

Finding aid for the St. Cecilia Music Society records Collection 453

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

111 Library Street NE Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503 localhis@grpl.org

URL: http://www.grpl.org

Table of Contents

Summary Information	3
Biographical/Historical note	3
Scope and Contents note	4
Administrative Information	5
Controlled Access Headings	5
Collection Inventory	6
Newspaper Clippings	6
Concert programs	9
The Musical Seasons	13
Documents and Histories	17
Musical programs and performers	21
Scrapbooks	24
Board Minutes	27
Miscellaneous Documents	28
President, Winifred Stiles papers [2019.070]	31

Summary Information

Repository: Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special

Collections Department

Creator: St. Cecilia Music Center. (Grand Rapids, Mich.)

Creator: St. Cecilia Society. (Grand Rapids, Mich.)

Title: St. Cecilia Music Society Records

ID: Collection 453

Date [inclusive]: 1883-2015

Physical Description: 41.0 Linear feet 63 boxes

Language of the

Material:

English

Abstract: The Saint Cecilia Music Society was founded on September 7th, 1883

when one woman, Mrs. Ella M. Pierce, called for a meeting of musical women to the home of Mrs. Frank M. Davis. Starting out with only nine musical women, the society grew in numbers over the years. As a result, the women decided to purchase and construct their own building in 1892 to conduct their business. In the Spring of 1894 the building was complete and named after a saintly third century Roman girl who is known for her musical attributes, named Saint Cecilia. The Society was the first woman's musical organization in the United States to be built, financed, and operated entirely by women. Many local and nationally recognized artists and musicians have performed in the acoustically perfect performance hall and to this day many local organizations, such as the Grand Rapids Symphony, Civic Theater, and Opera can trace their origins back to the Saint Cecilia Music Center.

Biographical/Historical note

The Saint Cecilia Music Society was founded September 7th, 1883 by nine determined Grand Rapids women. These women were serious about studying, hearing, playing and promoting the appreciation of music and art throughout the community. The musical work of the society is stated to be based on, "broad lines, free from selfish interests, devoted to musical improvement and the development of the art in the community." Originally composed entirely of women, the society grew in size each year as

[^] Return to Table of Contents

the events were members only. This prompted more and more women in the community to become members.

As membership grew, it was apparent that the society needed a space of their own that would be large enough to hold their growing participation. As a result, May of 1892 the society purchased the present site on Ransom Ave. and by the spring of 1894, St. Cecilia's building was completed. St. Cecilia Music Society was the first woman musical organization in the United States to have purchased and operated their own clubhouse. The building features a nearly 700-seat auditorium with acoustical qualities which have caused numerous critics and performers to rate it as one of the most outstanding performance halls in the country.

The building and the organization was named after a saintly third century Roman girl who composed hymns, played various instruments, and invented the organ, which was used to influence people to convert to Roman Catholicism. Although it seemed that the organization was affiliated with Catholicism, the society stressed that they were not connected to any single religion.

Over the years, the society held recitals that featured local and nationally recognized artists and musicians. These women also organized youth musical groups and helped with the creation of other musical organizations, such as the Grand Rapids Opera, the Grand Rapids Symphony and the Grand Rapids Civic Theater. The Saint Cecilia Music Society is one of the few woman's organizations that is still around today.

^ Return to Table of Contents

Scope and Contents note

The Saint Cecilia Music Society collection is broken up into eight series, which are based on subject matter.

Series I: Newspaper Clippings contains a variation of Grand Rapids news clippings with dates ranging from 1883-1929.

Series II: Concert Programs contains a compilation of concert program books throughout the years of 1884-2010.

Series III: The Musical Seasons includes a variety of information including season program books, yearbooks, brochures and promotional materials. The yearbooks contain information regarding the concerts, programs, staff, bylaws, and clubs from each specific year; unlike traditional yearbooks, instead of the books being filled with photographs, they are strictly text. The information dates from 1889 through the present.

Series IV: Saint Cecilia Documents and Histories includes miscellaneous information about the society such as information on membership, volunteer activities, newsletters, a variety of written histories, and much more.

Series V: Saint Cecilia Musical Programs and Performers is a series about performers, milestones, and the Saint Cecilia Society School of Music.

Series VI: Saint Cecilia Society Scrapbooks. Comprised of full and partial scrapbooks from members and society employees. Most are filled with newspaper clippings; one is a photographic album of past presidents. Some scrapbooks in this series are filled with mulitple years' worth of musical programs. Includes scrapbooks dedicated to the Saint Cecilia Society Junior Members as well.

Series VII: Saint Cecilia Society Board Minutes. Comprised of ledger books of board minutes from SCS meetings.

Series VIII: Saint Cecilia Society Miscellaneous Documents. This series consists of miscellaneous documents ranging from mortgage deeds to financial ledgers to songbooks and musical society information on places other than Saint Cecilia.

^ Return to Table of Contents

Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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

111 Library Street NE Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503 localhis@grpl.org

URL: http://www.grpl.org

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of St. Cecilia Society [2015.029] [2016.034]

^ Return to Table of Contents

Controlled Access Headings

- Music -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- Music -- Societies, etc.
- Musicians -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
News Clippings, 1883-1891	Box 1	Folder 1
News Clippings 1892, 1892	Box 1	Folder 2
News Clippings 1893, 1893	Box 1	Folder 3
News Clippings 1894, 1894	Box 1	Folder 4
News Clippings 1899, 1899	Box 1	Folder 5
News Clippings Early 1900s, Early 1900s	Box 1	Folder 6
ews Clippings 1908, May-June 1908	Box 1	Folder 7
News Clippings 1909, 1909	Box 1	Folder 8
News Clippings 1911, February 14, 1911	Box 1	Folder 9
News Clippings 1912, 1912	Box 1	Folder 10
lews Clippings 1913, March, October 1913	Box 1	Folder 11
lews Clippings 1918, 1918	Box 1	Folder 12
News Clippings 1919, February 1919	Box 1	Folder 13
ews Clippings 1922, 1922	Box 1	Folder 14
ews Clippings, January, October 1926	Box 1	Folder 15
lews Clippings 1927, January 1927	Box 1	Folder 16
News Clippings 1928, 1928	Box 1	Folder 17
lews Clippings 1929, December 1929	Box 1	Folder 18
Jews Clippings 1931, December 1931	Box 2	Folder 1
lews Clippings 1933, October-November 1933	Box 2	Folder 2
News Clippings 1934, January-December 1934	Box 2	Folder 3
lews Clippings 1935, January-March 1935	Box 2	Folder 4
ews Clippings 1936, April 28, 1936	Box 2	Folder 5
ews Clippings 1937, January, May 1937	Box 2	Folder 6
lews Clippings 1938, November 1938	Box 2	Folder 7
Jews Clippings 1940, 1940	Box 2	Folder 8
News Clippings 1941, 1941	Box 2	Folder 9

