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Finding Aid for the Duncan E. Littlefair sermons and biographical collection Collection 102

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections
Department

111 Library Street NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

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URL: <http://www.grpl.org>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
Creator:	Littlefair, Duncan E
Title:	Duncan E. Littlefair sermons and biographical collection
ID:	Collection 102
Date [inclusive]:	1945-1979
Physical Description:	1.42 Linear Feet Three boxes
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	Duncan E. Littlefair (1912-2004) was the pastor of Fountain Street Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan from circa 1945 to 1979. This collection primarily includes sermons and pamphlets detailing his theology. Littlefair's tenure at Fountain Street Church continued a doctrine of liberalism. Littlefair, schooled in a theology based on 1930s modern humanism, created a popular liberal environment that increased membership and involvement, making the church one of the most prominent local institutions in the area. The changing elements of this humanism at Fountain Street Church, however, led to its separation from its roots and affiliation with the Baptist Church during the late 1950s. Also included are biographical documents pertaining to Littlefair.

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Biographical / Historical

Duncan E. Littlefair (b. 4 October 1912 in Toronto Canada – d. 2004) attended McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario and took his doctorate at the University of Chicago's Divinity School. Upon completion of his graduate work he took the pastorate of Union Church in Kenilworth, Illinois. In 1944 he was recruited by Fountain Street Baptist Church of Grand Rapids, theologically a relatively liberal church. The liberalism is traced to 1897 when the congregation hired J. Herman Randall, its first pastor trained at the University of Chicago Divinity School. After Randall resigned, the church hired Alfred W. Wishart, who remained from 1906 until 1933. Wishart brought the "social responsibility" gospel to Grand Rapids. During Littlefair's (schooled in the 1930s modern humanism) pastorate, the church became more liberal and separated from its Baptist affiliation in the late 1950s. Littlefair also increased church membership, attendance and member involvement to make Fountain Street Church a prominent

local institution. Littlefair retired in 1978, but continued to serve on a part-time basis until 1980. He died in Grand Rapids Jan. 17, 2004.

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Scope and Contents

The sermons and pamphlets detail the developing modern humanist theology of Duncan E. Littlefair and Fountain Street Church. Topics included the nature of God, Jesus, humanity, other world religions and biblical inspiration. As such the sermons demonstrate a shift toward the central place of humanity, akin to Unitarianism. The sermons apparently were presented extemporaneously and either recorded stenographically or on audio tapes, transcribed and printed. In most cases the sermons were presented during the spring on seven of eight successive Sundays and each season sermons were bound into a single volume.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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URL: <http://www.grpl.org>

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Unknown donors. Includes accession numbers 2006.004; 2006.005.

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Related Materials

Related Materials

Coll. 311. The Fountain Street Church Collection, including the sermons of Alfred Wishart. Fountain Street Church, as well as the Park Congregational Church, have long been neighbors of the Grand Rapids Public Library at its main downtown location. Most of the material in both Coll. 102 and 311 are believed to have been given by the Fountain Street Church and/or their pastors. The collections are updated occasionally when new material is given by the Church or Church members, or transferred within the Library's collections.

Coll. 096 Western Michigan Genealogical Society Church Records Collection. Includes microfiche of selected church records from area churches, collected and filmed by the Western Michigan Genealogical Society.

Coll. 270 Gathered at the River. Includes resources collected during this Humanities Council sponsored project to document Grand Rapids area churches.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Clergy -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- personal papers
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- Church history
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- Fountain Street Church (Grand Rapids, Mich.)

Collection Inventory

Series I. Biographical Information and Publications.

Scope and Contents

This series includes information and graphic items related to the life and ministry of Duncan E. Littlefair. Most of this material was added to the collection around 2004, from materials available in the collections, or from information found on Internet Websites.

Title/Description	Instances
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Remembrance photo sheet. "Dr. Duncan E. Littlefair, Oct. 4, 1912-Jan. 17, 2004. 2004.021J	Box 1	Folder 1
A Community Gathering in Celebration of the Life of Dr. Duncan Elliot Littlefair, Oct. 4, 1912-Jan. 17, 2004. Feb. 6, 2004 Program.	Box 1	Folder 2
The Fountain Street Church, 1869-1969. 2006.037	Box 1	Folder 3
The Glory Within You : Modern man and the Spirit / by Duncan E. Littlefair. Philadelphia : Westminster Press, 1973. 2007.102.5	Box 1	Folder 3.5
Sin Comes of Age / by Duncan E. Littlefair. Philadelphia : Westminster Press, 1975. 2007.102.6	Box 1	Folder 3.6
Littlefair : text and photographs by Michael William Grass. [Fountain Street Church], Littlefair Fund Management Committee, 1977. c.1 2006.004 / c.2 2006.037	Box 1	
[Flyer.] The Memorial Trust Fund, Fountain Street Church. "4/71" [April 1971] 2006.004	Box 1	Folder 6
Portrait photo. Photograph originally taken by John Porter, n.d. 2006.005	Box 1	Folder 7
Fountain Street Church. What is this Church? / written by Dr. Duncan E. Littlefair, 1966.	Box 1	Folder 8
Comments made by Dr. Littlefair Regarding the Principles of our Church, 06/07/70. 2006.037	Box 1	Folder 9
Littlefair obit. WOOD TV8	Box 1	Folder 10
La Claire Studio images.	Box 1	Folder 11
Grand Rapids Press Articles from ProQuest	Box 1	Folder 12
Notable American Unitarians. Littlefair.	Box 1	Folder 13
Free Spirit. Fall 2001. The Littlefair Legacy.	Box 1	Folder 14
Littlefair associations and testimonials.	Box 1	Folder 15
Southern Baptist Convention on Littlefair	Box 1	Folder 16

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Series II. Sermons

Scope and Contents

This series includes the sermons themselves, which formed the original content available for this collection.

The Nature of God, 1945

Title/Description	Instances	
The Place of Reason in Religion	Box 2	Folder 1

Is There a Place in Religion for the Supernatural?	Box 2	Folder 1
Can We Prove the Existence of God?	Box 2	Folder 1
The Nature of God	Box 2	Folder 1
Is God a Person	Box 2	Folder 1
The Injustice of God	Box 2	Folder 1
Does God Answer Prayer	Box 2	Folder 1
The Psychological Approach to God	Box 2	Folder 1
The Fountainhead. Jan. 14, 1945. 2006.037	Box 2	Folder 1.5

A Study of Jesus, 1946

Title/Description	Instances	
Can We Trust the Bible?	Box 2	Folder 2
Is There More Than One Jesus?	Box 2	Folder 2
The Judgments of Jesus	Box 2	Folder 2
The Promises of Jesus	Box 2	Folder 2
The Teachings of Jesus	Box 2	Folder 2
Can Jesus Solve Our Problems?	Box 2	Folder 2
Was Jesus Human or Divine?	Box 2	Folder 2
The Religion of Jesus vs. the Religion About Jesus	Box 2	Folder 2
Why was Christianity Successful?	Box 2	Folder 2
The Faith of Jesus	Box 2	Folder 2

World Religion, 1947

Title/Description	Instances	
Is There and Religious Truth?	Box 2	Folder 3
Is There a True Religion?	Box 2	Folder 3
Hinduism	Box 2	Folder 3
Buddhism	Box 2	Folder 3
Confucianism	Box 2	Folder 3
Judaism	Box 2	Folder 3
Mohammedanism	Box 2	Folder 3
Christian Science	Box 2	Folder 3
Roman Catholicism	Box 2	Folder 3

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