



UU Studies Network

Circle of Congregational Historians & Archivists

Welcome Packet & Resource Guide for Archival Research (Updated June 2021)

A Warm Welcome

The **Circle of Congregational Historians and Archivists (the Circle)** is a project of the **Unitarian Universalist Studies Network (the Network)**, a *new organization* created through the 2021 merger of the UU History and Heritage Society and the UU Collegium.



The Network is a **mutually supportive collective** of academic and independent scholars, lay leaders, religious professionals, and students **who aim to cultivate deeper engagement** with Unitarian Universalist historical, theological, and ethical knowledge and practices as well as their intersections and interplay.

ENCOUNTERING OUR HISTORIES

Before turning to learn more about the Circle, we ask you to find a Chalice, light it, and take a moment to connect with your breath. As you breath in, and out, and ground yourself in the space you are in, we invite you to ask:

When did I first become aware of my congregation's history?

Of the way those narratives are still present in my congregation today?

A living tradition.

When was the first time I became aware of the history of my own life?

Of that of my ancestors?

A living history.

And where might these meet?



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THE WORK OF THE CIRCLE

As Unitarian Universalists, our histories are what often inform our present; we grapple with what to include in the narratives we tell, the records we keep.

The larger hope of the UU Studies Network through the Circle is to **foster a renaissance of congregational histories and a renewed commitment to archival work** that is *deeply attentive* both to the historic presence of marginalized communities within Unitarian Universalism and to the complex ways that our movement has both perpetuated and resisted structures of oppression and marginalization.

To achieve this vision, **we need as large and diverse a team of truth-tellers as possible**, historians and archivists alike. We are building upon the work of Barbara Coeyman, the MidAmerica Region and others, who have been collecting information about congregational histories and archives for the past decade.

ENTERING THE CIRCLE

All of our congregations have histories that have been written and stories that are still waiting to be told. Our Circle is compiling information about both.

You will find here an embedded link to a [blank template of the Chart of Congregational Histories and Archives](#). You may use this tool to compile information for your congregation, as well as any other, which we will then incorporate into what will eventually be a comprehensive index of histories and archival resources. We are happy to answer any questions you may have as you enter information.

Below, you will also find a model row and more information on archival work with regards to formatting questions and the like. Later in this packet, in the Resource



UU Studies Network

Circle of Congregational Historians & Archivists

Welcome Packet & Resource Guide for Archival Research (Updated June 2021)

Guide for Archival Research, you will find more information about how to locate histories and archives for your congregation.

SAMPLE CONGREGATIONAL CHART

City and State	Name, Address, Website, and email of Congregation	Is the Congregation active? (Y/N)	Information on Online, Published, or Other Histories	Information on Archives	Contact Information for Historian/Archivist	Will the historian/archivist join the Circle of Congregational Historians and Archivists? (Y/N)
ME: Kennebunk	First Parish UU Church 114 Main Street Kennebunk ME 04043 www.uukennebunk.org uukennebunkoffice@gmail.com	Y	Extensive historical webpage with multiple links at https://www.uukennebunk.org/p/our-community-has-history	Records, 1936-1946, at Andover Harvard Theological Library, bMS 0025 Records and a sermon by Charles Carroll Vinal are available via the Andover Harvard database, https://guides.library.harvard.edu/hds/uu-congregations/me-md	<i>Pending</i>	<i>Pending</i>

GROWING THE CIRCLE

Once you've entered information about your own congregation's history and archives, we hope you will help expand our circle by reaching out to people like yourself at other congregations. Specifically, we hope that you might be willing to **contact five other congregations**, identify a potential circle member in each one, and collect information about previously written congregational histories (short or long, published, unpublished, or web-based) and about archives (scanned, unscanned, boxed, loose) that could be used for future histories.

If you, or others you know, are able to take this on, please reach out (Contact Information below) so we can **confirm the potential list of congregations**, to ensure that we don't duplicate work that is already being completed. We would love to expand the number of Congregational histories and archives, and welcome contacts in other states as well.



UU Studies Network

Circle of Congregational Historians & Archivists

Welcome Packet & Resource Guide for Archival Research (Updated June 2021)

THE CIRCLE CONTINUES

To ensure the future success of our Circle, consider joining the UU Studies Network itself. (Please note that until the merger is complete, the way to join the Network is by joining the UU History and Heritage Society.)

Your membership supports all the Network's programs, and gives you a subscription to the *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* and to our electronic newsletter.

Membership in the UU Studies Network is not required of participants in the Circle, but we hope you will consider joining!

CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information, email Dan McKanan, Ralph Waldo Emerson Unitarian Universalist Association Senior Lecturer in Divinity at Harvard Divinity School and UU Studies Network Board Member at dmckanan@hds.harvard.edu, and Cassandra Montenegro, Graduate Research Assistant to Prof. Dan McKanan and Coordinator of the UU Studies Network Circle of Congregational Historians and Archivists at cmontenegro@hds.harvard.edu.

GRATITUDE

We are truly grateful for your interest in learning more about our ever-growing Circle of Congregational Historians and Archivists, Unitarian Universalists who are committed to truth-telling.

Please feel free to forward this Welcome Packet to others at your congregation and within your larger circle as the spirit moves you!



UU Studies Network

Circle of Congregational Historians & Archivists

Welcome Packet & Resource Guide for Archival Research (Updated June 2021)

Resource Guide for Archival Research

WHAT ARE ARCHIVAL MATERIALS?

According to Jessica Suárez, Curator of Manuscripts and Archives at Harvard Divinity School and Andover-Harvard Theological Library, archives are mostly *unique, original materials* pertaining to an institution or person. In terms of congregational archives, one can think of them as consisting of everything from the Orders of Service, Committee Meeting minutes, Ministers' output; photos of events, people, and objects (these are a huge plus!); a church's involvement with General Assemblies; in sum, it's the records that are created in the running of a congregation. Archival collections can also include printed or photocopied works.

HOW MIGHT I SEARCH CONGREGATIONAL HISTORIES & ARCHIVES?

The most important archival resources for studying UU congregations are held at the Andover Harvard Theological Library and at Meadville Lombard Theological School's Wiggin Library. These resources include:

Unitarian Universalist Congregational Records - These are records collected by individual congregations and deposited at Harvard. Some are quite extensive! Keep in mind that some congregations choose a different archive or retain their records on site.

UUA Congregational Resource Files & UUA Congregational Records - These are records about congregations, as collected by the Unitarian Universalist Association. Files collected during the early years of the UUA were transferred to Harvard; those from the later years were transferred to Meadville Lombard when UUA headquarters relocated. For a complete picture of the UUA's interaction with a congregation, you need to consult both the files held at Harvard and the files held at Meadville Lombard.



UU Studies Network

Circle of Congregational Historians & Archivists

Welcome Packet & Resource Guide for Archival Research (Updated June 2021)

[Archives and Special Collections at Meadville Lombard](#) - This is an overview of relevant archival holdings at Meadville Lombard.

[Online Congregational Histories Compiled by the MidAmerica Region's History and Heritage Committee](#) - The MidAmerica Region's History and Heritage Committee has compiled this listing of web-based congregational histories produced in their region. As part of the Circle, we are hoping to add the archival component.

[Unitarian Universalist Congregations: Open Access Sources for Historians of the Unitarian Universalist Tradition](#) - Gloria Korsman has compiled this resource listing many primary sources related to Unitarian Universalist congregations that are freely available on the internet.

You can also do some general searches that may turn up material in other collections. For example, Harvard has a searchable master list of collections on their [AHTL website](#), but there's also a Harvard-wide source for searching only archival material, [HOLLIS for Archival Discovery](#). There's often overlap between the two, but it's recommended that one searches both to be as thorough as possible. For example, here are some of finding aids for First Parish in Cambridge: [First Parish \(Cambridge, Mass.\). Records, 1658-1993.](#); [First Parish \(Cambridge, Mass.\). Records, 1804-2010.](#); and, [First Parish \(Cambridge, Mass.\). Records, 1834-1912.](#) If you have any trouble navigating these finding aids, we recommend you click the "View PDF" button in the top right of the screen. That will download a full finding aid that's easy to search using Ctrl+F and also contains links to any digitized material in the collection.

For additional archival collections outside of Harvard and Meadville-Lombard, [ArchiveGrid](#) is excellent.

If you hit any stumbling blocks in your search for archival material, please don't hesitate to reach out.



UU Studies Network

Circle of Congregational Historians & Archivists

Welcome Packet & Resource Guide for Archival Research (Updated June 2021)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON RESOURCES AT ANDOVER-HARVARD

As mentioned
above,
Andover-Harvard
Theological
Library has a



HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL Andover-Harvard Theological Library

strong collection of [Unitarian Universalist Congregational Records](#) (free access). (Please note that the first item in the listing, “Unitarian Universalist Congregational Resource Files,” contains records of individual congregations maintained by the UUA. The subsequent listings related to records of individual congregations as maintained by the congregations themselves.)

