

The Congregationalists

~ Chronology, before 1900 ~

- 1616 The Congregational Church was formed in London, England.
- 1617 By a petition to King James, the Pilgrims of Leyden sought permission to settle in America.
- 1620 The Pilgrims left Leyden in July, then sailed from Plymouth, England, in September. They landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts on December 11.
- 1629 Emigrants from England to Salem, Massachusetts, arrived in six vessels and formed the Second Congregational Church there.
- 1637 At Cambridge, the first General Synod of New England was convened by the General Court.
- 1640 Between 1630 and 1640, 20,000 Puritans came to Massachusetts Bay. Inevitably, the "Bay People" who came directly from England and the "Plymouth People" from the Netherlands settlement joined forces and established an all-powerful theocratic style of government.
- 1734 In New England, a period of religious revival began, to become known as "The Great Awakening." Jonathan Edwards of Northampton played a leading role.
- 1776 During the Revolutionary War, the Congregational clergy generally sided with the patriots.
- 1808 The first Congregational Theological Seminary opened at Andover, Massachusetts.
- 1833 In colonial days, the Congregational religion had been the state religion in New England. Years after the Revolution ended, Massachusetts revoked its charter of colonial times, which ended state religion in New England.

The Congregational Churches merged with three other groups to become the **United Church of Christ**. The Christian Church and the Congregational Churches merged in 1931 to become Congregational Christian Churches. Then in 1957 they were joined by the merged Evangelical and Reformed churches. The union was complete with the adoption of a constitution at Philadelphia in 1961.

~ Records, Resources ~

Because of the mergers, schisms, and other historical developments, there are at least three denominations which contain former Congregational churches: Congregational Christian Churches (National Association), Unitarian Universalist Association, and United Church of Christ. Their archives may include old Congregational church records.

The basis of Congregationalist doctrine was a covenant or contract between God and a specific congregation, setting out the congregation's obligations to God. Each congregation policed itself; they did not recognize a higher judicial court.

Genealogists find Congregationalist records to be particularly useful. Since this church was for so long the state religion in New England, there are many early records to be found, dating back to the earliest settlements there. There is a large collection of newspapers, local magazines, and a major collection of Congregational records from that area. Many of these records have been published or microfilmed and can be found in libraries.

The types of records kept included births, marriages, and deaths and also the minutes of their meetings.

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~ Bibliography ~

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