News Clippings 1942, April 26, 1942	Box 2	Folder 10
News Clippings 1943, November 7, 1943	Box 2	Folder 11
News Clippings 1944, October-December 1944	Box 2	Folder 12
News Clippings 1945, January-November 1945	Box 2	Folder 13
News Clippings 1946, January-November 1946	Box 2	Folder 14
News Clippings 1947, January-October 1947	Box 2	Folder 15
News Clippings 1948, January-August 1948	Box 2	Folder 16
News Clippings 1949, March, April 1949	Box 2	Folder 17
News Clippings 1951, 1951	Box 2	Folder 18
News Clippings 1953, 1953	Box 2	Folder 19
News Clippings 1954, December 1954	Box 2	Folder 20
News Clippings 1955, 1955	Box 2	Folder 21
News Clippings 1956, April 1956	Box 2	Folder 22
News Clippings 1957, November 1957	Box 2	Folder 23
News Clippings 1958, September-October 1958	Box 2	Folder 24
News Clippings 1959, April, September 1959	Box 2	Folder 25
News Clippings 1960, March-April 1960	Box 2	Folder 26
News Clippings 1961, February, April, October 1961	Box 2	Folder 27
News Clippings 1962, February, June 1962	Box 2	Folder 28
News Clippings 1963, September 1963	Box 2	Folder 29
News Clippings 1964, November 1964	Box 2	Folder 30
News Clippings 1965, January-May, November 1965	Box 2	Folder 31
News Clippings 1966, April 1966	Box 2	Folder 32
News Clippings 1967, November 1967	Box 2	Folder 33
News Clippings 1968, 1968	Box 2	Folder 34
News Clippings 1969, 1969	Box 2	Folder 35
News Clippings 1970, October 1970	Box 2	Folder 36
News Clippings 1971, February, May 1971	Box 2	Folder 37
News Clippings 1972, 1972	Box 2	Folder 38
News Clippings 1973, January-September 1973	Box 2	Folder 39
News Clippings 1974, September 1974	Box 2	Folder 40
News Clippings 1975, 1975	Box 2	Folder 41

News Clippings 1976, January-September 1976	Box 2	Folder 42
News Clippings 1977, April-November 1977	Box 2	Folder 43
News Clippings 1978, March, September-November 1978	Box 2	Folder 44
News Clippings 1979, April-May, August-November 1979	Box 2	Folder 45
News Clippings 1980, May-August 1980	Box 2	Folder 46
News Clippings 1981, January-November 1981	Box 2	Folder 47
News Clippings 1982, May, September 1982	Box 2	Folder 48
News Clippings 1983, 1983	Box 2	Folder 49
News Clippings 1984, January-November 1984	Box 2	Folder 50
News Clippings 1985, January-December 1985	Box 2	Folder 51
News Clippings 1986, 1986	Box 2	Folder 52
News Clippings 1987, 1987	Box 2	Folder 53
News Clippings 1988, 1988	Box 2	Folder 54
News Clippings 1989, 1989	Box 2	Folder 55
News Clippings 1990, January-December 1990	Box 3	Folder 1
News Clippings 1991, January-December 1991	Box 3	Folder 2
News Clippings 1992, January 1992	Box 3	Folder 3
News Clippings 1993, January-December 1993	Box 3	Folder 4
News Clippings 1994, January-December 1994	Box 3	Folder 5
News Clippings 1995, January-December 1995	Box 3	Folder 6
News Clippings 1996, January-December 1996	Box 3	Folder 7
News Clippings 1997, January-December 1997	Box 3	Folder 8
News Clippings 1998, January-September 1998	Box 3	Folder 9
News Clippings 1999, 1999	Box 3	Folder 10
News Clippings 2000, 2000	Box 3	Folder 11
News Clippings 2001, 2001	Box 3	Folder 12
News Clippings 2002, 2002	Box 3	Folder 13
News Clippings 2003, 2003	Box 3	Folder 14
News Clippings 2004, 2004	Box 3	Folder 15
News Clippings 2005, 2005	Box 3	Folder 16
News Clippings 2006, 2006	Box 3	Folder 17
News Clippings 2007, 2007	Box 3	Folder 18

News Clippings 2008, 2008	Box 3	Folder 19
News Clippings 2009, 2009	Box 3	Folder 20
News Clippings 2010, 2010	Box 3	Folder 21
News Clippings Undated, no date	Box 3	Folder 22
News Clippings 2011, 2011	Box 4	Folder 1
News Clippings 2012, 2012	Box 4	Folder 2
News Clippings 2013, 2013	Box 4	Folder 3
News Clippings 2014, 2014	Box 4	Folder 4
Various News Clippings, 1894-1908	Box 4	Folder 5
News Clippings, Ned Colby's scrapbook, 1940s	Box 49	Box 49
News Clippings, 1930-1945	Box 50	Box 50
News Clippings, 1930-1934	Box 50	object scrapbook
News Clippings, 1933-1945	Box 50	object scrapbook
News Clippings, 1936-1939	Box 51	Box 51
News Clippings, Oct 1936Apr 1937	Box 51	object scrapbook
News Clippings , Oct 1937May 1938	Box 51	object scrapbook
News Clippings, Oct 1938Feb 1939	Box 51	object scrapbook
News Clippings, 1938-1942	Box 52	Box 52
News Clippings, 1938-1941	Box 52	object scrapbook
News Clippings, 1941-1942	Box 52	object scrapbook
News Clippings, originals	Box 41	Box 41

Concert programs, 1884-2010		
Title/Description	Instances	
Concert Programs 1884-1894 copies, 1884-1894	Box 5	Folder 1
Concert Programs 1886-1889, 1886-1889	Box 5	Folder 2
Concert Programs 1890, 1890	Box 5	Folder 3

Concert Programs 1891-1895, 1891-1895	Box 5	Folder 4
1894 Building Dedication, 1894	Box 5	Folder 5
Concert Programs 1896-1900, 1896-1900	Box 5	Folder 6
Concert Programs 1901-1905, 1901-1905	Box 5	Folder 7
Concert Programs 1906-1910, 1906-1910	Box 5	Folder 8
Concert Programs 1911-1915, 1911-1915	Box 5	Folder 9
Concert Programs 1916-1920, 1916-1920	Box 5	Folder 10
Concert Programs 1921-1922, 1921-1922	Box 5	Folder 11
Concert Programs 1923-1925, 1923-1925	Box 5	Folder 12
Concert Programs 1926-1929, 1926-1929	Box 5	Folder 13
Concert Programs 1930-1935, 1930-1935	Box 5	Folder 14
Concert Programs 1936-1939, 1936-1939	Box 5	Folder 15
Concert Programs 1940-1945, 1940-1945	Box 5	Folder 16
Concert Programs 1946-1949, 1946-1949	Box 5	Folder 17
Concert Programs 1950-1955, 1950-1955	Box 5	Folder 18
Concert Programs 1956-1959, 1956-1959	Box 5	Folder 19
Concert Programs 1960, 1960	Box 5	Folder 20
Concert programs 1961, 1961	Box 5	Folder 21
Concert Programs 1962, 1962	Box 5	Folder 22
Concert Programs 1963, 1963	Box 5	Folder 23
Concert Programs 1964, 1964	Box 5	Folder 24
Concert Programs 1965-1969, 1965-1969	Box 6	Folder 1
Concert Programs 1970, 1970	Box 6	Folder 2
Concert programs 1971, 1971	Box 6	Folder 3
Concert Programs 1972, 1972	Box 6	Folder 4
Concert Programs 1973, 1973	Box 6	Folder 5
Concert Programs 1974, 1974	Box 6	Folder 6
Concert Programs 1975, 1975	Box 6	Folder 7
Concert Programs 1976, 1976	Box 6	Folder 8
Concert programs 1977, 1977	Box 6	Folder 9
Concert Programs 1978, 1978	Box 6	Folder 10
Concert Programs 1979, 1979	Box 6	Folder 11

