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Natick, Mass. First Congregational Church records, 1721-1920. RG4839

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English

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Congregational Library & Archives

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Summary Information

Repository:	Congregational Library & Archives
Creator:	First Congregational Church (Natick, Mass.)
Title:	Natick, Mass. First Congregational Church records, 1721-1920.
ID:	RG4839
Date [inclusive]:	1721-1920
Physical Description:	1.15 Cubic Feet (1 box, 3 reels)
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	First Congregational Church of Natick, Massachusetts, was established in 1651 by a group of English settlers and missionaries under the leadership of Rev. John Elliot. The church became home to many local Native Americans, also known as "Praying Indians," and was the location of the writing of the "Eliot Bible:" a bible translated into phonetic Algonquian. This collection contains records of church covenants, meeting minutes, baptismal records, lists of deaths, disciplinary records, ordinations, and membership records.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], in the Natick, Mass. First Congregational Church records, 1721-1920., RG4839. The Congregational Library & Archives, Boston, MA.

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Historical Note

The First Congregational Church in Natick was established by a group of English settlers and missionaries led by Rev. John Eliot in 1651, in what is now old South Natick. The settlers cultivated strong relationships with local Indigenous peoples, mainly comprising members of the Massachusetts tribe, while attempting to convert them to Christianity. To this end, Rev. Eliot studied the Algonquin language with the help of the Montaukett interpreter Cockenoe, eventually publishing a translation of the Bible in phonetic Algonquin.

Those who converted were known as "Praying Indians" and became foundational members of the First Church in Natick, which was typified by its racially diverse congregation during the 17th and 18th centuries. There was a sizeable minority of congregants who were identified as "Negro" in the earliest church registers, as well as increasing numbers of white members. The Native presence persisted despite major fluctuations in their numbers, including those resulting from deadly forced removals to Deer Island in 1675, during King Philip's War.

In 1721 the old meetinghouse was rebuilt and local missionary Rev. Oliver Peabody was appointed as minister. During his tenure (1721-1752), he created the first extant records for both the church and town. Construction on a third meetinghouse in the same location began in 1754.

By 1749 however, white congregants were lobbying to move the church from South Natick to the increasingly segregated Natick Center. These "Center Members" were at odds with the largely Indigenous South Natick members who wished to retain the old location. Despite the unifying efforts of Rev. Peabody's successor, Rev. Stephen Badger, a fourth meetinghouse was eventually built in Natick Center in 1767. In 1798 the congregation officially split, largely (although not completely) along racial lines, with both groups retaining the moniker of "First Church". Rev. Badger was subsequently dismissed for his refusal to preach at the Center church, continuing to reside in South Natick until his death in 1803.

After the congregational schism, the South Natick division of Natick First fell into disrepair, but was revived in 1828 with the incorporation of the South Parish Congregational Church and the construction of a new meeting house. The South Parish, which became Unitarian in 1870, is now called the Eliot Church and hosts a revived Praying Indian community of worship. The "Center" church continued through several physical iterations until the present day while retaining the designation of the First Church in Natick. Notable among these was the sixth meetinghouse, a costly edifice erected on the same site in 1854, which included a bell and fine organ, and played host to several prominent luminaries of the Civil War era. This structure however burned down only two decades after its construction, in the great Natick fire of 1874. A gothic-style church was erected adjacent to the former site in 1877 and is still in use. Natick First joined the United Church of Christ shortly after the latter organization's foundation in 1957.

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Scope and Contents

This collection contains early administrative and financial records for the First Congregational Church in Natick. The collection contains administrative records and meeting minutes, financial records and ledgers, church membership records, baptismal records, marriage records, records of deaths, sermons produced by Benjamin Caryl, church correspondence, a list of prohibition supporters, and a history of the Sabbath school in Natick.

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Arrangement

Materials in this collection have been arranged in chronological order by start date.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Restrictions on Access

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Restrictions on Use

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Acquisition Information

The 1721-1794 church record book was deposited at the Congregational Library & Archives by the First Congregational Church of Natick in 2007; no accession number.

The remaining portion of the collection was deposited at the Congregational Library & Archives by the First Congregational Church of Natick in 2016; accession 2016-05. This accession was originally provided the identifier RG5313.

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 by Zachary Bodnar, March 2022, using DACS Second Edition.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Algonquin Indians.
- Baptismal records.
- Church discipline.
- Church membership.
- Church records and registers.
- Covenants (Church polity).
- Marriage records.
- Necrologies.
- New England's Hidden Histories.
- Ordination.
- Sermons, American -- Early works to 1800.
- Temperance and religion.
- Badger, Stephen, 1726-1803
- First Congregational Church (Natick, Mass.)
- Natick (Mass.) -- Church history
- Peabody, Oliver, 1698-1752

- Sears, Freeman, 1779-1811
- South Congregational Church in Natick (Natick, Mass.)

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).

A microfilm reader is required in order to access microform materials. One microfilm reader is available to the public upon request.

