

Niles District records

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Table of Contents

<u>Summary Information</u>	3
<u>Biographical/Historical note</u>	4
<u>Scope and Contents note</u>	5
<u>Administrative Information</u>	5
<u>Collection Inventory</u>	6

Summary Information

Repository	Albion College Archives and Special Collections
Title	Niles District records
Date [inclusive]	1863-1938
Extent	0.5 Linear feet
Language	English

Language of Materials note The material is in English.

Preferred Citation note

[Item], [Folder], [Box], [Collection Number and Title], Archives and Special Collections, Stockwell-Mudd Library, Albion College. Albion, MI.

Biographical/Historical note

The **Niles Methodist Episcopal Church** was established in 1832 and was renamed the Wesley United Methodist Church in 1968. The church remains active as of 2014 as a part of the Kalamazoo District.

The origins of Methodism in Niles, Michigan are traceable as far back as 1829 when the Presiding Elder of the Detroit District visited the Niles settlement to preach to the residents. It was in the following year when the Ohio Conference established the St. Joseph mission. The purpose of this mission was to tend to the religious needs of the settlers in the area west of Detroit. Circuit Riders began to visit Niles from 1830 onward to preach. The record defines a circuit rider as any level of Methodist clergymen, who would sometimes be fully ordained or who had achieved little education. A local family in Niles would form a class in 1832, which would later develop into the Methodist Episcopal Church of Niles. The class first conducted meetings in someone's private home. Meetings were later moved to the new schoolhouse in the fall of 1832. The schoolhouse would remain an active meeting place until 1839. Besides the Methodists, the schoolhouse also used by local Episcopalians and Presbyterians. It was determined in 1836 that sufficient resources were present to build a church. Construction began in 1837 and would measure 40 feet by 45 feet and cost \$2,500 when completed. The church was dedicated on Christmas Day of 1839. This was the time when the church was transferred to the Kalamazoo district of the Michigan Conference in 1840 with 99 members. The church would transfer to the Niles District in 1860.

Sunday Schools were of great importance to the Niles Methodists. From 1831 to 1842 the first Sunday School of seven students expanded to include two superintendents, twelve teachers, one librarian, and a 151 volumes in the library.

The Official Board of the Church resolved in 1848 to rent the slip pews as a means to raise money. This was in violation of the Methodist discipline to rent seats. In 1852 the General Conference issued a mandate stating churches must have free seats "whenever practical".

Niles finally received its own parsonage in 1882 after all of the other churches in the district received theirs. There was new demand for a church in 1858 and the next few years were spent procuring land and planning construction. The old church was torn down in 1862 with the new one dedicated a year later. Measuring at 46 feet by 70 feet, the new building was larger and built out of brick and Joilet stone. The building also featured stained glass windows. The capacity for the building was 400 persons. An oddity with this new church was its close proximity to downtown. It was more common at the time to build a church in the outskirts of a community.

Renovations were made to the church building in 1976-1977. The renovations included additions to the administrative and educational facilities, a new entrance, and improved acoustics in the sanctuary. The new acoustic properties of the building made the church popular with school choral groups.

Celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the Niles Wesley Church were held in September of 1982. The church was named an official historical landmark by the state of Michigan in the following October.

Scope and Contents note

The **Niles District records** consist of conference meeting minutes, trustees meeting minutes, women's foreign missionary society minutes, a treasurer ledger, and annual reports dating from 1863-1938.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Albion College Archives and Special Collections 2013 August 16

Conditions Governing Access note

This collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use note

The literary rights to this collection are assumed to rest with the person(s) responsible for the production of the particular items within the collection, or with their heirs or assigns. Researchers bear full legal responsibility for acquisition to publish from any part of said collection per Title 17, United States Code. The Albion College Archives and Special Collections Department may reserve the right to intervene as intermediary at its own discretion.

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Source of acquisition unknown.

Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
Conference meeting minutes 1875-1890	1	1
Trustees Meeting minutes 1875-1908	2	1-2
Women's Foreign Missionary Society minutes 1907-1938	2	3
Treasurer ledger 1879-1902	2	4
Annual reports 1863-1890	2	5-6