott was chosen and in 1713, assessments were assigned to parishioners to contribute to Prescott's salary and for the erection of a home for the minister and his family. Prescott had recently graduated from Harvard University and the South Church would be his first church as minister. He lived at 72 Central Street in Peabody.

Prescott served as minister until 1756. Subsequent ministers were: Nathan Holt, 1756-1792, Samuel Mead, 1794-1803, Samuel Walker, 1805-1826, George Cowles, 1827-1836, Harrison G. Park, 1837-1838, Thomas P. Field, 1840-1850, James D. Butler, 1851-1852, James O. Murray, 1854-1861, William M. Barbour, 1861-1868, George D. Anthony, 1869-1876, Willard G. Sperry, 1878-1885, George A. Hall, 1886-1905, William Arthur Dietrick, 1906-1911 and Newell D. Maynard, 1911-1913.

In 1835, the congregation voted to take down the original church and build a new one in its place. This building was dedicated in 1837. On January 30, 1843, another vote was taken and it

was decided to sell this building to the Methodist Society. The church was taken down and moved to Washington Street where it still stands today.

On September 22, 1843, a fire broke out in South Danvers, destroying the partially finished church. With help from donations and the work of the Ladies' Association, the church was completed in 1844. It remained at its site until 1961 when it was sold and taken down. The congregation moved to its present location on Prospect Street in Peabody.

The Records of the South Church, 1711-1739, record the early years of the church. Members, locations and owners of the pews, lists of the various committees, votes taken and a record of the budget were transcribed into this first volume. Parishioners were assessed a portion of the minister's salary. Any person unable to meet these assessments were subject to being arrested and jailed. Abatements were often given to the poorer members of the church and these lists are also included in the records.

Minutes of the South Church recorded between1840 and1871 describe a church in transition. Included here are the names of parishioners, as well as those applying for admittance to the church. Deaths of members were not recorded until 1858. Any person wishing to join the church had to be interviewed before being accepted. While the church was forward in its vote to work against the evils of slavery in American society, they also were adamant that members adhere to established guidelines of behavior. These included bans against dancing and drinking. If parishioners were believed to be violating the church rules, they would be visited by a committee established for this purpose and warned. If they did not prove their repentance, they were excommunicated. These excommunications were fairly frequent during the 1840's and 1850's.

In 1850, Rev. Thomas Field announced his resignation. According to church records, his reasons for resigning—exhaustion—were not viewed as just cause for leaving. But faced with his refusal to stay, they had no choice but to accept to his decision.

In March 1851, James D. Butler was accepted as the new minister. It wasn't long into his work when Butler realized there were many within the congregation who were not pleased with his style. On July 23, 1852, Butler asked for a meeting to discuss relations between him and church. A council was convened on August 5, 1852. It was comprised of ministers from neighboring towns and two delegates from South Church. Results of council are included in the minutes. They state that James Butler's installation at South Church was met by a disgruntled minority who worked to force him out. Despite the council's findings that Butler was not at fault for the rift, they recommended that he leave, believing he'd never be accepted by some members of the church. His farewell discourse, given on July 18, 1852 alludes to many other reasons for his departure.

Because of this, it took nearly another two years for the South Church to find a minister willing to become their pastor. Rev. James Murray was named the new minister on October 1854. In his sermons, he spoke for the abolition of slavery. Included with these papers is one of his Thanksgiving addresses against slavery, given in 1856. Soon after, the church voted to open a chapel in the Rockville section of South Danvers. One of the first ministers sent to preach there was Stephen Hooper. In November of 1858, he was reported to have made derogatory remarks regarding the character of some of the members of the church. He also

denounced the recent excommunications. Because he refused to retract his statements, Hooper himself was excommunicated. Sermons given at the South Church by Andrew Nichols and Articles of Faith for the Church in 1845 and 1885 are also filed here. Programs and anniversary celebrations are here as well.