Concert Programs 1980, 1980	Box 6	Folder 12
Concert Programs 1981, 1981	Box 6	Folder 13
Concert Programs 1982, 1982	Box 6	Folder 14
Concert Programs 1983, 1983	Box 6	Folder 15
Concert Programs 1984, 1984	Box 6	Folder 16
Concert Programs 1985, 1985	Box 6	Folder 17
Concert Programs 1986, 1986	Box 6	Folder 18
Concert Programs 1987, 1987	Box 7	Folder 1
Concert Programs 1988, 1988	Box 7	Folder 2
Concert Programs 1989, 1989	Box 7	Folder 3
Concert Programs 1990, 1990	Box 7	Folder 4
Concert Programs 1991, 1991	Box 7	Folder 5
Concert Programs 1992, 1992	Box 7	Folder 6
Concert Programs 1993, 1993	Box 7	Folder 7
Concert Programs 1994, 1994	Box 7	Folder 8
Concert Programs 1995, 1995	Box 7	Folder 9
Concert Programs 1996, 1996	Box 7	Folder 10
Concert Programs 1997, 1997	Box 7	Folder 11
Concert Programs 1998, 1998	Box 7	Folder 12
Concert Programs 1999, 1999	Box 7	Folder 13
Concert programs 2000, 2000	Box 7	Folder 14
Concert Programs 2001, 2001	Box 7	Folder 15
Concert programs 2002, 2002	Box 7	Folder 16
Concert Programs 2003, 2003	Box 7	Folder 17
Concert Programs 2004, 2004	Box 7	Folder 18
Concert Programs 2005, 2005	Box 7	Folder 19
Concert Programs 2006, 2006	Box 8	Folder 1
Concert Programs 2007, 2007	Box 8	Folder 2
Concert Programs 2008, 2008	Box 8	Folder 3
Concert Programs 2009-2010, 2009-2010	Box 8	Folder 4
Concert Programs Undated Programs, no date	Box 8	Folder 5
Artprize 2011, 2011	Box 10	Folder 1

Artprize 2012, 2012	Box 10	Folder 2
Artprize 2013, 2013	Box 10	Folder 3
Chuck Royce birthday party/photographs January 20th, 1999, January 20, 1999	Box 10	Folder 4
Royce luncheon 4/15/09, April 15, 2009	Box 10	Folder 5
VanKuiken luncheon 4/13/10, April 13, 2010	Box 10	Folder 6
2009 Wine tasting auction with Martha's Vineyard, 2009	Box 10	Folder 7
Great Artist auction 2012, 2012	Box 10	Folder 8
Artstrings, 2003-2004	Box 10	Folder 9
Musique de l'Amour 2/14/10, February 14, 2010	Box 10	Folder 10
Auction brochures/promotional materials 2001-2005, 2001-2005	Box 10	Folder 11
Country Sonata photographs 2005-2006, 2005-2006	Box 10	Folder 12
Christmas Tour of Homes, 1974-1994	Box 10	Folder 13
Valentine dinner 1986-1987, 1986-1987	Box 10	Folder 14
Play-A-Thon 1980s, 1980s	Box 10	Folder 15
Art Sale, 1990s?, 1990s?	Box 10	Folder 16
Miscellaneous fundraisers/events promotional materials and brochures	Box 10	Folder 17
Sweet Music Cafe/World Music Cafe brochures, 2001-2008	Box 10	Folder 18
Arts Jam, 2005	Box 10	Folder 19
1988 Symposium - medical problems and the performing arts, 1988	Box 10	Folder 20
Fine Arts Symposium October 16-17, 1986, October 16-17, 1986	Box 10	Folder 21
Friday morning seminars, 1991	Box 10	Folder 22
Youth Choir information/history	Box 10	Folder 23
Youth Choir concert programs 1974-1995, 1974-1995	Box 10	Folder 24
Youth Choir concert programs 1996-2008, 1996-2008	Box 10	Folder 25
Youth Choir news clippings/photographs	Box 10	Folder 26
Youth Choir concert programs undated, undated	Box 10	Folder 27
SCMC Yough Choirs assorted photos	Box 10	Folder 28
Bach Chorale - concert programs/news clippings/photographs, 1998-2005	Box 10	Folder 29
Bach's lunch concert programs 1988-2002, 1988-2002	Box 10	Folder 30
8 piano concert history 1940-2001, 1940-2001	Box 10	Folder 31

8 piano concert programs/news clippings/photos, 1940-2004	Box 10	Folder 32
Classical jazz in a classical setting 1987/1988-1994/1995, 1987-1995	Box 10	Folder 33
Musicians showcase, 1995; 1997	Box 10	Folder 34
St. Cecilia's women's chorus 1940s-1950s committee reports/news clippings/photographs, 1940s-1950s	Box 10	Folder 35
Grand Rapids adult chamber choir - photographs, 1980-1981	Box 10	Folder 36
Beyond the notes/miscellaneous adult education programs 2000-2003, 2000-2003	Box 10	Folder 37
New Horizons concert programs 1999-2009, 1999-2009	Box 10	Folder 38
New Horizons band photographs	Box 10	Folder 39
New Horizons departure	Box 10	Folder 40
SCMC "What is a Symphony?" 1913, 1913	Box 10	Folder 41
SCMC cookbook 1909-1910, 1909-1910	Box 10	Folder 42
SCMC "A Calander for all Seasons"	Box 10	Folder 43

Title/Description	Instances	
Outline of work 1897-1912, 1897-1912	Box 13	Folder 1
Yearbook 1889-1900, 1889-1900	Box 13	Folder 2
Yearbook 1892-1893, 1892-1893	Box 13	Folder 3
Yearbook 1893-1895, 1893-1895	Box 13	Folder 4
Yearbook 1895-1896, 1895-1896	Box 13	Folder 5
Yearbook 1896-1897, 1896-1897	Box 13	Folder 6
Yearbook 1899-1900, 1899-1900	Box 13	Folder 7
Yearbook 1903-1904, 1903-1904	Box 13	Folder 8
Yearbook 1907-1908, 1907-1908	Box 13	Folder 9
Yearbook 1908-1909, 1908-1909	Box 13	Folder 10
Yearbook 1912-1913, 1912-1913	Box 13	Folder 11
Yearbook 1914-1915, 1914-1915	Box 13	Folder 12
Yearbook 1915-1916, 1915-1916	Box 13	Folder 13
Yearbook 1916-1917, 1916-1917	Box 13	Folder 14

