

Bridgewater State University

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**The Margaret Alexander
First Parish Unitarian Church of
East Bridgewater Collection,
1724 - 2002, undated
(MSS-040)**

*Finding Aid Compiled by
Orson Kingsley, February 2020*

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Volume: 1.3 linear feet (4 document boxes), 1 oversized folder, 1 volume

Acquisition: Many of the items in this manuscript group were donated to Bridgewater State University by David Tedesco by way of Margaret Alexander.

Access: Access to this record group is unrestricted.

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Administrative History

The First Parish of East Bridgewater was established on December 14, 1723, and originally named the East Parish of Bridgewater (the town of East Bridgewater was not incorporated until 1823 when it broke away from Bridgewater). The first minister, Reverend John Angier, a Harvard University graduate, was ordained in 1724 and the first meeting house was constructed the same year. In 1754, while Angier was still minister, a second meeting house was constructed

close by to replace the original. Upon completion the original meeting house was removed from the site. In 1767 John Angier's son, Samuel Angier, was ordained as colleague pastor of the East Parish.

Construction on a third meeting house began in 1794 and was completed by 1795. It was constructed on nearly the same location as the previous two. This building was remodeled in 1850 and is still standing today. The original steeple was destroyed by hurricane in 1938 and replaced in 1968. During the 1970s the building's chandelier and Paul Revere Bell were sold.

Rev. Paul John Rich was ordained as minister in 1962 and would remain until 1978. During these years the Church was continually a hot topic in East Bridgewater. Some of these issues included ownership of the town Common, changing the town's name, controversial art exhibits and displays, newly created museums and organizations (five small museum buildings known collectively as the Standish Museums), and a court case centered around Rev. Rich embezzling money from Church funds. Rich was the last minister of the Church and the physical building was relinquished in the early 1980s. Members would continue to meet for some time at other locations.

Scope and Content Note

A large portion of this collection was collected by East Bridgewater native, Margaret Alexander. After her death in 2019 her family transferred the material to a member of the First Parish Unitarian Church of Bridgewater. BSU holds the archive collection of the First Parish of Bridgewater, along with other related collections.

Related collections held by BSU include the [Rev. Paul John Rich III Collection](#), the [Edward Kirby Collection](#) (Rich's lawyer), and the [First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church of Bridgewater Collection](#).

Series Descriptions

Series 1: Church Records/Registers

Series 1 contains 1 ledger with genealogical information including baptisms. Other items include wills and deeds of some Church members, a couple warrants for meetings, directory and membership lists, etc.

Series 2: Church Administration

Series 2 contains by-laws, Parish Committee reports, meeting minutes, notifications of upcoming meetings, correspondence. This also contains building and grounds materials for church property and renovations and national and regional communications, correspondence and notifications.

Series 3: Financials

Series 3 contains information on wills, property, trust funds, and general finances of the First Parish.

Series 4: Publications and Photographs

Series 4 contains a few First Parish annual reports, newsletters (a lot of these are undated, but from the Paul John Rich years), a few orders of service, fundraising endeavors such as cookbooks, and postcards.

Series 5: Ministers

A few ministers are briefly represented in this collection from the 1940s and 1950s, but Paul John Rich III is represented the most in this series.

Series 6: Church Organizations/Societies

Four Church related organizations are represented in this series with the most content deriving from the First Parish Sewing Circle that dates back to 1837.

Series 7: Oversized

The few oversize items are held in flat-file storage, including a 1850 layout of the pews and pew owners of the First Parish.

First Parish East Bridgewater Box and Folder List

Series 1: Church Records/Registers

Vol. 1. "Ecclesiastical Records of the East Parish in Bridgewater." A ledger from the East Bridgewater Unitarian Church that includes admissions, Communion, baptisms, and dismissals from the Church, 1724-1948.

Box 1 Folder

1. Notification from Robert Orr that he is leaving the 1st Congregational Society in East Bridgewater to join the Society of Trinity Church in Bridgewater, Feb. 12, 1828
2. Deed between Isaac Nutter and First Parish for a pew, 1852
3. Warrant for church meeting, Sept. 15, 1937 and April 15, 1947
4. Copper plate wood block of image of demolished First Parish steeple, 1938
5. Directories and membership lists, 1957, 1958, undated
6. Will of Louis E. Allen, 1967
7. Will of Paul John Rich, 1968

