

Newton, Massachusetts. Central Congregational Church Records, 1868-2003

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Introduction

The Central Church in Newton closed its doors for the last time in December, 2002 after several years of struggle. Membership started to decline after the 1940s, following the trend in this region for a smaller family. Central could not maintain membership necessary to keep the church running, so decided to close before their endowment was exhausted. The remaining members of the church decided to donate their records to the Congregational Library. Kenneth Frail was the church's representative in the transfer.

Timeline

- 1868 Church organized, Chapel opened at Washington and Court Streets
- 1870s-1930s Church building continually expands
- 1888 Howe Young People's Society organized
- 1899 Church incorporated
- 1905 Central Club organized
- 1911 Three separate organizations join to form the Woman's Association
- 1912 Central Guild Organized
- 1920 Free-pew and voluntary contribution system adopted, Parsonage dedicated
Church approves national merger of the Congregational Christian with Evangelical and Reformed Church to form the United Church of Christ (not officially formed until 1957)
- 1948
- 1960 UCC constitution approved of by church
Cooperative with Newtonville Methodist Church begins; Central membership is approximately 380. Its peak in the 1940s was 1000
- 1971
- 1975 Parsonage is sold. Minister emeritus Randolph Merrill dies.
Church faced deficit between \$5,000 and \$10,000 dollars due to decline in membership, and cuts down teaching role to Andover-Newton students
- 1976 Pastor William Tolley lead church in sponsoring two Vietnamese refugee families under the flag of helping end world hunger. Also, a task force to improve the building failed to push through.
- 1980
- 1982 Church continued to solve its membership problem with Harvard professor Donald

- Oliver, who facilitated a survey to determine the community's needs.
- 1985 Mary Lou Roadman acts as first female moderator in church's history. The church was involved in peace activism, particularly targeting Ethiopia, U.S.S.R., and Nicaragua
- 1987 Task force on church growth and community dissolved after eight years
- 1991 New efforts were made to assess church needs and direction explored through a questionnaire
- 1994 The church revived its teaching status as a parish by supporting students from Andover-Newton again.
- 1990s Financial and membership problems continue
- 1999 Sunday school closed due to too few students
- 2001 Task force on the future of the church determined the church will have to close. The task force recommended consolidation with the other Congregational churches in Newton. However this recommendation was abandoned in 2002 when no one church could be agreed upon by the majority of the community.
- 2002 The task force on selling the building accepted the Boston Chinese Evangelical Church's offer of \$2,500,000 for the building, including the stained glass windows and organ.
- 2003 January 12 was the final service for the church

This material was taken from pamphlets in Series VI, Box 32, folder 8. Refer to those items for a more complete timeline.

Ministers

Joseph B. Clark	1868-1873
James R. Danforth	1873-1874
E. Frank Howe	1876-1882
Frank W. Gunsaulus	1883-1885
Pleasant Hunter, Jr.	1886-1889
David H. Taylor	1890
John M. Dutton	1892-1899
Ozora S. Davis	1900-1904
Jay T. Stocking	1905-1914
Abraham J. Muste	1915-1918
McIlyar H. Lichiter	1919-1924
Arthur M. Ellis	1924-1931

Randolph S. Merrill	1931-1956
Benjamin R. Andrews, Jr.	1956-1962
Robert J. Harding	1963-1973
Baldwin Callihan (interim)	
Ernest Heeren	1973-1977
Robert C. Senior (interim)	
William Tolley	1978-1991
Joan M. Haner	1991-1993
Robert Melhorn	1993-1998
Ann Suzedell (interim)	
Jeffrey Belcher	1998-2001
Joan Haner (interim)	2001-2003

Scope and Content

Series I: Church Records, 1868-2003

This series includes committee minutes, annual minutes, by-laws, constitution, covenant of faith correspondence, financial, and building records. Many, especially earlier records, have all the afore mentioned types of records together in chronological order.