Yearbook 1917-1918, 1917-1918	Box 13	Folder 15
Yearbook 1918-1919, 1918-1919	Box 13	Folder 16
Yearbook 1919-1920, 1919-1920	Box 13	Folder 17
Yearbook 1920-1921, 1920-1921	Box 13	Folder 18
Yearbook 1921-1922, 1921-1922	Box 13	Folder 19
Yearbook 1922-1923, 1922-1923	Box 13	Folder 20
Yearbook 1923-1924, 1923-1924	Box 13	Folder 21
Yearbook 1924-1925, 1924-1925	Box 13	Folder 22
Yearbook 1925-1926, 1925-1926	Box 13	Folder 23
Yearbook 1926-1927, 1926-1927	Box 13	Folder 24
Yearbook 1927-1928, 1927-1928	Box 13	Folder 25
Yearbook 1928-1929, 1928-1929	Box 13	Folder 26
Yearbook 1929-1930, 1929-1930	Box 13	Folder 27
Yearbook 1930-1931, 1930-1931	Box 13	Folder 28
Yearbook 1931-1932, 1931-1932	Box 13	Folder 29
Yearbook 1932-1933, 1932-1933	Box 13	Folder 30
Yearbook 1935-1936, 1935-1936	Box 13	Folder 31
Yearbook 1936-1937, 1936-1937	Box 13	Folder 32
Yearbook 1937-1938, 1937-1938	Box 13	Folder 33
Yearbook 1938-1939, 1938-1939	Box 13	Folder 34
Yearbook 1939-1940, 1939-1940	Box 13	Folder 35
Yearbook 1940-1941, 1940-1941	Box 13	Folder 36
Yearbook 1941-1942, 1941-1942	Box 13	Folder 37
Yearbook 1942-1943, 1942-1943	Box 13	Folder 38
Yearbook 1943-1944, 1943-1944	Box 13	Folder 39
Yearbook 1944-1945, 1944-1945	Box 13	Folder 40
Yearbook 1945-1946, 1945-1946	Box 13	Folder 41
Yearbook 1946-1947, 1946-1947	Box 13	Folder 42
Yearbook 1947-1948, 1947-1948	Box 13	Folder 43
Yearbook 1948-1949, 1948-1949	Box 13	Folder 44
Yearbook 1949-1950, 1949-1950	Box 13	Folder 45
Yearbook 1950-1951, 1950-1951	Box 13	Folder 46

Yearbook 1951-1952, 1951-1952	Box 13	Folder 47
Yearbook 1952-1953, 1952-1953	Box 13	Folder 48
Yearbook November 1960, November 1960	Box 13	Folder 49
Yearbook 1961-1962, 1961-1962	Box 13	Folder 50
Yearbook 1962-1963, 1962-1963	Box 13	Folder 51
Yearbook 1963-1964, 1963-1964	Box 13	Folder 52
Yearbook 1964-1965, 1964-1965	Box 13	Folder 53
Yearbook 1965-1966, 1965-1966	Box 13	Folder 54
Yearbook 1966-1967, 1966-1967	Box 13	Folder 55
Yearbook 1967-1968, 1967-1968	Box 13	Folder 56
Yearbook 1968-1969, 1968-1969	Box 13	Folder 57
Yearbook 1969-1970, 1969-1970	Box 13	Folder 58
Yearbook 1970-1971, 1970-1971	Box 13	Folder 59
Yearbook 1971-1972, 1971-1972	Box 13	Folder 60
Yearbook 1972-1973, 1972-1973	Box 13	Folder 61
Yearbook 1973-1974, 1973-1974	Box 13	Folder 62
Yearbook 1974-1975, 1974-1975	Box 13	Folder 63
Yearbook 1975-1976, 1975-1976	Box 13	Folder 64
Yearbook 1976-1977, 1976-1977	Box 13	Folder 65
Yearbook 1977-1978, 1977-1978	Box 13	Folder 66
Yearbook 1978-1979, 1978-1979	Box 13	Folder 67
Yearbook 1979-1980, 1979-1980	Box 13	Folder 68
Yearbook 1980-1981, 1980-1981	Box 13	Folder 69
Yearbook 1981-1982, 1981-1982	Box 13	Folder 70
Yearbook 1982-1983, 1982-1983	Box 13	Folder 71
Yearbook 1983-1984, 1983-1984	Box 13	Folder 72
Yearbook 1984-1985, 1984-1985	Box 13	Folder 73
Yearbook 1985-1986, 1985-1986	Box 14	Folder 1
Yearbook 1986-1987, 1986-1987	Box 14	Folder 2
Yearbook 1987-1988, 1987-1988	Box 14	Folder 3
Yearbook 1988-1989, 1988-1989	Box 14	Folder 4
Yearbook 1989-1990, 1989-1990	Box 14	Folder 5

Yearbook 1990-1991, 1990-1991	Box 14	Folder 6
Yearbook 1992-1993, 1992-1993	Box 14	Folder 7
Yearbook 1993-1994, 1993-1994	Box 14	Folder 8
Yearbook 1994-1995, 1994-1995	Box 14	Folder 9
Yearbook 1995-1996, 1995-1996	Box 14	Folder 10
Yearbook 1996-1997, 1996-1997	Box 14	Folder 11
Yearbook 1997-1998, 1997-1998	Box 14	Folder 12
Yearbook 1999-2000, 1999-2000	Box 14	Folder 13
Yearbook 2000-2001, 2000-2001	Box 14	Folder 14
Yearbook corrections/additions	Box 14	Folder 15
Season program books 1989-1990, 1989-1990	Box 14	Folder 16
Season program books 1990-1991, 1990-1991	Box 14	Folder 17
Season program books 1991-1992, 1992-1992	Box 14	Folder 18
Season program books 1992-1993, 1992-1993	Box 14	Folder 19
Season program books 1993-1994, 1993-1994	Box 14	Folder 20
Promotional materials 1995-1996, 1995-1996	Box 14	Folder 21
Season program books/brochure/promotional materials 1999-2000, 1999-2000	Box 14	Folder 22
Season program books/brochure/promotional materials 2000-2001, 2000-2001	Box 14	Folder 23
Season program books/brochure/promotional materials 2001-2002, 2001-2002	Box 14	Folder 24
Season program books/brochure/promotional materials 2002-2003, 2002-2003	Box 14	Folder 25
Season program books/brochure/promotional materials 2003-2004, 2003-2004	Box 14	Folder 26
Season program books/brochure/promotional materials 2004-2005, 2004-2005	Box 14	Folder 27
Season program books/brochure/promotional materials 2005-2006, 2005-2006	Box 14	Folder 28
Season program books/brochure/promotional materials 2006-2007, 2006-2007	Box 14	Folder 29
Season program books/brochure/promotional materials 2007-2008, 2007-2008	Box 14	Folder 30
Season program books/brochure/promotional materials 2008-2009, 2008-2009	Box 14	Folder 31