8. Land deed from Samuel Fuller to First Parish, 1968
9. Miscellaneous photographs, undated

Series 2: Church Administration

10. First Parish By-laws, adopted 1960
11. First Parish By-laws, adopted 1979
12. First Parish By-laws, undated
13. Condition report of Church building, 1956
14. Report to Parish Committee, 1958-1959
15. Search for minister material, 1958-1959
16. Advertisement for event to First Parish for the "Dedication of its new addition," 1965
17. List of items recovered by First Parish from East Bridgewater Savings Bank vault, 1996
18. First Parish meeting minutes, Jan. 17, 2002
19. "Background Paper on the Building Needs of First Parish," undated

Series 3: Financials

Box 2

Folder

1. Wills and Property involving First Parish, 1924, 1941, 1942
2. Fire insurance document, 1930
3. First Parish financial ledger, 1933-1936
4. Correspondence on the Granville Allen Fund, 1941-1942, 1958
5. Mailings to members asking for donations, 1945, undated
6. Trust Fund Report, 1958
7. Hobart Fund account information, 1961-1964
8. Rowena W. Hobart Fund, 1962, 1963
9. Financial Report, 1963-1964
10. Massachusetts Investors Trust, 1 stock belonging to Paul John Rich III, 1965
11. Capital Gains ledger page, Feb. 15, 1966
12. Trust Fund Report, 1966, 1967

Series 4: Publications

13. First Parish Annual Reports, 1963-1965, 1970
14. First Parish Newsletters, 1947, 1958
15. First Parish Newsletters, 1964, 1967, 1972-1973, 1976
16. First Parish Newsletters, Paul John Rich years, undated
17. Service of Rededication, Sept. 10, 1939
18. Calendars of Service, 1940-1941
19. Order of Services, 1946, undated
20. Cookbook, 1953
21. Cookbook, 1965
22. "The History of East Bridgewater" by Paul John Rich. 34 page reprint, undated
23. Collection of Church related postcards, c. 1900 - 1977

Series 5: Ministers**Box 3****Folder**

1. John W. Quinby
 - a) Sermon, "Going to Church," reprint, original from 1897
2. Leon Converse Fay
 - a) Service of Installation, 1945
3. Paul Edward Lauffer
 - a) Service of Installation, 1949
4. Robert Samuel Lehman
 - a) Service of Ordination, 1959
5. Paul John Rich
 - a) Ordination and Installation material, 1963
6. Paul John Rich, Non-sermon publications
 - a) "The Unitarians and Harvard," from The Unitarian Christian, Oct. 1962
 - b) "The Unitarians and Music," from The Unitarian Christian, Dec. 1961
 - c) "The Theology of Mountaineering," from Harvard Mountaineering, May 1963
 - d) "The Interpreters of Life," from the Journal of the Liberal Ministry, undated
 - e) "Prayers," undated
 - f) "Special Responsive Reading for Sunday," Dec. 17, 1967
 - g) "Important Dates in Unitarian History," undated
7. Paul John Rich Sermons
 - a) "Who are the Swedenborgians," undated
 - b) "The Next and Last War," undated
 - c) "Lyndon Johnson's Ugly War," 1968
 - d) List of sermons for 1962-1963
 - e) List of sermons for 1964-1969
 - f) "An Answer for Jeremiah: A Sermon on Cultural Anarchy," 1960
8. Paul John Rich publications related to East Bridgewater
 - a) "Your Guide to the Standish Museums and Unitarian Church in East Bridgewater, Massachusetts," 1973
 - b) "East Bridgewater's Scouting Museum...A Survey of the First Year," 1973
 - c) "A Very Special Place," undated
9. Paul John Rich and Mrs. Whitmore correspondence, 1963-1964
10. Paul John Rich, miscellaneous correspondence and material, 1962-1970, undated
11. Paul John Rich, material on the "New England Academy" Rich tried to create in East Bridgewater, 1973-1977
12. Paul John Rich, news clippings of court case and more, 1968-1978
13. Scrapbook created by Dorothy Mann documenting Paul John Rich's court trial, 1977-1979

Series 6: Church Organizations/Societies**Box 4****Folder**

1. Unity Club of the First Parish of East Bridgewater ledger containing constitution and meeting minutes, 1892-1900
2. Woman's Alliance pamphlet of events and members, 1917-1918, 1926-1927
3. Young People's Religious Union ledger containing meeting minutes and financial information, 1935-1946
4. Young People's Religious Union financial book, 1938-1939
5. Young People's Religious Union miscellaneous material, 1940-1945
6. First Parish Sewing Circle 100th anniversary pamphlet, 1937
7. First Parish Sewing Circle meeting minutes, 1937-1962
8. First Parish Sewing Circle by-laws and membership list, undated
9. First Parish Sewing Circle "Anecdotes from First Parish History," collected by Laura Alexander, undated

Series 7: Oversized

- Layout of First Parish pews and pew owners, 1850
- Drawing of Church in pencil, undated
- Parish house kitchen design, 1956