

Second Congregational Church Collection, 1849-1994

2 Document Cases, 1 Drop-Front Box (2 linear feet)

Collection Number: HPLA2008.098

Abstract:

The Second Congregational Church began in 1849. The present church which stands on the corner of Appleton and Maple Streets opened in 1885. It includes the Skinner Memorial Chapel which opened in 1912. The building and organization is now known as the United Congregational Church. This collection consists of historical reference books and manuscripts about the church and chapel, over 70 years of pastors' sermons, records of the Women's Guild, newspaper articles and photographs, and pamphlets regarding services, recitals, concerts, programs, and dedications dating back to the inception of the congregation.

Historical Note:

The Second Congregational Church organized on May 24, 1849 and began worship in a school house on Chestnut Street. It was not technically referred to as the "second" congregation until the incorporation of the town of Holyoke in 1850 when the organization dating back 1799 by seniority officially adopted the "first" moniker. Its 31 members for a few years worshiped at Exchange Hall at High and Hampden Streets. Reverend Eldridge G. Pierce served as the organization's first minister. In 1852 the Hadley Falls Company donated land at the intersection of High and Dwight Streets for a church of their own; construction workers laid the corner stone in a ceremony on September 1, 1852 and church members dedicated the completed building not even a year later in July of 1853. Subsequent pastors who followed Reverend Pierce's resignation in 1850 also did not experience longevity in the role. From 1850 to 1867, due to financial hardship and uncertainty, the congregation saw the installation and resignation of three ministers: Richard Knight, James B.R. Walker, and Lucius R. Eastman. The leadership position remained vacant for periods of time as well, which in part caused inactivity in membership.

In the first eight years of its existence membership increased to 86 members. However, in 1858 membership nearly doubled and remained over 160 members into the 1870s. In 1867, Reverend John Low Rogers Trask became minister of the congregation. By the end of his fifteen years of service, the church had over 405 members. During the late 1870s, the parishioners quickly outgrew their original building, and Trask led the charge to raise money and plan for the present historic structure which still stands today. The Second Congregational Church was dedicated on January 29, 1885. Reverend Trask resigned a few years prior to the finished product due to his failing health, but the church will forever be indebted to his efforts and the efforts of his successor, Dr. M. Woolsey Stryker. The very first baptism in the new church on the corner of Maple and Appleton Streets was the daughter of H.B. Lawrence.

The church was built of East Longmeadow stone with a 112-foot tower. Its total cost of construction was \$160,000, which was paid in full by the time of the dedication. The original chapel resembled the Romanesque style and seated over 1000 people. With this new building also came another significant piece of the church's history – the beloved William Churchill Hammond, expert organist and choirmaster. Hammond played at the very first church service in the new building on February 1, 1885. He played at many services in the church, over 60 years worth, and his talent invited him to many other churches in the Connecticut Valley for organ recitals. Hammond also served as an organ instructor at Smith College. The original organ at the church was one of the largest in New England; George S. Hutchins of Boston built the instrument with 2475 pipes and 45 stops for a price of \$10,000.

Reverend Stryker left the church in October of 1885 and although H.H. Hubbard acted as interim pastor for nearly a year, the prominent and powerful preacher Edward Allen Reed assumed the ministry in 1886. The decades of the eighties and nineties showed marked growth under Reed's leadership. Well over 700 members heard the minister's Puritan-like doctrine promoting education, utilitarianism, human progress. In 1898 Reed's daughter, Fanny Bliss, married the organist William Hammond.

By 1900 church membership reached over 1000. In memory of William and Sarah E. Skinner, the Skinner Memorial Chapel was built during the years 1909 to 1912. In 1914 Reverend Reed became Pastor Emeritus and Robert Russell Wicks became head pastor of the church. Wicks' positive and emotional demeanor rivaled that of Reverend Reed, and he served as Chaplain for Mount Holyoke College in the latter years of his tenure. Shortly after World War I services moved for time to the ballroom at Hotel Nonotuck and also the Opera House due to a devastating fire at the church on the night of March 24, 1919. Although losses exceeded \$200,000, luckily the heroic work of the fire department left the Skinner Chapel unscathed. The Skinner Chapel and tower escaped the blaze, but Hammond's organ did not. But hope and devotion championed by Reverend Wicks kept the church afloat. He kept the church on the same site and began to put the pieces back together. While the first construction was traditional Romanesque, the rebuilt church on the original foundation was Gothic. The congregation dedicated the renovation just two days before Christmas in 1921, as part of a sixteen day festival.