Season program books/brochure/promotional materials 2009-2010, 2009-2010	Box 14	Folder 32
Season program books/brochures/promotional materials 2010-2011, 2010-2011	Box 14	Folder 33
Season program books/brochures/promotional materials 2011-2012, 2011-2012	Box 14	Folder 34
Classical series review	Box 14	Folder 35
Jazz series review	Box 14	Folder 36
Lincoln Center at Grand Rapids, 2013-2014	Box 15	Folder 1
Season program books/promotional materials 2012-2013, 2012-2013	Box 15	Folder 2
Jazz series 2012-2013, 2012-2013	Box 15	Folder 3
Holbrook MLive profile 2013, 2013	Box 15	Folder 4
Fresh Folk 2013, 2013	Box 15	Folder 5
Season brochure books/promotional materials 2013-2014, 2013-2014	Box 15	Folder 6

Fitle/Description	Instances	
Past presidents, life members; miscellaneous photographs	Box 9	Folder 1
Iembers group photograph - 1918, 1918	Box 9	Folder 2
Iembership directories 2000-2002, 2000-2002	Box 9	Folder 3
dembership categories and benefits 2001-2003, 2001-2003	Box 9	Folder 4
erforming member qualifications/programs, (Bulk, 1990-2001), 969-2001	Box 9	Folder 5
erforming members over the years - photographs	Box 9	Folder 6
ogram chairmen duties - program, luncheon, tea, membership icludes tea photos)	Box 9	Folder 7
embership awards/events, (Bulk, 2001-2002), 1991-2002	Box 9	Folder 8
iscellaneous membership info, (Bulk, 1991-1995), 1908-1995	Box 9	Folder 9
liscellaneous membership brochures	Box 9	Folder 10
lunteer activities, (Bulk, 2001-2012), 1983-2012	Box 9	Folder 11
CMS affiliate organizations - Schubert Chorus, WMFlute ociety, etc.	Box 9	Folder 12

Symphony connection, 1920-21, 1936	Box 9	Folder 13
Monthly bulletins 1933, 1933	Box 16	Folder 1
Monthly bulletins 1934, 1934	Box 16	Folder 2
Monthly bulletins 1935, 1935	Box 16	Folder 3
Monthly bulletins 1954, 1954	Box 16	Folder 4
Monthly bulletins 1955, 1955	Box 16	Folder 5
Monthly bulletins 1956, 1956	Box 16	Folder 6
Monthly bulletins 1957, 1957	Box 16	Folder 7
Monthly bulletins 1958, 1958	Box 16	Folder 8
Monthly bulletins 1959, 1959	Box 16	Folder 9
Monthly bulletins 1960, 1960	Box 16	Folder 10
Monthly bulletins 1961, 1961	Box 16	Folder 11
Newsy notes (newsletters) 1940-1949, 1940-1949	Box 16	Folder 12
General note		
missing years 1960-1969		
Newsy notes (newsletters) 1950-59, 1950-1959	Box 16	Folder 13
Newsy notes (newsletters) 1970-79, 1970-1979	Box 16	Folder 14
Newsy notes (newsletters) 1980-89, 1980-1989	Box 16	Folder 15
Newsy notes (newsletters) 1990-June 1992, 1990-June 1992	Box 16	Folder 16
Vis-a-Vis newsletters Sept. 1992-1994, September 1992-1994	Box 16	Folder 17
Vis-a-Vis newsletters 1995-1996, 1995-1996	Box 16	Folder 18
Soundings 1997, 1997	Box 16	Folder 19
Soundings 1998, 1998	Box 16	Folder 20
Soundings 1999, 1999	Box 16	Folder 21
Soundings 2000, 2000	Box 16	Folder 22
Soundings 2001, 2001	Box 16	Folder 23
Soundings 2002, 2002	Box 16	Folder 24
Soundings 2003, 2003	Box 16	Folder 25
Soundings 2004-05, 2004-2005	Box 16	Folder 26
Soundings 2005/2006, 2005/2006	Box 16	Folder 27
Soundings 2006-2007, 2006-2007	Box 16	Folder 28
Soundings 2007-2008, 2007-2008	Box 16	Folder 29

Legacy of Music newsletters, October 2009-2010, October 2009-2010	Box 16	Folder 30
E-Newsletters December 2010, December 2010	Box 16	Folder 31
E-Newsletters 2011, 2011	Box 16	Folder 32
E-Newsletters 2012, 2012	Box 16	Folder 33
Annual reports - miscellaneous years, miscellaneous years	Box 16	Folder 34
Annual reports 1991-2009, 1991-2009	Box 16	Folder 35
Presidents' letters 1970s, 1970S	Box 16	Folder 36
Miscellaneous executive reports	Box 16	Folder 37
Outside consultant reports 1980s, 1980s	Box 16	Folder 38
Roy Rollins files 1998-1999, 1998-1999	Box 16	Folder 39
National Federation of Music Clubs biennial May 1909, 1909	Box 16	Folder 40
National Federation founding and history	Box 16	Folder 41
Michigan Federation of Music Clubs 1960s, 1960s	Box 16	Folder 42
SCMC perticipation	Box 16	Folder 43
SCMC general brochures	Box 16	Folder 44
Miscellaneous invitations/brochures/stationary	Box 16	Folder 18
Logo change 2005, 2005	Box 16	Folder 46
Annual fund brochures	Box 16	Folder 47
Donor lists 2011-2012, 2011-2012	Box 16	Folder 48
Miscellaneous development materials	Box 16	Folder 49
A Week at SCMC brochure, undated	Box 16	Folder 50
Maestro Society dinner	Box 16	Folder 51
Endowment campaign materials 2007-2008, 2007-2008	Box 16	Folder 52
Nine original founders, 1883	Box 18	Folder 1
1883 Descriptiong of cornerstone laying, 1883	Box 18	Folder 2
Ella Mathews Pierce 1883-1893, 1883-1893	Box 18	Folder 3
Victoria Belmont (Great granddaughter of Ella M. Pierce), 2005	Box 18	Folder 4
Mrs. Edwin F. Uhl 1892, 1892	Box 18	Folder 5
Grand Rapids Press 1894, 1894	Box 18	Folder 6
Ella Mathews Peirce recap 1908, 1908	Box 18	Folder 7
History 1940s, 1940s	Box 18	Folder 8
YY 1		

