

# Historical Records of the Evangelical Congregational Church, Westborough, MA, 1784-1914

## Finding Aid

Last Revised: May 20, 2024

### Collection Summary

- Collection number:** OD.009 (2014.05 accession number)  
**Collection title:** Historical Records of the Evangelical Congregational Church, Westborough, MA, 1784-1914  
**Dates:** 1784-1914  
**Size:** 5.5 linear feet (7 boxes + one oversize box)  
**Creator/Collector:** The Evangelical Congregational Church, Westborough, MA  
**Acquisitions info.:** Transferred to the Westborough Public Library from the Town Clerk's Office, which retains official custody of the collection.  
**Custodial history:** This collection was among a group of historical records that were transferred from the Town Clerk's Office vault to the Westborough Public Library during the renovation of Town Hall starting in 2013. The records in this collection were housed in two wooden boxes, one labeled "Church Documents, Records of Pastors from Parkman to Beardsley, Records of Individual Members, 200 Anniversary, 1924" and another labeled, "Documents, 1709-1831." There is no record of ownership or stewardship of the documents before or after this time.  
**Language(s):** English  
**Repository:** The Westborough Public Library  
**Processed by:** Processed by Anthony T. Vaver, 2014

### Rights and Access

**Access restrictions:** Collection is open for research.

**Physical access restrictions:** None, although researchers are encouraged to use any available digital images from the collection.

**Publication rights:** All records are in the public domain.

### Organizational History

The Evangelical Congregational Church was founded in 1834, when members of the first Congregational Church of Westborough split to form two separate church societies. A division in beliefs revolving around Trinitarian and Unitarian theories among the original congregation became severe when the church began to consider building a new meetinghouse for the growing church population. The division between belief systems prompted a call for an ecclesiastical council to consider the dispute, which was held on

January 7, 1834. The council recommended that members holding Trinitarian views should form a new religious society, so on January 29, 1834, fifty-six members officially separated from the First Society to create the Evangelical Society.

Even though Rev. Elisha Rockwood, who was the pastor of the church when the break up took place, held views more in line with the Evangelical Society, the First Society continued to be the organization that officially employed him. After it became clear that the theological differences between the pastor and the congregation could not be worked out, the First Society dismissed Rockwood that same tumultuous year. Even though Rockwood continued to serve as the Evangelical Society's virtual pastor, the emotional split of the church made it difficult for him to continue in that role, so he was dismissed on March 11, 1835.

As part of the separation agreement, the First Society, which became the Unitarian Church, retained the meetinghouse and other ecclesiastical property, while the Evangelical Society received the records of the original church and the communion service plate. The Evangelical Society also built a new meetinghouse, which was completed on December 17, 1834. A more detailed account of the early life of the Evangelical Society can be found in the *Manual of the Evangelical Congregational Church* (1875) (Folder 1.03).

### **Scope and Content Note**

The records in this collection document the administrative, financial, and regular activities of the early history of the Evangelical Congregational Church, and to a lesser degree the first Congregational Church. Genealogists will especially be interested in the financial records (Series 2), which include property assessments of church members, and membership records (Series 5), which provide valuable information about the movement of church members into and out of Westborough.

“Series 3: Ministers” mostly contains records relating to the hiring and resignations of ministers. Documents relating to disciplinary action against Rev. Barnabas Phinney (adultery) and Rev. William Mitchell (theft/mental stability) are also included. “The Case of R. G. Holmes, 1858-1859” (Folder OS.03) provides detailed disciplinary action taken by the Church against R. G. Holmes for behaviors perceived to be “derogatory to the Christian character.”

Records of regular church activity start with “Church Records, [Volume 2], 1808-1835” (Folder 4.11). The first volume (“Volume 1”), which covers the years that Rev. Ebenezer Parkman served as Westborough's first minister and up to 1808, is in the Historical Records of the Evangelical Congregational Church (LH.071).

### **Related Collection**

- Historical Records of the Evangelical Congregational Church (LH.082)

- Historical Records of the Town of Westborough: Administrative Documents, 1724-1929 (OD.001): Relations of Belief and Confession, 1763-1785. Online: <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:z316s983p>.