One of the most influential organizations within in the South Church was the *Ladies Association*. It was formed in 1843, with the intention to furnish and purchase an organ for the new church. The first president of the Association was Mrs. Henry (Eunice) Cook. She was born in Danvers as Eunice Winchester (1795-1872). In 1816, she married Henry Cook (1793-1875). Though he had once been involved in the export of soap, by the time of his death, his occupation was listed as that of a gentleman. Once the new church was dedicated in 1844, the Ladies Association shifted their focus to raising funds for any number of charitable needs.

After the Civil War, the Ladies Association returned their attention to helping ministers and missionaries in Midwestern states.

An offshoot of the Ladies Association was the Woman's Missionary Society. It was begun on March 7, 1871 by Mrs. Anthony, wife of George D. Anthony, minister of the church from 1869-1876. As part of their work, they supported two girls' boarding schools started by a Mr. and Mrs. Knapp and Mary E. and Charlotte E. Ely located in Constantinople and Bitlis, Turkey. Letters from the Elys recorded into the minutes describe their work at these schools and the conditions they encountered. In 1878, they describe the shifting political tide and a massacre of Kurds. The papers of Mary E. and Charlotte E. Ely can be found at Mt. Holyoke College in South Hadley, MA

In 1878, the Social Circle was formed with the intention to foster friendships, hold fairs and raise money for church. And in 1890, the Woman's Missionary Society changed its name to Auxiliary to the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions.

In 1906, the Woman's Association was formed in the attempt to gather together the various women's groups—Social Circle, Home Missionary Group, Foreign Missionary Group and Ladies' Association. They voted to change name of the Ladies Association to the Home Missionary Department of the Woman's Association and the Social Circle to the Local Church Department of the Woman's Association. The Woman's Association Executive Board held meetings once a year with the intent of overseeing the various associations. In 1917, they voted to combine home and foreign missionary meetings.

One of their first missions was to help fund colporteurs, missionaries and others who brought Bibles to distribute to settlers living in the Midwest. In their early years, they devoted much time to quilting and later to shoe making as a way to raise money for their projects.

Ministers of the South Congregational Church Name and Time at the South Church

Benjamin Prescott 1713-1756 Nathan Holt 1756-1792 Samuel Mead 1794-1803 Samuel Walker, 1805-1826

George Cowles 1827-1836

Harrison G. Park, 1837-1838

Thomas P. Field 1840-1850

James D. Butler 1851-1852

James O. Murray 1854-1861

William M. Barbour 1861-1868

George D. Anthony 1869-1876

Willard G. Sperry 1878-1885

George A. Hall 1886-1905

William Arthur Dietrick 1906-1911

Newell D. Maynard, 1911-1913

Arrangement

Series 1: Correspondence and Newspaper Clippings of the South Church, 1861-1911

Subseries 1.1: Founding of the Church, 1709-1710

Subseries 1.2: Sermons, 1852-1856

Subseries 1.3: By-Laws, 1845-1885

Subseries 1.4: Programs and Celebrations, 1886-1923, 1976, No Date

Series 2: Committees and Reports, 1906-1924

Subseries 2:1 Prudential Committee, 1906-1928

Subseries 2:2 Pastor Reports, 1906-1920

Subseries 2.3 Ecclesiastical Council, 1907-1924

Subseries 2.4 Vestry, 1920

Subseries 2.5 Sunday School, 1905-1920

Subseries 2.6 Christian Endeavor Committee, 1917

Subseries 2.7 Interfaith Service, 1918

Subseries 2.8 Advisory Committee, 1906

Subseries 2.9 Music Committee, 1910-1914

Subseries 2.10 Men's Committee, 1906-1911

Subseries 2.11 Girls Club, 1908-1911

Subseries 2.12 Young Peoples Society, 1906-1909

Subseries 2.13 Social Committee, 1908-1909

Subseries 2.14 Entertainment Committee, 1916

Subseries 2.15 Bible Club, 1908

Subseries 2.16 Woman's Work, 1906

Subseries 2.17 Supper Committee, 1913

Subseries 2.18 South Church 100th Anniversary Committee, No Date

Series 3: Civil War Associations, 1863-1865

Subseries 3.1 Soldiers Aid Society Receipts, 1863-1865

Subseries 3.2 New England Women's Auxiliary Association, 1864

Subseries 3.3 Ladies Soldiers Aid Society, 1862-1864

Subseries 3.4 National Soldiers Fair, 1864, No Date

Series 4: Ladies Association to the Home Missionary Department of the Woman's Association and the Social Circle to the Local Church Department of the Woman's Association