	Box 18	Folder 9
Bertha E. Kutcher 1956, 1956	Box 18	Folder 10
History 1960s, 1960s	Box 18	Folder 11
History 1970s, 1970s	Box 18	Folder 12
History 1980s, 1980s	Box 18	Folder 13
"Our Second Hundred Years" 1985, 1985	Box 18	Folder 14
"Second Century Celebration History" 1987, 1987	Box 18	Folder 15
105th anniversary materials 1988, 1988	Box 18	Folder 16
Eloise Johnson 1991, 1991	Box 18	Folder 17
"Sing Me No Sad Songs," a history in one act 1991, 1991	Box 18	Folder 18
History 1990s, 1990s	Box 18	Folder 19
History 2000s, 2000s	Box 18	Folder 20
History 2002, 2002	Box 18	Folder 21
Grand River Valley history 2003, 2003	Box 18	Folder 22
Miscellaneous undated historical info, undated	Box 18	Folder 23
Timelines, date lines, fact sheets	Box 18	Folder 24
1890s financial condition/earliest donors, Henry Ives Cobb original bill, 1890s	Box 18	Folder 25
1893 original mortgage agreement, 1893	Box 18	Folder 26
1883 Constitution, 1883	Box 18	Folder 27
1891 Constitution, 1891	Box 18	Folder 28
Constitutions miscellaneous years	Box 18	Folder 29
Articles of Association/incorporation	Box 18	Folder 30
By-Laws	Box 18	Folder 31
Miscellaneous documents	Box 18	Folder 32
Government honors/proclamations	Box 18	Folder 33
Case statement for fund drive 1899, 1899	Box 18	Folder 34
Restoration 1926, 1926	Box 18	Folder 35
Rebuilding proposal 1948, 1948	Box 18	Folder 36
Restoration history 1967-1985, 1967-1985	Box 18	Folder 37
Parking lot purchase 1970, 1970	Box 18	Folder 38
College park urban renewal project 1960s/1970s, 1960s, 1970s	Box 18	Folder 39
Restoration progress 1970s, 1970s	Box 18	Folder 40

Restoration fund drive 1974-1975, 1974-1975	Box 18	Folder 41
Renovation proposal 1975, 1975	Box 18	Folder 42
Renovation proposals 1979-1981, 1979-1981	Box 18	Folder 43
Second Century campaign 1984-1987, 1984-1987	Box 18	Folder 44
1984-1985 Restoration - second century campaign, 1984-1985	Box 18	Folder 45
"Be a Saint, Help the Saints" campaign 1985-1986, 1985-1986	Box 18	Folder 46
Royce Auditorium 1986, 1986	Box 18	Folder 47
Restoration 1987, 1987	Box 18	Folder 48
Kresge Challenge grant 1987-1988, 1987-1988	Box 18	Folder 49
Fundraising efforts 1988-1990, 1988-1990	Box 18	Folder 50
Restoration design proposals 1996-1999, 1996-1999	Box 18	Folder 51
Opus 2 capital campaign 1996-1998, 1996-1998	Box 18	Folder 52
Opus 2 "Securing our Second Century" restoration 1997-1998, 1997-1998	Box 18	Folder 53
June 1997 Opus 2 campaign event photos, June 1997	Box 18	Folder 54
June 1997 Opus 2 birthday event photos, June 1997	Box 18	Folder 55
Babst-Uhl and Allied Families Genealogical and Biographical, 1944	Box 12	Object 1

Title/Description	Instances	
SOM season catalogs/brochures	Box 19	Folder 1
SOM promotional materials 2008-2013, 2008-2013	Box 19	Folder 2
SOM promotional materials prior to 2008, prior to 2008	Box 19	Folder 3
School of Music newsletters 2005-2009, 2005-2009	Box 19	Folder 4
SOM description - used for grant apps	Box 19	Folder 5
Camps - news clips/promotional materials	Box 19	Folder 6
SOM rock camp brochures	Box 19	Folder 7
SOM Stella Royce piano camp brochures	Box 19	Folder 8
Grand band summer camp	Box 19	Folder 9
SOM string camp brochures	Box 19	Folder 10

SOM champs camp brochures/photos

	Box 19	Folder 11
Adult fiddle camp	Box 19	Folder 12
SOM theory class	Box 19	Folder 13
SOM strings and things brochures	Box 19	Folder 14
SOM alternatives for stings brochures	Box 19	Folder 15
SOM adult classes	Box 19	Folder 16
SOM miscellaneous classes	Box 19	Folder 17
SCMC Youth Ensemble handbook	Box 19	Folder 18
SOM Youth Ensemble concert programs 1974-2012, 1974-2012	Box 19	Folder 19
Youth ensembles - Dave Ellis retires 2004, 2004	Box 19	Folder 20
SCMS - Junior Orchestra photos 1980s, 1980s	Box 19	Folder 21
	Box 19	Folder 21
Youth concert programs 1932-1945, 1932-1945	Box 19	Folder 22
Junior St. Cecilia 1932-1933, 1932-1933	Box 19	Folder 23
SOM adult - grand band/string orchestra promotional materials	Box 20	Folder 1
SOM adult - grand band/string orchestra programs and brochures	Box 20	Folder 2
Strings to school	Box 20	Folder 3
Operatunity brochures	Box 20	Folder 4
SOM junior music club programs	Box 20	Folder 5
SOM junior music clubs info/brochures	Box 20	Folder 6
SOM junior music clubs history and miscellaneous	Box 20	Folder 7
Great Artist program - 1987 Itzhak Perlman, 1987	Box 17	Folder 1
Great Artist program - 1988 James Galway, 1988	Box 17	Folder 2
Great Artist program - 1989 Vladimir Feltsman, 1989	Box 17	Folder 3
Great Artist program - 1990 Marilyn Horne, 1990	Box 17	Folder 4
Great Artist program - 1991 Sherrill Milnes, 1991	Box 17	Folder 5
Great Artist program - 1992 Earl Wild, 1992	Box 17	Folder 6
Great Artist program - 1993 Tony Bennett, 1993	Box 17	Folder 7
Great Artist program - 1994 Isaac Stern, 1994	Box 17	Folder 8
Great Artist program - 1995Wynton Marsalis, 1995	Box 17	Folder 9
Great Artist program/promotional materials 1997 Andre Watts, 1997	Box 17	Folder 10
Great Artist program - 1998 Itzhak Perlmon, 1998	Box 17	Folder 11