As a preacher and leader with the congregation and at Mount Holyoke College, Reverend Wicks became renowned nationwide. He accepted a position as the Dean of the Chapel at Princeton, after turning down many other opportunities to continue his local work. In 1928 Dr. Clarence Reidenbach, who grew up in Massachusetts, came from Kansas to serve as pastor of the church until 1933. The Depression hit the church with debt, voided pledges, and severely reduced donations. Moses Lovell's subsequent ministry lasted from 1933 to 1938 and membership nearly reached 2000 in spite of, or perhaps due to, the affect of the decade's hardship on the community. Reverend Albert J. Penner followed the exit of Moses Lovell to New York, and he delicately navigated the church through its mounting debt, which took the entire 1940s to resolve.

Much more important than financial hardship was the affect of war. There were 238 young men and women members of the congregation who served in World War II; seven lost their lives. Penner skillfully managed the organization through 1949. To 1956 a young pastor, Jerry W. Trexler, developed many youth and educational programs. He devised the hand-bell choir and the church bulletin named the *Tower*. The fifteen years following saw the leadership of Oliver K. Black, who, in addition to being an avid biblical historian, was instrumental in the promotion and growth of the Women's Guild. This group began in 1911 and comprised all female church members. With programs for youth and the elderly, fundraising, and membership responsibilities, the Women's Guild gainfully served the congregation for decades.

Reverend Black left for Turkey in 1971. Three years passed before Ronald Wallen continued the modern tradition of creative programs and broadcasted his Sunday morning sermons over the radio. He for a time ran a daily column in the newspaper, and he also established a Ministry for the Deaf and a Food Pantry. Wallen served until 1980. Dr. David L. Slater followed in the leadership role of the church while earning his doctorate degree. Sunday school attendance and youth education prospered under the direction of Slater and Pamela Lamlein. In 1989 new Reverend David E. Roe devoted his time to cultivating an appreciation for a culturally diverse community and church service. On January 3, 1995 Grace United and Second Congregational merged to become the United Congregational Church. Dr. Charles and Roberta Morkin are the present pastors and the church stands tall as a beacon of spiritual, cultural, and historical significance in downtown Holyoke.

Scope and Contents:

The first series in this collection includes general historical reference sources chronicling the story of the church through the mid 20th century. Organized in the same box are documents pertaining to the Skinner Memorial Chapel (Series 2) and 70 years worth of sermons (Series 3, 1916-1986) written and orated by ministers of the Second Congregational Church. Finally in Box 1 is Series 4 which contains 50 years of programs and membership information from The Women's Guild.

Series 5 begins with programs and pamphlets from recitals, concerts, and general dedications, nearly dating back to the inception of the church. Also included are the by-laws of the church from 1909. One of the three membership directories included in Series 5, from 1905, shows charred pages which occurred during a church fire just four years later. Also in this series is a catalogue from the parish's library and a historical manuscript about the Ernest M. Skinner organ. Series 6, the final series in this collection, comprises newspaper articles and photographs of the church and Reverend E.A. Reed's house. Researchers are encouraged to also see the *Holyoke Transcript* scrapbooks for

additional articles, and for additional photographs please see the Holyoke Photograph Collection and the William Churchill Hammond Photograph Collection.

Information on Use

Terms of Access and Use

Restrictions on Access:

The collection is open for research unless otherwise noted in Series Descriptions

Preferred Citation

Cite as: The Second Congregational Church Collection (HPLA2008.098)
Holyoke Public Library History Room & Archives.

Custodial History

Donor Information Unknown

Processing Information

Processed by Edmund Bissonnette and Jim Massery

Additional Information:

Repository Information

Holyoke Public Library
History Room & Archives
250 Chestnut Street
Holyoke, MA 01040

Telephone: (413) 420-8107
www.holyokelibrary.org

Series Descriptions:

Series 1: Histories

1849-1949

Box 1: Folder 1:

The Story of the Second Congregation Church by Wyatt Harper

Box 1: Folder 2:

“The New Church: An Interpretation” by Robert Russell Wicks [Manuscript]

Biography of William Churchill Hammond

Box 1: Folder 3:

Fiftieth Anniversary of the Second Congregational Church (May 21-24, 1899)

