

Inventory of the

First Congregational Church
Sterling, Illinois

Records

In the

Regional History Center

RC 155

INTRODUCTION

Rev. M. Melvin Hough of Sterling, Illinois donated the records of the First Congregational Church to the Northern Illinois Regional History Center on August 19, 1982.

Property rights in the collection belong to the Regional History Center; literary rights are dedicated to the public. There are no restrictions on access to the collection.

Linear feet of shelf space: 6
Number of containers: 6 + 4 volumes
Northern Illinois Regional History Center
Collection 155

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection documents the history of the First Congregational Church from its founding in 1857 through 1982. The records are organized into six series covering different facets of church operation. Series one, administrative records, comprises historical information, constitutions and by-laws, church record books containing meeting minutes (1857-1961), trustee meeting minutes (1949-1955), annual reports (1940-1981), resolutions and legal agreements, and correspondence (1949-1965). These materials describe church actions taken on building development, recruitment of new pastors, membership problems, and the financial status of the society. The second series contains financial records such as cash books, day books, and pledge books for the years 1888 to 1976. Membership records comprise the third series. Here researchers can find the names of all church members, dates of communions and baptisms, a register of marriages and deaths, and a listing of contributions. In addition, there are letters of transfer and dismissal (1883-1973). These first three series represent the core records of the church.

The last three records series contain information on building development, the Sunday School, and various organizations within the church. The fourth series documents the church's campaign for a new education building and modernization of older facilities. Series five contains the minutes of the Board of Religious Education meetings from 1942 to 1971 describing curriculum changes over the twenty-four year period. Also included are treasurer's books and attendance records. The final series contains records of the Deacons (1945-1970), the Prudential Committee (1902-1977), the Men's Bible Class (1904-1909), the Mary and Martha Class (1927-1936), the Mayflower Circle (1948-1958), the Woman's Missionary Society (1914-1940), and the Woman's Guild (1895-1980). Records of the Woman's Guild comprise the largest subseries describing their activities, membership, constitution, and financial situation. Photographs and scrapbooks (1858-1959) complete the collection.

Researchers studying the responses of northern Illinois citizens to the Great Depression and World Wars I and II may want to consult these records around those various time periods.

For those studying religious history in this area, the Center holds other collections which may provide some pertinent information. Please consult the Center's Regional Collection Guide or with a staff person for information on complimentary records collections.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The first move toward the organization of a Congregational Society came in 1856 when several families from Indiana discovered the presence of a Congregational element in Sterling. Throughout the 1856-1857 winter twelve men met to discuss and investigate the possibility of organizing. On April 17, 1857, A. McMoore offered the following resolution at a meeting: "Resolved that we organize ourselves into a Congregational Church." The resolution unanimously passed. Public organization took place on June 21, 1857 with 54 persons being recognized as members. Rev. Parker served as the first pastor at a salary of \$10.00 per sermon. Rev. U.W. Small replaced Parker on August 8, 1859 receiving a salary of \$800.00 per year. A hall on the second floor of the Central Block served as the first place of worship. In need of larger space, the church moved to Central Hall in 1860.

On May 22, 1863, the church appointed a committee to decide on specifications and estimates for a Romanesque style of church. After completion of the church until 1894 the society suffered financial difficulties and employed nine different pastors. Nevertheless, by 1897 a cornerstone was laid for another new building and church membership reached nearly 500. World Wars I and II also created problems for the congregation. For example, the 1920 annual meeting listed total membership at 1094, but in January 1921 it was only 435. Another drop occurred in 1923 until only 335 people belonged in December of that year. From here on, however, the church grew and prospered.

In 1957 members began a campaign to add new church school facilities. The church approved the new facilities and Rev. C.F. McCall, superintendent of the Congregational and Christian Conference of Illinois, conducted the dedication services on June 12, 1960. The Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church merged in 1959 to form the United Church of Christ; this church became a member soon after the merger. Over the years, the Congregational Church has served the community on an international level through missionary work, on a national level through charitable contributions, and locally as a source of strength and spirit for its members.

SUBJECT TRACINGS

Congregationalists
 First Congregational Church, Sterling
 Great Depression
 Sterling
 World War I
 World War II

<u>BOX</u>	<u>FOLDER</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
Series V. Sunday School Records		
3	1	Teacher's Meeting Minutes, 1947-1951
	2-3	Board of Religious Education, Minutes, 1942-1943, 1954-1971
	4-5	Treasurer's Books, 1906-1942
	6	Attendance Records, 1939-1945
Series VI. Church Organization Records		
4	7	Deacons, Minutes, 1945-1970
	8-9	Prudential Committee, Minutes, 1902-1909, 1944-1977
	10	Men's Bible Class, Minutes, 1904-1909
	11	Mary and Martha Class Records, 1927-1936
	12	Mayflower Circle, Minutes, 1948-1958
	13	Woman's Auxiliary, Minutes, 1907-1916
		Woman's Missionary Society:
	14	Constitution, n.d.
	15-19	Minutes, 1914-1918, 1921-1940
	20-21	Treasurer's Books, 1893-1933
4		Women's Guild:
	1	Constitutions, n.d.
	2	Ladies Aid, Minutes, 1895-1906
	3-10	Minutes, 1916-1963
5	1	Executive Board Minutes, 1955-1962
	2	Correspondence and Miscellaneous Records, 1940-1961
	3	Treasurer's Books, 1916-1940
	4	Dues Record, 1926-1936
	5-7	Yearbooks, 1937, 1942, 1946-1976, 1977-1980 (3)
	8	Photographs, partially identified, 1949-1960 (17)
6	5 volumes	Scrapbooks, (1858-1959), n.d.