Subseries 4.1 Ladies Association, 1853-1925

Subseries 4.2 Women's Association Papers, 1906-1920

Subseries 4.3 Ladies Association Home Papers, 1900-1918, No Date

Subseries 4.4 Ladies Association Foreign Papers, 1901-1920, No Date

Subseries 4.5 Ladies Association Local Papers, 1901-1949, No Date

Subseries 4.6 Foreign Missionary, 1906, 1920

Subseries 4.7 Home Missionary, 1911-1912, 1920

Subseries 4.8 Boston City Missionary Society, 1919

Series 5: Church Meetings,

Subseries 5.1 Annual Meetings, 1904-1921

Subseries 5.2 Business Meetings, 1912-1924

Subseries 5.3 Special Meetings, 1911-1920

Series 6: Letters of Dismal & Requests, 1905-1925

Subseries 6.1 Letters of Dismal, 1908-1915

Subseries 6.2 Requests for Letters of Dismal, 1905-1925

Series 7: Correspondence & Journals

Subseries 7.1 Letters to Eunice Cook, 1861-1865

Subseries 7.2 Henrietta Learoyd Sperry Journal, 1884

Subseries 7.3 General Correspondence, 1906-1919

Subseries 7.4 Unsorted Papers, No Date

Scope and Content Note

This collection documents the South Congregational Church contains two boxes of materials and twenty-three volumes of materials that cover the years 1711-1956. The first box contains materials from 1860-1951. The bulk of the records relate to the various Women's Associations at the South Congregational Church. Included is the journal by Mrs. Henrietta Sperry (1845-1919), wife of Willard Gardner Sperry (1847-1906) who was minister at the church from 1878-1885. There are records relating to the South Congregational Church that cover the years 1900-1911. The second box coves the years 1912-1931. The bulk of the records relates to the South Congregational Church, and includes materials relating to the church and correspondents with other churches. There are records relating to the Banquets and Suppers that cover the years 1921-1931. The twenty-three volumes includes the book that founded the church along with journals and manuscripts from the Ladies Association.

A great number of the letters sent to the Association were addressed to Mrs. Henry (Eunice) Cook. The letters she received describe the casualties who poured into Washington D.C. and the efforts of those working with the wounded. Many of the letters came from Almira L. Fales (d.1868) and her husband, Joseph. Almira Fales was one of the first women to actively provide aid to the wounded in Washington, D.C. The Fales's letters present a vivid account of the

conditions they encountered among the wounded. In her Feb. 7, 1863 letter to Eunice Cook, Almira Fales promised to reserve some butter for Fitch Poole's son, Horace. The July 22, 1863 letter to Eunice Cook expresses the Fales's gratitude for the sympathy extended upon the death of their son at the Battle of Chancellorsville. In response to Eunice Cook's request, Almira Fales included her photograph in the letter. It has been removed for storage in Photograph Box 2.

Other letters to Eunice Cook came from the Executive Committee of the United States Sanitary Commission. One, dated July 9, 1864, from Gideon Bantz described the Battle of Monocacy which took place outside of Frederick City, Maryland.

Also included with the Ladies Soldiers Aid papers are bulletins from The National Sailors' Fair and reports from the New England Women's Auxiliary Association which were printed by Abby May of Fitchburg, Massachusetts.