Series II: Membership, 1868-2002

This series includes baptisms, deaths, marriages, admission, and dismissal in registries. There is also a comprehensive membership index file organized by last name. The baptism index is much less comprehensive. Researchers should check the registries first.

Series III: Ministers, 1883-2001

All files about all ministers, including interim, are here in alphabetical order. Not all ministers have files. There are also some files from pulpit search committees. This series also includes sermons

Series IV: Auxiliary and Social Groups- Includes Sunday School, 1869-2002

The most complete set of records for the Auxiliary groups is the Woman's Association and its antecedents. Copies of the annual reports are included, although they are frequently found with the church's annual report as well. The women's groups are grouped together, sub-divided and in chronological order within the sub-divisions.

Besides, the Woman's Association, this series includes the Sunday school, music-related files, some Central Guild, and the Spiritual Life records. These records are listed first and in alphabetical order.

Series V: Newsletter, 1932-2002

The Courier was the Central Church's newsletter. A copy of each issue was kept and is in chronological order.

Series VI: History, 1880-2002

While the documents in this series covers the years back to the founding of the church, the oldest document is from 1880.

Included in the series are photographs, programs from events, orders of service, anniversary celebrations, histories of the church, biographies of some members, clippings, a list of World War II servicemen, and two folders about helping displaced persons in the 1950s and 1970s

Folder List

Series I: Church Records

Box 1

1-3 Church Records, bound volumes 1868-1885, 1868-1886, 1886-1899

Box 2

1-2 Congregational Society 1886-1899

3-5 Church Records (includes membership list): Was orig. 1899, 1912-1924

Box 3

1 Correspondence 1895-1929

2-5 Committee Reports and Minutes 1883-1936

6 Personnel Committee 1963-1978

Box 4

1-3 Annual and Church Meetings 1884-1912

4-6 Standing Committee Annual Reports 1901-1920

Box 5

1-2 Standing Committee Annual Reports 1921-1930

3-6 Annual Reports 1928-1938

Box 6

1-6 Annual Reports 1939-1964

Box 7

1-5 Annual Reports 1965-1985

Box 8

1-2 Annual Reports 1986-2002

1	Incorporation	1899
2	By-Laws and Revisions	1869-1990
3	Church Manuals	1800s
4	Personnel	1963-1978
5	Vision Reports	1971-1993
6	Task Force	1981-1986
7	Special Meetings	1981-1987, 1990-1999
8	Stewardship Committee	1988-1998, gaps
9	Special Meetings: Future of the Church	1993
10	Standing Committee Meetings	2001-2003
11	Closing the Church	2001-2002
12	Closing the Church: Legacy Terms	2002?

Box 10 : *Sub-series- Building Records*

1	Repairs to Church	1886
2	Records	1915-1939
3	Remodeling Campaign	1928
4	Blueprints	1939
5	Extension Proposal	1946-1947
6	Communion Service Set	1948
7	Memorial Windows	n.d.

Sub-series- Financial

8	Pew Rentals	1914-1918
9-10	Reports, Correspondence, Fundraising	1902-1946 (gaps), 1972
11	Trustees of Permanent Funds, Correspondence	1950s-1960s
12	Bequests	1905, 1969-1970
13	Benevolence and Financial pamphlets	n.d.

Series II: Membership

Box 11: Bound Ledgers

1-4	Church Registers	1868-1975
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Box 12:

1	Bound church register	1975-2002
2	Members that signed the covenant	1928-1975
3	Covenant and Membership	1870
4	Membership	1940-1943
5	Membership Profiles	ca. 1999

6	Guest sign in book	1972-1985
Boxes 13-16		
	Membership- alphabetical index file, comprehensive	1868-2003
Box 17		
	Baptism index file, chronological	1917(approximate) -1981
Box 18		
	Church Directories	multiple dates