## **Collection Inventory**

### **Series 1: Administration**

Box 1

Folder

- 1.01 Articles of Faith and Covenant, 1842
- 1.02 By-Laws and Methods of Proceedings, 1868
- 1.03 Manual of the Evangelical Congregational Church, 1875
- 1.04 Supplement to the Manual of the Evangelical Congregational Church, 1898
- 1.05 The Half-Way Covenant (Bretheren), 1784
- 1.06 Meeting Warrant, 1893
- 1.07 Meeting Minutes, 1846
- 1.08 Pew Deeds, 1834, 1892-1899
- 1.09 Oath of George S. Eddy to Become Clerk, 1884
- 1.10 Letter of Resignation from W. A. Fairbanks as Superintendent of the Sunday School, 1892
- 1.11 Correspondence: Request to Concur on the Choice of Rev. W. H. Holman as Pastor, 1887 [Holman turned down the offer to become Pastor.]
- 1.12 Correspondence: Requests for Information, 1892-1899
- 1.13 Correspondence: Thank-You Note from the First Baptist Church, 1898
- 1.14 Invitation to the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Church, 1874
- 1.15 Letters re: 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Church, 1874

Oversize Box

Folder

- OS.01 Separation of the Church, 1832-1834, n.d.
- OS.02 Complaints, Accusations, and Charges, 1835-1853, n.d.
- OS.03 The Case of R. G. Holmes, 1858-1859 [Holmes's Request for Admission (1848) can be found in Folder 3.03.]
- OS.04 Invitations to Attend Councils, 1836-1897

### **Series 2: Finance**

Box 1

Folder

- 1.16 Tax Records, 1791
- 1.17 Tax Records, 1845-1849
- 1.18 Tax Records, 1855
- 1.19 Tax Records, 1857-1858
- 1.20 Bills and Receipts, 1885-1889
- 1.21 Pulpit Supply Committee, 1849
- 1.22 Warrant of Assessors to Collector of Evangelical Society
- 1.23 Call for Assessment Lists, 18--

## Box 4

## Folder

- 4.01 Treasury Book, 1806-1848
- 4.02 Treasury Book, 1834-1889
- 4.03 Treasury Book, 1846-1889
- 4.04 Ledger Book, 1882-1889
- 4.05 Property Valuation, 1852
- 4.06 Property Valuation, 1861
- 4.07 Property Valuation, 1865-1866
- 4.08 Property Valuation, 1868
- 4.09 Subscription Payments, 1876-1884
- 4.10 Subscription Payments, 1884-1885

## Box 7

## Folder

- 7.01 Account Book of Orders, 1834-1905

**Series 3: Ministers**

## Box 2

## Folder

- 2.01 Rev. John Robinson, 1789-1807
- 2.02 Rev. Elisha Rockwood, 1808-1835
- 2.03 Rev. Barnabas Phinney, Feb. 1836-Oct. 1836
- 2.04 Rev. Charles Kittredge, 1837-1845
- 2.05 Rev. Henry Beers, 1847-1849
- 2.06 Rev. Daniel Cady, 1849-1856
- 2.07 Rev. Luther Sheldon, 1856-1867
- 2.08 Rev. Artemas Dean, 1867-1869
- 2.09 Rev. H. P. De Forest, 1871-1880
- 2.10 Rev. Fred A. Thayer, 1880-1882
- 2.11 Rev. William Mitchell, 1883-1884: Installation, 1883
- 2.12 Rev. William Mitchell, 1883-1884: Leave of Absence and Return, 1883-1884
- 2.13 Rev. William Mitchell, 1883-1884: Declarations of Confidence, 1884
- 2.14 Rev. William Mitchell, 1883-1884: Refusal to Appear at Council, 1884
- 2.15 Rev. William Mitchell, 1883-1884: Meeting of Council, 1884
- 2.16 Rev. William Mitchell, 1883-1884: Resignation, 1884-1885
- 2.17 Rev. Walcott Fay, 1888-1895
- 2.18 Rev. Merle Breed, 1895-1901

