

AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

Manuscript Collections

<p>Name of collection:</p> <p>Worcester County, Mass., Church Associations Collection, 1805-1935</p>	<p>Location:</p> <p>Octavo volumes "W" Folio volumes "W" Misc. mss. box "Worcester County"</p>
<p>Size of collection:</p> <p>18 octavo volumes; 1 folio volume; 3 folders in Misc. mss. box "Worcester County"</p>	<p>N.U.C.M.C. number:</p> <p>N.A.</p>
	<p>RLIN id:</p>
<p>Finding aids:</p> <p>For information on the Worcester Association of Ministers see: Frederick Lewis Weis, <u>The History of the Worcester Association</u> (Lancaster, 1935); for information on the Harmony Conference-Worcester South Conference see: <u>A Brief History of the Congregational Churches of the Worcester South Conference of Churches</u> (Worcester, 1877).</p>	
<p>Source of collection:</p> <p>See Contents List</p>	
<p>Collection Description:</p> <p>This collection consists of records from a variety of church associations of Worcester County.</p> <p>The <u>Harmony Conference of Churches</u> was a religious association of pastors and laymen of fourteen Evangelical Congregational churches in southern Worcester County. The purpose of the conference was to promote spirituality, carry on missionary work, and aid those churches within the conference demonstrating financial or spiritual need. The conference served in an advisory capacity and did not set policy for the member churches. It was formed in 1828 and met semiannually until 1859. In 1860 the name of the conference was changed to the <u>Worcester South Conference of Congregational Churches</u>. By 1917 there were sixteen member parishes in the conference.</p> <p>The records of the <u>Harmony Conference-Worcester South Conference of Churches</u> consist of six octavo record books, 1828-1922, one octavo treasurer's account book, 1872-1922, and one folder of miscellaneous records, 1846-1909. The six record books include the constitution and lists of members of the conference as well as minutes of meetings. Minutes of meetings include lists of attending pastors and participants, titles of the sermons presented at the meetings, and reports of the business conducted at the meetings. There are also meeting notices and annual reports of the churches interfiled in the record books. The treasurer's account book contains the income and expenditures of the conference and includes annual statements of the treasurer interfiled in the volume. The folder includes an 1862 constitution and two printed reports, 1908 and 1909.</p>	

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Collection Description (continued) Worcester County, Mass., Church Associations
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The Worcester Central Association consisted of twenty-one Congregational churches from Worcester, Mass., and surrounding towns. Its purpose was to promote religious fellowship and, as with the Harmony Conference, it had no ecclesiastical power. At its semiannual meetings, members would deliver sermons and addresses and join together in prayer and discussions.

Worcester Central Association records, 1838-1855, consist of one octavo volume labeled "volume II." It includes the minutes of meetings, with lists of the participating pastors, titles of sermons, and the names of attending guests and societies' representatives. There is also a "Report on Congregationalism" given in 1845.

The Worcester Association of Ministers was founded in 1762 after a reorganization of the Marlborough Association of Ministers. In 1791 the Worcester Association disbanded over the controversy of Unitarianism, but reformed the same year. The purpose of the Association was to "advance the interest in Christ" through theological discussions. It also was a decision-making body which interviewed and recommended candidates for the ministry. The Worcester Association consisted of six members in 1791, but its influence rapidly declined. In 1820 the Worcester Association merged with the Lancaster Association of Ministers. This revitalized the Worcester Association and it began to take an active interest in the religious life of its member Unitarian churches. It became involved with children's education, founded a library, and actively aided the temperance movement. In 1866 it sponsored the formation of the Worcester Conference of Congregational (Unitarian) and other Christian Societies. In 1886 it merged with the Worcester West Association of Ministers, and with the addition of new parishes, the Worcester Association grew to include twenty-nine members in 1935.

The Lancaster Association of Ministers was founded in 1815 and included five pastors from parishes in towns north and east of Worcester. After a year of debate, it merged with the Worcester Association of Ministers in 1820.