Series III: Ministers

Box 19		
1	Belcher, Jeffery	1999-2001
2	Chickueka, Maria Chela	1999
3	Ellis, Arthur M.	1924-1931
4	Heeren, Ernest	1973
5	Interim Ministers	1970s-1990s
6	Griswold, Jed- Collected Stories	1999
7	Harding, Robert	1962-1972
8	Howe, Frank	1883-1887
9	Hunter, Pleasant, Jr.	1886, 1889
10	Melhorn, Robert	1993
11	Merrill, Randolph Seaman	1931-1975 (gaps)
12	Muste, A.J- clippings Muste, A.J. <i>Peace Agitator: The Story of A.J.</i>	1917-1967 (gaps)
13	<i>Muste</i> by Nat Hentoff (monograph)	1982
14	Muste, A.J. Schomer, Howard and Elsie: Missionaries to	1914-1917, 1972, 1993
15	France	1946-1947
16	Taylor, David H.	1890
17	Tolley, William	1978-1991
Box 20		
1	Dedication Sermon, by Rev. Dutton or Gunsavlus	1895
2	Sermons	multiple dates
3-6	Pulpit Committee	1956, 1962, 1972-1973, 1977-1978

Series IV: Auxiliary and Social Groups- Includes Sunday School

Box 21

1-2	Central Guild, Records	1918-1933, 1933-1939
3	Music	multiple dates
4	Social Circle, Records	1869-1873
5	Spiritual Life Meetings	1998
6	Sunday School	1902-1962 (gaps)
7	Sunday School Catalogs and Programs	1890s
8	Young People Society for Christian Endeavor	1894-1900

Box 22: Women's Groups

1	Ladies Social Circle, Records	1875-1893
2	Charity Square	1895-1903
3-4	Junior Women's Association, Records	1955-1962, 1961-1967

Box 23: Woman's Association

1	Records	1911-1917
2	Annual Reports	1916-1934, gaps
3	Annual Reports	1932-1941
4	Officers	1965-1973
5-6	Annual Reports	1976-2002
7	Constitution and By-laws	multiple dates
8	Evening Group, Minutes	1944-1955
9	Evening Group, Records	1964-1973
10	Evening Group, Officers, Members	1962-1980

Box 24: Woman's Association

Handbooks	1917-2002
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Series V: Church Newsletter Courier

Box 25

1932-1945 (gaps)

Box 26

1959-1970

Box 27

1971-1978

Box 28

1979-1986

Box 29	1987-1992
Box 30	1993-1996
Box 31	1997-2002

Series VI: History, Programs, and Photographs

Box 32		
1	60th Anniversary	1928
2	70th Anniversary	1938
3	75th Anniversary	1943
4	80th Birthday Bazaar Burlesque	1948
5	100th Anniversary	1968
6	125th Anniversary	1993
7	350th Anniversary: Congregational	1970
8	Histories and Biographies	multiple dates
9	Church Archive Inventory	1973
10	Clippings	multiple dates

Box 33		
1-2	Displaced Persons	1951;1970s
3	Prayer in School	1963
4	Publicity/PR for the church	1960s-1980s
5-6	World War II Servicemen	

Box 34: Programs		
1	Auxiliary Groups	1890s-1965
2	Calendars	1901, 1911, 1937
3	Celebrations, Dedications	1894-1965
4	Christmas	1895-1989 (gaps)
5	Communion Booklet	n.d.
6	Easter	1895-1999 (gaps)
7	Memorials	1880-2001
8	Pastoral Installations	1905-1999
	Religious Education: Children's Day Service	
9	Dedication	n.d.
10-	Orders of Service (samples)	1890-1929; 1930-1962

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Box 35

Orders of Service (samples) 1963-2002

Box 36: Photographs

1 Church Members

2 Memory Book 2002

3 Building

4 Ministers

5 Holidays

37: Oversize Material (Folder)

Blueprints multiple dates

Central Club Charter Members 1906

Members 1920?

Pew Seating Plan n.d.

Sunday School: Certificate- For Marian Bordan 1908

Sunday School: Lenten Class Notes by Rev. Ozora
S. Davis 1900-1904