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# Finding Aid for the First (Park) Congregational Church, United Church of Christ records Collection 512

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Prepared by Rachel Burns

Grand Rapids History Center

Grand Rapids Public Library

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URL: <https://www.grpl.org/research/history/>

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## Table of Contents

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Summary Information .....	3
Biographical / Historical .....	3
Scope and Contents .....	4
Administrative Information .....	5
Related Materials .....	6
Controlled Access Headings .....	6
Collection Inventory .....	6

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	Grand Rapids History Center
<b>Creator:</b>	Park Congregational Church (Grand Rapids, Mich.)
<b>Title:</b>	First (Park) Congregational Church records
<b>ID:</b>	Collection 512
<b>Date [inclusive]:</b>	1839-1940
<b>Physical Description:</b>	3 Linear Feet 6 Boxes
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English .
<b>Abstract:</b>	This collection contains records of the First (Park) Congregational Church, located in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Established in 1836, the First (Park) Congregational Church is one of the earliest churches established in the city. The records include some of the earliest documents preserved by the church and registers of records up to the early 20th century. This collection could be helpful to researchers interested in the history of the church, the volunteer efforts of its members, and information on early Grand Rapids residents.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

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## Biographical / Historical

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The First (Park) Congregational Church was organized on September 18th, 1836. Services were initially held at the home of Myron Hinsdall. The church had 22 original members made up of Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Reverend A.D. McCoy was the first pastor for this group. On March 26th, 1839 the church reorganized as a Congregational polity named the First Congregational Church with Reverend James Ballard serving as pastor. Members held services at many locations in Grand Rapids, before 1841, when they purchased a church built by Louis Campau, a building previously designated for Catholic use.

The First (Park) Congregational Church held services at the Campau church building from 1841 to 1867. In 1867, the building was sold and the construction began on the present day church building. The new church building, located on the east side of Fulton Street Park

was dedicated on November 28th, 1869. The church was now informally referred to as Park Congregational or Park Church due to the location.

Members of the church began creating internal organizations to become involved in missionary work and assisting the community. The Ladies' Aid Society of Kent County formed by members of the church to assist sick and wounded Civil War soldiers as well as to raise funds to support the war effort. In 1865 women of the church organized The Ladies Congregational New Church Society, assisting with fundraising efforts for the church. The earliest recorded missionary efforts of the church began in 1868. In 1873 the Union Benevolent Association was formally organized by several women members of the church who had collaborated with other women from different churches. This association would go on to create a nurse training school and later become Butterworth Hospital with the assistance of Marion L. Withey, one of the original members of the First (Park) Congregational Church.

Major changes occurred to the First (Park) Congregational Church building at the beginning of the twentieth century. From 1904 to 1938 members began donating stain glass windows to be installed, making First (Park) Congregational Church the only church in the Midwest with a full set of Tiffany windows gracing the sanctuary. In 1915, the church added a parish house to the site. Major renovations to the interior of the church started in 1925.

The First (Park) Congregational Church celebrated its centennial from September 13th to 18th, 1936. In 1957 several Evangelical and Reformed churches merged to create the United Church of Christ. Major membership changes occurred when the First (Park) Congregational Church chose to join the United Church of Christ in 1961.

In 1982 the First (Park) Congregational Church building was added to the National Register of Historic Places. 1986 marked the sesquicentennial for church. At this point, the church continued to grow and helped establish ten congregational churches in the greater Grand Rapids Area. In 1988 the church sanctuary was partially destroyed in a fire set by an arsonist.

The First (Park) Congregational Church has continued to support the local area through the 21st century. Park Church has a long history of supporting the community through volunteer and philanthropic efforts. Two of the most recognized of these efforts are the founding of the Santa Claus Girls and Pilgrim Manor. In 2010, the church adapted an Open and Affirming status in support of the LGBTQ community. The First (Park) Congregational Church has also been a venue space for the ArtPrize competition held every year in the city.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

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## Scope and Contents

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This collection contains printed materials such as letters; news clippings; receipts; photographs; and registers related to the First (Park) Congregational Church from 1839 to 1940.

The collection contains a scrapbook of early internal documents and compiled history documents on the church.

The records of the year give a brief description of major events for the years 1856 and 1857 by the clerk and pastors. It also lists the Principles of Church Polity, Rules, and Amendments.

The manual of the First Congregational Church includes a history of the church up to 1858; The Aricles of Faith and Covenant; Rules of the Church; and a listing of members in chronological order from 1836 to 1858.

The register of records documents board meetings; trustee reports; baptisms; deaths; and memberships that occured at the church. There is also a register of records relating specifically to the Ladies' Aid Society.

This collection would be helpful to researchers interested in early protestant church histories in the area. It may also be helpful to genealogists researching members of the church as well.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Statement

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Donated by Fritz Crabb on behalf of the First (Park) Congregational Church, 2016.044, 2018.062, 2021.081, 2022.007, 2022.067

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

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## Related Materials

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### Related Materials

Collection 347: Grand Rapids Public Library Religious and Philosophical Organizations collection. A significant amount of materials relating to First (Park) Congregational Church were donated to the library and processed in this collection.

Collection 96: Western Michigan Genealogical Society Church records

Collection 187: Lorraine Pratt Immen collection

Collection 270: Gathered at the River Project collection

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

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## Controlled Access Headings

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- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- Church history
- Church records and registers -- Michigan
- Park Congregational Church (Grand Rapids, Mich.)--History
- United States--History--Civil War--1861-1865--Women

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## Collection Inventory

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Title/Description	Instances	
Scrapbook of letters and papers of the early church, 1840-1900	Box 1	
Records of the Year; Principles of Church Polity; Rules and Amendments , 1856-1857	Box 2	
Manual of the First Congregational Church, 1858	Box 3	Folder 1
Ladies' Aid Society Record Book, 1863	Box 3	Folder 2
Clerks Records of Park Church, 1868-1890	Box 4	
Register of Records, 1900-1914	Box 5	
Register of Records, 1915-1940	Box 6	