To find information about a congregation’s collection at Harvard, be sure to use the [search box on this Manuscripts and Archives page](#) (free access) and also [HOLLIS for Archival Discovery](#) (free access). Why two searches? The library is slowly migrating finding aids from our website to HOLLIS for Archival Discovery. At this point, the transfer is incomplete.

Gloria Korsman, Associate Librarian for Research Services at Andover-Harvard Theological Library and Harvard Divinity School, has compiled this resource listing many primary sources related to Unitarian Universalist congregations that are freely available on the internet: [Unitarian Universalist Congregations: Open Access Sources for Historians of the Unitarian Universalist Tradition](#) (free access). Please feel free to send Gloria links to any additional open access sources you discover while doing this work.

These are other potentially helpful resources available through Harvard’s website to Harvard affiliates; they can also be found at many other libraries worldwide:

[WorldCat](#) (Harvard Login) searches thousands of libraries worldwide. Use the congregation’s name(s) in your author and subject searches. There is also a [free version of WorldCat](#).

[Atla Religion Database](#) (Harvard Login) will locate congregational histories published in religious studies journals.



UU Studies Network

Circle of Congregational Historians & Archivists

Welcome Packet & Resource Guide for Archival Research (Updated June 2021)

[America: History and Life](#) (Harvard Login) will locate congregational histories published in historical journals.

[ProQuest Dissertations & Theses](#) (Harvard Login) is a database of papers written for advanced degrees, mostly Ph.D., but also some D.Min papers. Search here by the congregation's name. If you find a paper that examines that congregation's history, you might cite it in your chart, but also examine the bibliography at the end of the paper. The bibliography may lead you to additional sources.

Concerning newspapers, colleagues at the Harvard Kennedy School created a [very useful guide to news sources](#) that the library provides. For current news, use “news aggregators” at the top of the page. For historical news, scroll down the page to find databases. Products like [Proquest Historical Newspapers Online](#) (Harvard Login) will give you a glimpse of [how your congregation showed up in the news over time](#) (Harvard Login).

Use [ArchiveGrid](#) (free access) to find congregational records held in archives, libraries, museums and historical societies beyond Harvard.

[Digital Public Library of America](#) (free access) provides access to digitized materials from libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural institutions across the country. Both Harvard and Meadville Lombard contribute content.

Feel free to email Harvard's [Ask a Librarian](#) for any questions you might have.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON RESOURCES AT MEADVILLE LOMBARD

The [Wiggin Library](#) at Meadville Lombard exhaustively collects all English language published material related to Unitarians, Universalists, and Unitarian Universalists. In addition, Meadville





UU Studies Network

Circle of Congregational Historians & Archivists

Welcome Packet & Resource Guide for Archival Research (Updated June 2021)

Lombard also collects material related to the Radical Reformation and global Unitarianism. Included within Wiggin Library are many published congregational histories and biographies, and memoirs of Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist ministers. All UU's have community library privileges with Meadville Lombard, and we can mail most books directly to patrons anywhere in the United States. To become a patron of the Wiggin Library, simply submit a [library account request form](#).

In addition to published material, Meadville Lombard also holds extensive archival material. The [Meadville Lombard Archives and Special Collections](#) holds over 400 archival collections, with topics spanning from Puritanism to Paganism. Meadville's archives have primary emphases in liberal religion in the west, twentieth-century Unitarian Universalism, and communities underserved and excluded from traditional archives. The most popular archival collection held at Meadville Lombard is the [UUA Congregational Records](#). The UUA Congregational Records contain a file about every single UUA congregation that existed during the twentieth century. Most files contain dozens of pages, with some larger congregational files numbering hundreds of pages. Documents within these files include field reports from regions, districts, and the national office; congregational histories; photographs; correspondence between the congregation and the UUA; paperwork filed to the UUA; sermons and orders of service; and other printed ephemera.

In addition to physical archives, Meadville Lombard has a growing collection of [digitized archival materials](#). Drawing mainly from the Meadville Lombard Special Collections, over 40,000+ pages of material has been digitized and described by archivists at Meadville Lombard Theological School. This material is freely accessible and full-text searchable.

To assist researchers, Meadville Lombard has created a specific guide dedicated to researching [Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist Individuals and Congregations](#). While some resources are only available to current students and



UU Studies Network

Circle of Congregational Historians & Archivists

Welcome Packet & Resource Guide for Archival Research (Updated June 2021)

researchers on campus at Meadville Lombard, most are free and accessible to community patrons anywhere in the world.

Meadville Lombard has two full-time theological librarians available to assist you in checking out books from Wiggin Library, using archival collections, and developing research strategies for congregational histories, personal projects, or just to indulge your curiosity! To get started, email library@meadville.edu.