

**West Fairlee Center Congregational Church
Records, 1842-1998
MSA 709**

Introduction

This collection contains some records of the West Fairlee Congregational Society which established the West Fairlee Center Congregational Church in West Fairlee, Vermont, in 1809. The church donated three hand-written books of annual meeting minutes spanning 1842 through 1998 to the Vermont Historical Society on June 11, 2014. The collection is stored in one archival flip top box and consumes .25 linear feet of shelf space.

Agency History

Six residents of the hamlet of West Fairlee Center organized to found the West Fairlee Center Congregational Church in 1809, according to the application the church filed seeking National Historic Register recognition for the current church building. The founders (3 men and 3 women) held religious services at Elmwood Farm, the home of Nathaniel Niles, who was one of the founders of the town of West Fairlee. Niles, educated at Harvard and Princeton, represented Vermont in the U.S. Continental Congress (1791-95) after the state was admitted to the union. He was also a preacher, poet and large landowner. The Vermont Division for Historic Preservation survey form for the church says the church was organized by Rev. Joseph Fuller.

The society's first home, built in 1811, was a two-story, log structure located on a knoll above the site of the current church. By 1854, the congregation was large enough to want a new building. The minutes recount that the congregation settled a disagreement over where to locate the new structure by having those who favored the west side of Middlebrook Road sit on the west side of the old meeting house and those favoring the east sit on the east. The west won, 12-6. The records also note repeatedly that the congregation resorted to cutting timber on the parsonage property to cover expenses. The congregation shrunk in the 20th century with services held only in the summer. The church is currently (2017) used for contemplation, weddings, baptisms, funerals, and secular meetings.

Scope and Content

This collection consists of three record books penned by clerks of the West Fairlee Congregational Society, also known as the West Fairlee Center Church, between 1842 and 1998. The current Greek Revival building, constructed in 1855 and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2002, is located on Middlebrook Road in West Fairlee, Vermont.

The oldest book (1842-1932) in the collection is damaged and missing pages including several pages of the articles of organization or constitution at the beginning. This record contains notices (warnings) of annual meetings and abbreviated minutes that include the names of church officers.

The second record book covers nearly the same time period as the first book (1854-1933), but with more detailed accounts of the actions taken at annual meetings. The account of how parishioners decided whether to build the new church on the east or west side of Middlebrook Road is recorded here. A complete, but undated version of the church constitution is found on the opening pages. There is a record of finances for two years only (1898-99) at the back of the book as well as an undated record of who bought pews and how much they paid.

The final record book, kept in a school composition notebook, reflects the struggles of the church as the congregation begins to shrink. The first entry (1954) suggests the church holds services only during the summer months. And, in 1958 the church inaugurates an early summer bean supper to raise money for expenses. The building, especially the roof and steeple, needed significant repairs in the 1970s. The minutes for 1972 go into detail about the work and cost of materials and note as an addendum that the man hired to fix the steeple, George Bromer of Lisbon, N.H., fell from “a church roof” and died of his injuries. Presumably it was while working on the steeple of another church, not West Fairlee. The back page of this book lists members as of Dec. 31, 1965, and the back cover has two photos from March 4, 1991, when the church joined in a celebration of the state’s 200th anniversary.

The collection also includes nominating papers which placed the church on the National Register of Historic Places in 2002.

Inventory

- MSA 709:01 Partial articles of association, abbreviated annual meeting minutes listing new officers, 1842-1932.
- Missing initial pages.
 - Two pages at the end of the book list expenses in 1841 and 1842.
- 02 Constitution and more detailed minutes, 1854-1933.
- Page 6: List of members and their pledges for the construction of a new meeting house, Feb. 21, 1854.
 - First minutes from Feb. 28, 1854, recount how the congregation picked the location for the new church.
 - Two pages near the back of the record list receipts and expenses for 1898 and note outstanding expenses as of June 3, 1899.
 - Seven pages from the end is an undated list of who bought pews and how much they paid. Three pages from the end of a list of names followed by X marks. The final pages list some names without explanation.
- 03 Minutes, 1954-1998.
- May 3, 1958: Members decide to try a supper as a way to raise money.
 - 1965 minutes note no meeting or church services were held, but the church was painted. Also no minutes for 1967-69.
 - 1972 meetings held May 22, Aug. 17 and Oct. 16 to discuss and take action on required repairs to foundation, roof and steeple. In a post script to the Oct. 16 minutes, Clerk Dorothy Cook writes, “A

note should be added that Mr. (George) Bromer fell from a church roof and died from the injuries. No decisions have been made, as yet, as to the completion of our steeple.”

- Inserted sheets at 1974 list members and associates.
 - Some marriages and deaths noted in minutes for 1979, 1980, 1984 and 1986.
 - Back page lists members as of Dec. 31, 1965.
 - Back cover has two photos, one of Chuck Eaton waiting to ring bell on March 4, 1991, the 200th anniversary of Vermont’s statehood and a second photo of some church members in front of the church on that same date.
 - Loose newspaper clippings.
- 04 Copy of church’s request for designation of the building on the National Historic Register. The request was granted on July 2, 2002. Also a two-page historic sites form for the church that is on file at the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation. Also, “West Fairlee Centre. By an old timer.” (Harold M. Morse).

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March 2017
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