Great Artist program - 1999 Victor Borge, 1999	Box 17	Folder 12
Great Artist program - 2000 3 Piano Crossover, 2000	Box 17	Folder 13
Great Artist program - 2002 Denyce Graves, 2002	Box 17	Folder 14
Great Artist program - 2003 Evelyn Glennie, 2003	Box 17	Folder 15
Great Artist program - 2004 Joshua Bell, 2004	Box 17	Folder 16
Great Artist program - 2005 Peter Cincotti, 2005	Box 17	Folder 17
Great Artist program - 2006 Branford Marsalis, 2006	Box 17	Folder 18
Great Artist program - 2007 Emanuel Ax, 2007	Box 17	Folder 19
Great Artist program - 2008 Frederica Von Stade, 2008	Box 17	Folder 20
Great Artist program - Fall 2008 MiDori, Fall 2008	Box 17	Folder 21
Great Artist program - 2009 Ramsey Lewis Trio, 2009	Box 17	Folder 22
Great Artist program - 2010 Michael Feinstein, 2010	Box 17	Folder 23
Great Artist program - 2011 Sarah Chang, 2011	Box 17	Folder 24
Great Artist program - 2012 John Pizzarelli, 2012	Box 17	Folder 25
Great Artist program - 2013 David Sanborn/Bob James, 2013	Box 17	Folder 26
Performers over the years - programs and info	Box 17	Folder 27
Performers over the years - photographs	Box 17	Folder 28
Conrnerstone ceremonies, newspaper accounts and photograph 1893, 1893	Box 17	Folder 29
Building dedication June 19th, 1894, June 19, 1894	Box 17	Folder 30
55th birthday celebration 1938, 1938	Box 17	Folder 31
70th anniversary 1953, 1953	Box 17	Folder 32
75th anniversary program and photos 1958, 1958	Box 17	Folder 33
81st anniversary program 1964, 1964	Box 17	Folder 34
Placement of national historic register program 1972, 1972	Box 17	Folder 35
US Bicentennial celebration activities and photos - 1976, 1976	Box 17	Folder 36
Restoration benefit 1977, 1977	Box 17	Folder 37
100th anniversary events 1983, 1983	Box 17	Folder 38
Second century committee north wall project 1985, 1985	Box 17	Folder 39
Opening of Terryberry Art Gallery 1986, 1986	Box 17	Folder 40
Michigan Sesquicentennial Art Symposium 1986, 1986	Box 17	Folder 41
Royce auditorium dedication 1986, 1986	Box 17	Folder 42
D 11 - 4000 1000		

	Box 17	Folder 43	
Recipient William F. Thrall, award and photos - 1989, 1989	Box 17	Folder 44	
State awards photographs and miscellaneous 1976, 1982, 1976; 1982	Box 17	Folder 45	
St. Cecilia centennial celebration 1993, 1993	Box 17	Folder 46	
Idema room re-dedication 1994, 1994	Box 17	Folder 47	
Eloise Johnson tribute, 1994	Box 17	Folder 48	
Dedication of wheelchair seating 1995 photographs, 1995	Box 17	Folder 49	
Opus 2: securing our 2nd century campaign 1996, 1996	Box 17	Folder 50	
Reopening events 1998, 1998	Box 17	Folder 51	
120th anniversary/celebration 2003, 2003	Box 17	Folder 52	
130th anniversary 2013, 2013	Box 17	Folder 53	

Scrapbooks, 1892-2004

Creator: St. Cecilia Music Center (Grand Rapids, Mich.)

Physical Description: 12 Linear Feet

Box 21	
Box 22	
Box 23	
Box 24	
Box 25	
Box 25	object scrapbook
Box 25	object scrapbook
Box 26	
Box 27	
Box 28	
Box 28	object scrapbook
	Box 22 Box 23 Box 24 Box 25 Box 25 Box 25 Box 25 Box 27 Box 28

Scrapbook/Programs, 1928-1930

	Box 28	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1946-1947	Box 29	
Scrapbook/Programs, 1955-1971	Box 30	
Programs, 1955-1961	Box 30	page programs
Scrapbook, 1967-1971	Box 30	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1961-1962	Box 31	
Scrapbooks/Photo Albums, 1955-1968	Box 32	
Scrapbook, 1955-1958	Box 32	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1958-1962	Box 32	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1964	Box 32	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1962-1964	Box 32	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1965-1966	Box 32	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1966-1967	Box 32	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1967-1968	Box 32	object scrapbook
Scrapbooks , 1964-1979	Box 33	
Scrapbook, Junior Society, 1964	Box 33	Object scrapbook
Scrapbook/photographs, Junior Society, 1964	Box 33	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1974-1975	Box 33	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1975-1976	Box 33	Object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1976-1977	Box 33	Object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1977	Box 33	Object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1978-1979	Box 33	object scrapbook
Scrapbooks/Junior Scrapbooks, 1964-1979	Box 36	

Junior Scrapbook, 1964	Box 36	object scrapbook
Junior Scrapbook, 1965	Box 36	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1974-1979	Box 36	object scrapbook
Scrapbooks, 1972-1983	Box 37	
Scrapbook, September 1972March 1974	Box 37	object scrapbook
Junior Scrapbook, 1973	Box 37	Object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1979-1981	Box 37	Object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1981-1983	Box 37	Object scrapbook
Scrapbooks/programs, 1943-1988	Box 38	
Programs, 1943-1955	Box 38	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1984	Box 38	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1985	Box 38	Object scrapbook
Scrapbook, part I, 1986	Box 38	Object scrapbook
Scrapbook, part II, 1986	Box 38	Object scrapbook
Scrapbook, part II, 1987	Box 38	object scrapbook
Scrapbooks, 1991-1994	Box 39	
Scrapbook, 1991-1992	Box 39	Object scrapbook
Scrapbook, part II, 1992	Box 39	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, part I, 1993	Box 39	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, part II, 1993	Box 39	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, part I, 1994	Box 39	object scrapbook
Scrapbooks, 1994-2004	Box 40	

Scrapbook, part II, 1994	Box 40	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, part I, 1995	Box 40	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 1995-1996	Box 40	object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 2002-2003	Box 40	Object scrapbook
Scrapbook, 2003-2004	Box 40	object scrapbook

Board Minutes, 1885-1952

Creator: St. Cecilia Music Center. (Grand Rapids, Mich.)

Physical Description: 3 Linear Feet

Title/Description	Instances	
Board Minutes, 1892-1894	Box 42	
Board Minutes (x2), 1892-1893	Box 42	volume book
Board Minutes (x2), 1893-1894	Box 42	volume book
Board Minutes, portion (typed), 1892-1893	Box 42	folder X
Board Minutes, 1883-1891	Box 43	
Board Minutes , 1883-1891	Box 43	volume book
Board Minutes, 1885-1890	Box 43	volume book
Board Minutes, 1891	Box 43	volume book
Board Minutes, 1897-1901	Box 44	
Board Minutes (x2), 1897-1898	Box 44	volume book
Board Minutes, 1898-1899	Box 44	volume book
Board Minutes, 1899	Box 44	volume book
Board Minutes (x2), 1899-1900	Box 44	volume book
Board Minutes, 1900-1901	Box 44	volume book
Board Minutes, 1900-1924	Box 45	
Board Minutes, 1900-1901	Box 45	volume book
Board Minutes , 1901	Box 45	volume book
Board Minutes, 1903-1904	Box 45	volume book

Board Minutes, 1904-1906	Box 45	volume book
Board Minutes , 1909-1912	Box 45	volume book
Board Minutes, 1912-1916	Box 45	volume book
Board Minutes , 1916-1921	Box 45	volume book
Board Minutes, 1918-1924	Box 45	volume book
Board Minutes, 1921-1952	Box 46	
Board Minutes, 1921-1927	Box 46	volume book
Board Minutes, 1924-1931	Box 46	volume book
Board Minutes, 1927-1937	Box 46	volume book
Board Minutes, 1937-1946	Box 46	volume book
Board Minutes , 1950-1952	Box 46	volume book
Board Minutes, 1894-1897	Box 47	
Board Minutes, 1894-1895	Box 47	volume book
Board Minutes, 1895-1896	Box 47	volume book
Board Minutes, 1896-1897	Box 47	volume book
Board Minutes, 1895-1897	Box 47	volume book
Board Minutes, 1932-1936	Box 48	
Board Minutes, 1932-1934	Box 48	volume book
Board Minutes, 1934-1936	Box 48	volume book

Miscellaneous Documents

Creator: St. Cecilia Music Center (Grand Rapids, Mich.)