The Westminster Association of Ministers was founded in 1780 and included five pastors from parishes in towns north and west of Worcester. It sponsored a missionary society for Worcester County in 1806. In 1830 it changed its name to the Worcester West Association and in 1886 it merged with the Worcester Association of Ministers.

The Worcester Conference of Congregational (Unitarian) and other Christian Societies was formed in 1866 by the Worcester Association of Ministers on the recommendation of the National Unitarian Conference. Its membership consisted of a combination of pastors and laymen from Unitarian and Universalist parishes of Worcester County. The purpose of the Conference was to advance cooperation among churches and individuals with theological problems and cooperate in missionary work. The Conference also took an active role in education and in aiding sister churches in times of financial need.

The records of the Worcester Association of Ministers are comprised of record books of meetings, 1830-1935, and a catalogue of books in the Association's library, 1828-1842. The minutes of meetings from 1820-1830 are found in the volume with the Lancaster Association's records. The minutes of meetings include the date and place of the meeting, lists of attending members, and accounts of the discussion topics and general business. There is also a

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Collection Description (continued) Worcester County, Mass., Church Associations
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list of members and a constitution in the octavo volumes and an account of land owned by the Association filed in the folio volume.

The records of the Lancaster Association of Ministers, 1815-1826, consist of one octavo volume with the constitution and minutes of the Association's meetings. The minutes include the location of meetings, topics discussed, and general business conducted at the meetings.

The Westminster-Worcester West Association records, 1805-1886, consist of one octavo volume with minutes of meetings and one folder of miscellaneous records. The minutes contain the date, place, and attendance at meetings, with accounts of discussions and examinations of ministerial candidates.

The Worcester Conference of Congregational (Unitarian) and other Christian Societies records, 1866-1913, are comprised of minutes of meetings, biographies of members, and obituaries of deceased members; newspaper clippings and a constitution interfiled in the record books; two printed histories of the conference written during the 25th and 50th anniversaries of the conference; and a folder of miscellaneous records.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MASS., CHURCH ASSOCIATIONS COLLECTION

Provenance

Worcester Association of Ministers records permanently deposited by the Worcester Association of Ministers, 20 January 1941; Worcester Central Association record book purchased from E. L. Kowalczyk, 1 February 1956; Westminster-Worcester West Association record book gift of Rev. Nathaniel Seaver, 11 September 1899; Worcester Conference of Congregational (Unitarian) and other Christian Societies record books gift of Rev. Austin L. Garver, 31 March 1892; Worcester Conference of Congregational (Unitarian) and other Christian Societies anniversary records gift of Frederick L. Weis, n.d.

Contents List

Octavo volumes

- #1-#3 Harmony Conference of Churches record books, 1828-1859; include minutes of meetings, membership lists, etc.
- #4-#6 Worcester South Conference of Churches record books, 1860-1917; include minutes of meetings, membership lists, etc.
- #7 Worcester South Conference of Churches treasurer's account book, 1872-1922; includes accounts of income and expenditures
- #8 Worcester Central Association record book, 1838-1855; includes minutes of meetings, reports, membership lists, etc.
- #9 Lancaster Association of Ministers, 1815-1820, and Worcester Association of Ministers, 1820-1830, record book; includes constitutions and minutes of meetings
- #10-#11 Worcester Association of Ministers record books, 1830-1861; include minutes of meetings, membership lists, business accounts
- #12 Worcester Association of Ministers catalogue of books, 1828-1843
- #13 Westminster-Worcester West Association of Ministers record book, 1805-1886; includes minutes of meetings
- #14-#16 Worcester Conference of Congregational (Unitarian) and other Christian Societies record books, 1866-1913; include minutes of meetings, obituaries, etc. Volumes #15 & #16 have indexes.
- #17-#18 Worcester Conference of Congregational (Unitarian) and other Christian Societies 25th and 50th anniversary celebration histories

Folio volume

- #1 Worcester Association of Ministers record book, 1861-1935;
includes minutes of meetings, etc.

Misc. records box "Worcester County"

Folder

- 2 Westminster-Worcester West Association
3 Worcester Conference of Congregational (Unitarian) and other
Christian Societies
3a Worcester South Conference of Churches