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Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
Church records, 1721-1794	box 1	volume 1
<p>Scope and Contents</p> <p>This volume contains the earliest extant records for the town of Natick and of the First Church. They begin in 1721, the year in which a second meetinghouse was built and in which Rev. Oliver Peabody began his 30 year tenure. It includes lists of members, baptisms, deaths, church meetings minutes, and a copy of the church covenant. This volume of records includes a list of "those Indians that have Dyed from among us," which can be used as an index to track the activities of Native Americans in the church, many of whom had anglicized names. Stewardship of the records passed to Rev. Stephen Badger in 1752, after Rev. Peabody's death.</p>	reel Print Master	
	reel Archival Master	
	reel Service Copy	
<p><u>Restrictions on Access:</u></p> <p>Restrictions on Access</p> <p>Of the microfilm reels, only the service copy is available for public use. Master reels are restricted and maintained for preservation purposes.</p>		
Letter regarding the building of the third meeting house, 1750	box 1	folder 12

Physical Access

Access to this folder is restricted due to the presence of broken glass. Contact the archivist for special permission to view the item. Special gloves must be worn when handling this folder.

Letter to bereaved parent, 1755	box 1	folder 1
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Scope and Contents

This single piece of correspondence is both unsigned and unaddressed. Its writer expresses sympathy with a bereaved parent whose son was killed in the disastrous defeat of General Edward Braddock's forces near Fort Duquesne, in the "Battle of the Monongahela" during the French and Indian War. The letter was sent from Boston and dated August 4, 1755.

Warrant for meeting about gallery stairs, 1755	box 1	folder 13
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Physical Access

Access to this folder is limited due to the presence of glass. Handle with care.

Benjamin Caryl sermons, 1762-1803	box 1	folder 2
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"A sermon at the execution of Moses Paul", circa 1772	box 1	folder 3
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Electronic resource available:

Electronic resource available

An electronic version of a later edition of this sermon is available through Hathi Trust Digital Library: [A Sermon at the execution of Moses Paul](#)

Library resource available:

Library resource available

A different edition of this item is available from the Congregational Library & Archives: [15.5 5842.1](#)

Physical Access

Access to this item is restricted due to the fragility of the object. Please use either the edition held by the library or the electronic version on Hathi Trust. Contact the archivist for special permission to view this item.

A plan of Concert of Prayer circular letter, 1794-1795	box 1	folder 4
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Purchase of town's right to meeting house, 1798	box 1	folder 14
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Physical Access

Access to this folder is limited due to the presence of glass. Handle with care.

Church records, 1802-1833	box 1	volume 2
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Scope and Contents

This volume dates from shortly after the Church's 1798 schism and comprises the records of the "Center" division of Natick First. It includes details of the church's committee at the time of formation, articles of faith, the church covenant, financial records, member lists, records of baptisms, marriages, deaths, church meeting minutes, and correspondence. The death records include detailed mortality information such as age at death and cause of death, and occasional demographic details. Correspondence includes a letter from Rev. Sears seeking reconciliation with the people of South Natick. A table of contents is included at the front of the volume.

Ministerial fund records, 1802-1914	box 1	volume 3
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Freeman Sears letter, 1809	box 1	folder 15
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Physical Access

Access to this folder is limited due to the presence of glass. Handle with care.

Financial records, 1814-1914	box 1	volume 4
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"A sermon, delivered at Natick, January 5, 1817, containing a history of said town", 1817	box 1	folder 5
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Electronic resource available:

Electronic resource available

An electronic version of this item is available through the Internet Archives: ["A Sermon, delivered at Natick, January 5, 1817"](#)

Scope and Contents

This sermon was authored by Martin Moore, but it includes an end note which was authored by Freeman Sears, minister at the First Congregational Church of Natick between 1806 and 1811.

Financial records, 1822-1862	box 1	volume 5
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Scope and Contents

This volume comprises financial ledgers from Natick First's 'Center' church subsequent to the congregational split of 1798. The records, kept by various of the

church's treasurers, detail incoming and outgoing revenue, ministerial salaries, member rates, and other miscellaneous expenses.

Church records, 1833-1864	box 1	volume 6
Daniel Wight papers, 1837-1919	box 1	folder 6
Church records by Willard Drury, 1856-1868	box 1	volume 7
Financial records, 1861-1866	box 1	folder 7
Typewritten excerpt from "The old Indian chronicle", 1867	box 1	folder 8

Electronic resource available:

Electronic resource available

A complete copy of the work this item is an excerpt of is available through the Hathi Trust Digital Library: "[The old Indian chronicle: being a collection of exceeding rare tracts written and published in the time of King Philip's war](#)"

Scope and Contents

This typewritten excerpt contains the text of pages 88 through 96 from "The old Indian chronicle", a work by Samuel G. Grace.

Financial records, 1878, 1900-1912	box 1	folder 16
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Separated Materials:

Separated Materials

These materials were removed from the volume "Financial records, 1814-1914".

Prohibition supporters, 1892	box 1	folder 9
Chronological list of members from 1802-1920, 1920	box 1	folder 10

Scope and Contents

This list of members was compiled by Lucy E. Wight.

Early history of the Natick Sabbath School, undated	box 1	folder 11
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