## Oversize Box

## Folder

- OS.05 Rev. William Mitchell, 1883-1884: Letters Regarding His Character, 1883
- OS.06 Rev. William Mitchell, 1883-1884: Petition for His Immediate Resignation, [1884]
- OS.07 Rev. William Mitchell, 1883-1884: Calls for Council, 1884

**Series 4: Records of Church Activity**

## Box 2

## Folder

- 2.19 Sunday Church Service Memorandum, 1830
- 2.20 Sunday Church Service Memorandum, 1832-1835
- 2.21 Sunday Church Service Memorandum, 1836-1842
- 2.22 Sunday Church Service Memorandum, 1843-1849
- 2.23 Sunday Church Service Memorandum, 1856

## Box 4

## Folder

- 4.11 Church Records, [Volume 2], 1808-1835
- 4.12 Church Records, Volume 3, 1835-1856
- 4.13 Church Records, Volume 4, 1856-1889

## Box 5

## Folder

- 5.01 *Records of Evangelical Church of Westborough*, Vol. 1, 1834-1856  
[Includes a "History of Separation from First Church of Westborough."]

## Box 6

## Folder

- 6.01 *Records of Evangelical Church of Westborough*, Vol. 2, 1857-1888

**Series 5: Membership**

## Box 3

## Folder

- 3.01 List of Church Members, 1849
- 3.02 Requests for Admission, 1833-1839
- 3.03 Requests for Admission, 1841-1849
- 3.04 Requests for Admission, 1850-1859
- 3.05 Requests for Admission, 1860-1869
- 3.06 Requests for Admission, 1870-1878
- 3.07 Requests for Admission, 1880-1887, n.d.
- 3.08 Letters of Recommendation from Other Churches, 1840-1849
- 3.09 Letters of Recommendation from Other Churches, 1850-1859
- 3.10 Letters of Recommendation from Other Churches, 1860-1869
- 3.11 Letters of Recommendation from Other Churches, 1870-1879
- 3.12 Letters of Recommendation from Other Churches, 1880-1889
- 3.13 Letters of Recommendation from Other Churches, 1891-1809, n.d.
- 3.14 Notices of Withdrawal, 1835-1839
- 3.15 Notices of Withdrawal, 1840-1849
- 3.16 Notices of Withdrawal, 1850-1859
- 3.17 Notices of Withdrawal, 1860-1877
- 3.18 Notices of Withdrawal, 1880-1888, n.d.
- 3.19 Requests for Dismissions and Recommendations to Other Churches, 1845-1849
- 3.20 Requests for Dismissions and Recommendations to Other Churches, 1850-1859

- 3.21 Requests for Dismissions and Recommendations to Other Churches, 1860-1867
  - 3.22 Requests for Dismissions and Recommendations to Other Churches, 1883-1898, n.d.
  - 3.23 Letters Re: Request for Dismission and Recommendation of Jessie MacPhee, 1894
  - 3.24 Notices from Other Churches of Acceptance of Former Members, 1840-1849
  - 3.25 Notices from Other Churches of Acceptance of Former Members, 1850-1859
  - 3.26 Notices from Other Churches of Acceptance of Former Members, 1860-1869
  - 3.27 Notices from Other Churches of Acceptance of Former Members, 1870-1879
  - 3.28 Notices from Other Churches of Acceptance of Former Members, 1880-1889
  - 3.29 Notices from Other Churches of Acceptance of Former Members, 1890-1898, 1914, n.d.
  - 3.30 Obituaries Clipped from *The Westboro Chronotype*, ca. 1891-1898
- Oversize Box  
Folder
- OS.08 Letters of Recommendation from Other Churches, 1833-1839
  - OS.09 Requests for Dismissions and Recommendations to Other Churches, 1837-1844
  - OS.10 Letter of Recommendation to Another Church (Ellen E. Hill), 1827 [Letter returned to the Church due to Ellen Hill's ill health.]
- Box 4  
Folder
- 4.14 Church Register, 1724-1876
  - 4.15 Church Register, 1875-1890
- Series 6: Index, Labels, and Envelopes**
- Box 4  
Folder
- 4.16 "Index" Church Records [?], n.d.
  - 4.17 Labels and Envelopes from Old Storage Boxes