<u>Physical Description</u>: 4 Linear Feet

Title/Description	Instances	
National Federation of Music Clubs Blue Book: Past Presidents, 1927	Box 63	Folder 1
National Federation of Music Clubs. Music Clubs magazine, March-April 1943	Box 63	folder 2
Thank-you events, 2013	Box 63	folder 3
Terryberry Gallery clippings and promotional materials	Box 63	Folder 4
Newsletter, Volunteer Update, 2001-2003	Box 63	frame 5
Chuck Royce obituary, funeral program, 2015	Box 63	folder 6

Centennial graphics, 1993	Box 63	folder 7
Program. "The Oriental Opera 'Egypta'", March 22-24, 1909	Box 63	folder 8
Songbook: Fresh Laurels for Sabbath School, 1867	Box 62	folder 1
Miscellaneous songs/songbooks	Box 62	Folder 2
St. Cecilia Club of Los Angeles, 1950s	Box 62	Folder 3
Malek School of Music calendars , 1915-1918	Box 62	folder 4
Calendar, 1915-1916	Box 62	Folder 4
Calendar, 1916-1917	Box 62	folder 4
Calendar, 1917-1918	Box 62	folder 4
Musicians' directories, various	Box 62	folder 5
Article: "Woman as a Musician: American Feminism in 1876" by Petra Meyer Frasier, 2003	Box 62	folder 6
Photographs/postcard	Box 62	folder 7
Central High School Orchestra	Box 62	folder 7
Messmore Kendall to Frank DuMond	Box 62	folder 7
Information re: Historic Landmark status, State Register of Historic Places, Heritage Hill tours	Box 62	folder 9
Information re: Building architecture and floor plans	Box 62	folder 8
Original music composed by Maria Lund , 1910	Box 62	folder 10
Information on Tiffany Window	Box 62	Folder 11
Interiors. Copies from original lithographs, 1890s	Box 62	Folder 12
Information re: John Philip Sousa; Sousa and Gailey	Box 57	object documents/ images
Abstracts of Title	Box 57	Folder X
Musical Observer magazine, January 1924	Box 57	Folder X
Rainbow Room gifts	Box 55	object book
Guest Book, 1976 Centennial Celebration, 1976	Box 55	object book
Delegates to Biennial, May 1909	Box 55	object book
Resolution/petition to build; subscriptions	Box 53	Folder 1
Mortgage Note	Box 53	Folder 2
Mortgage/tax history	Box 53	Folder 3
Correspondence. Dispute re: Louis Barth property, 1925	Box 53	folder 4
Constitution/Articles of association	Box 53	folder 5

Materials cost list; gift of oriental rug; letter to architect (1901)	Box 53	Folder 6
Information/correspondence re: Beach Project between SCMS and Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council	Box 54	Folder 1
Tour tips; undated program; ticket stubs; Symphonic Society	Box 54	folder 2
The Armory, various programs	Box 54	folder 3
Powers Theater, various programs	Box 54	Folder 4
Schubert Club, various programs	Box 54	folder 5
Other venues, various programs	Box 54	Folder 6
Programs: Detroit Symphony Orchestra & Ossip Gabrilowitsch	Box 54	Folder 7
Invitations: U.B. Association; Nursing School Commencement (1915)	Box 54	folder 8
Letters: to Miss Gertrude Baars/Brars	Box 54	Folder 9
Letter: to Hazel McEachon from War Loan Organization, May 23, 1919	Box 54	Folder 10
Application for Membership Book, 1895-1915	Box 56	
Miscellaneous, 1974-1989	Box 58	
Auditorium restoration proposal , 1975	Box 58	binder proposal
Capital Campaign materials , 1974-1975	Box 58	binder documents
Grant Applications , 1988-1989	Box 58	binder documents
List of Artists Performing at St. Cecilia's	Box 59	
Accounting ledger sheets; Ledgers; Balance books , 1956-1978	Box 60	
Ledger Sheets: artist recitals, assessments, bulletins	Box 60	Folder 1
Ledger Sheets: dues	Box 60	folder 2
Ledger Sheets: furniture & fixtures, fuel, insurance, interest	Box 60	folder 3
Ledger Sheets: luncheons, maintenance, miscellaneous, piano account	Box 60	folder 4
Ledger Sheets: programs, rentals	Box 60	folder 5
Ledger Sheets: St. Cecilia Juniors, St. Cecilia Chorus, St. Cecilia Young Musicians, social committee	Box 60	folder 6
Ledger Sheets: society activities, St. Cecilia stationery, supplies, utilities, wall improvements, Wykes Memorial Fund	Box 60	folder 7
Ledger, April 1956March 1968	Box 60	volume book
Ledger, April 1968May 1978	Box 60	volume book

Ledgers/balance books, 1926-1942	Box 61	
Leagers/varance books, 1920-1942	B0x 01	
Ledger, 1926-1929	Box 61	volume book
Ledger, 1930-1937	Box 61	volume book
Ledger, 1937-1942	Box 61	volume book
Old Membership Cards,1987	Box 34	
	Box 35	

President, Winifred Stiles papers [2019.070], 1946-1948

General

Past St. Cecilia President, Winifred Stiles's papers were donated to St. Cecilia by Tom Stiles, Winifred's grandson. These papers consist of correspondence related to a lease dispute with The Grand Rapids Civic Theatre and renovations of the St. Cecilia building in 1948 to comply with Grand Rapids City fire ordinances. In addition, meeting minutes and legal documents are included.

Title/Description	Instances	
Constitution of the St. Cecilia Society of Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1946-11-08	Box 64	Folder 1
Letter from The Michigan Trust Co. concerning building mortgage, 1946-10-03	Box 64	Folder 2
Notebook containing meeting minutes; includes additional loose notes and correspondence, 1946-10-11-1948-12-01	Box 64	Folder 3
Correspondence , 1947-10-24-1947-11-25	Box 64	Folder 4
Correspondence, 1948-01-14-1948-05-20	Box 64	Folder 5
Correspondence, 1948-07-15-1948-11-22	Box 64	Folder 6
Legal documents, 1946-1948	Box 64	Folder 7

[^] Return to Table of Contents