The South Church Papers from 1900 to 1955 include minutes of Vestry meetings, calendar of services, yearly reports from the minister, handwritten reports from the Woman's Association, accounts of finances and information regarding membership.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation: [Identify the item], [Folder number], South Congregational Church Records, Local History Resource Center, Peabody Institute Library, Peabody, Massachusetts.

Provenance: While it is unknown exactly when the papers were deposited in the Sutton Room for safe keeping, it seems likely that they were donated after 1961 when the South Church was taken down. The Record Book from 1711-1739 appears to be donated in 1988 by the South Congregational Church.

Acquisition Information: Found in collection.

Processing: Nancy C. Barthelemy, Archivist, 2006-2007. Reprocessed, Erik R. Bauer, Archivist, 2018.

Access Rights: Collection is open for research.

Physical Access Restrictions: None.

Technical Access Restrictions: None.

Copyright: All copyrights belong to the Peabody Institute Library, Peabody, MA. All requests for permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted in writing to the archivist. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the Local History Resource Center as the owner of the physical items and is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder, when applicable, which must also be obtained by the researcher. This does not apply to items where the copyright has expired.

Conservation Work: All staples were removed and plastic paperclips were used. Papers were filed in archival folders and organized in a document box. Fragile volumes had boxes created for them and any pages or documents viewed as particularly acidic had acid-free tissue placed between them. Some surface cleaning was done.

Related Archival and Museum Materials at This and Other Institutions:

Charlotte E. and Mary A.C. Ely Papers, 1861-1990 (MS 0631)

Charlotte E. and Mary A.C. Ely Papers, Mount Holyoke College. Several pieces of correspondence from the Woman's Missionary Society.

Separated Materials: Photograph of Almira Fales has been moved to Photograph Box 2 and a purchased potato sack race ribbon from a picnic from June 29, 1915 is in the Object Collection. A Prayer and Conference booklet from 1889 that was purchased is in the Peabody Institute Library Local History Vertical File Collection, 1752-2018.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Correspondence United States Sanitary Commission.
United States Sanitary Commission--1860-1870.

Genre(s)

Battle of Monocacy (Frederick County, Maryland, MD)
Danvers (Mass.)—History
Middle Parish (Salem, Mass.)—History
Peabody (Mass.)—History
South Danvers (Mass.)—History
South Danvers (Mass.)—History—Civil War, 1861-1865
South Church (Peabody, Mass.)—History
South Church (Danvers, Mass.)—History

Personal Name(s)

Bantz, Gideon Ernest, 1844-1930 Cook, Eunice Winchester 1795-1872 Ely, Charlotte Elizabeth 1839-1915 Ely, Marry Ann Caroline 1841-1913 Fales, Almira, d.1868 Sperry, Henrietta Learoyd 1845-1919. Sperry, Willard Gardner (1847-1906. Washington, Booker T. (Taliaferro), 1856-1915

Subject(s)

Sermons Reports

Collection Inventory

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On Shelf			
South Church Records Book	1711-1739		
South Society of Congregation Church Accounts	1839-1855		
The South Church Records Book	1840-1871		
Brotherhood of Andrew and Philip	1895-1900		
South Church Minutes	1911		

Subseries 1.2: Sermons, 1819-1856

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Andrews Nichols Sermon "Suppressing Intemperance", 1819 2	
James David Butler Sermon "A Farewell Discourse", 1852	3
James O. Murray Sermon "A Discourse", 1856	

Subseries 1.3: By-Laws & Articles of Faith, 1884-1885

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	Number

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Prudential Committee Papers, 1909-1910	8
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Prudential Committee Papers, 1913	10
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Prudential Committee Papers, 1924	19
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Subseries 2.2: Pastor Reports, 1906-1920

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Pastor Report(s), 1907	22	
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Records of the Social Circle of the South Church, 1878-1888
Records of the Social Circle South Church, 1889-1906
Records of the Women's Missionary Society, 1871-1877
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Records of the Women's Association Executive Board, 1906-1907

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(Letter from Gideon Efficie Dantz describing the Dattie of Monocacy)	
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