First Hundred Years of the Second Congregational Church (Edward and Aaron Bagg, 1949)

Series 2: Skinner Memorial Chapel

1909-1974

Box 1: Folder 4:

Service and Dedication for Laying of the Corner Stone, 1909

Program and Dedication for the First Organ Recital and Sermon, 1909

Newspaper Articles 1941, 1948, 1974

Box 1: Folder 5:

Booklets with Photographs of Church and Chapel, No Date

Series 3: Sermons

1916-1986

Box 1: Folder 4:

“An Appeal for the Destitute in Europe,” by Robert Russell Wicks (June 11, 1916)

“Providence and Fate,” by Wicks (February 17, 1918)

“The New Church: An Interpretation,” by Wicks (December 4, 1921)

Untitled, by Wicks (October 8, 1922)

“Must Christians Fight Another War,” by Moses R. Lovell (November 11, 1934)

“ ‘Why’ the Hurricane,” (September 25, 1938)

“Vital Prayer,” by Albert J. Penner (October 17, 1943)

“Our Protestant Heritage,” by Penner (October 31, 1943)

“The Kingdom of Right Relationships,” by Penner (October 29, 1944)

“Judging Others,” by Penner (October 28, 1945)

“Christian Faith and Public Issues,” Compilation by Albert J. Penner (1940s)

“Living Beyond Our Depths,” by Penner (January 18, 1948)

“We Walk By Faith,” by Penner (January 2, 1949)

“In The Providence of God,” by Penner (May 22, 1949)

“Keeping Life Joyful,” by Jerry W. Trexler (No Date)

“How Full The Inn,” by Trexler (December 18, 1955)

Untitled by Trexler (February 20, 1956)

“An Open Letter To My Successor” by Trexler (February 26, 1956)

“How To Get Along With People You Don’t Like” (No Date)

“A Hall Of Fame For Excellence In Spiritual Quality,” by Oliver K Black (March-April 1962)
“Jesus And His Experience Of God,” by Black (March, 1962)
“We Must Go To Bethlehem For Christmas,” by Black (December 16, 1962)
“We Are A Colony Of Heaven,” by James Cleland (May 23, 1965)
“Be Perfect,” by Slater (February 22, 1981)
Minister’s Report (November 7, 1983)
“My People, I Am Your Security,” by David L. Slater (November 18, 1983)
“The Scribe in Herod’s Court,” by Slater (December 25, 1983)
“Watching Big Brother,” by David L. Slater (January 15, 1984)
“If Love Can Persuade,” by Slater (No Date)
“The Matchmaker,” by Slater (Christmas, No Date)
“1984... A Time To Soar,” by Pamela Lamlein (January 1, 1984)
“People On The Way” (February 1984)
World Day Of Prayer by Pamela Lamlein (March 2, 1984)
Remarks by B. Quincy Haynes (June 3, 1984)
“Watching...And Waiting...For Christmas,” By James G. Reed (December 2, 1984)
“Turning Troubles Into Triumphs,” by James G. Reed (No Date)
“Innocent and Wise,” by Slater (June 1985)
“When You Can’t Help Yourself,” by David L. Slater (July 1985)
“Come Home for Christmas,” by James G. Reed (December 7, 1986)

Series 4: The Women’s Guild

1915-1955

Box 1: Folder 1:

Women’s Guild Program Booklets and Membership, 1915-1955

Series 5: Recitals, Concerts, Programs, and Dedications

1855-1939

Box 2: Folder 1:

Manual and By-Laws, 1908

Box 2: Folder 2:

Recitals and Concerts, 1896-1939

Box 2: Folder 3 and 4:

Service Programs and Dedications, 1855-1948

Catalogue of the Parish Library, 1903

Box 2: Folder 4 and 5:

Dedications 1910-1926, Membership Directories 1905 [[Access Restricted](#)], 1914, 1929

History of the Ernest M. Skinner Organ

Series 6: Articles and Photographs

1899-1994

(**See Also *Transcript* Scrapbooks; Holyoke Photograph Collection; and William Churchill Hammond Photograph Collection)

Box 3: Folder 1:

Church Construction, 1921

Church, No Dates

Chapel Interior, No Dates

Residence of Reverend E.A. Reed, Corner of Pine and Suffolk Streets, No Date

English Boy's Choir, No Date

Box 3: Folder 2:

Newspaper Articles, 1899-1994
