

Cambridge Social Union / Cambridge Center for Adult Education Collection
Finding Aid

Cambridge Historical Commission
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Acquisition Date: May 1998

Languages: English

Historical Sketch

William W. Vaughan and a group of like-minded citizens founded the Cambridge Social Union (CSU) in 1871. In the beginning it had a piano for musical entertainment, a lending library and reading room. Soon literacy and other classes were started, mostly taught by Harvard College students, as well as a Boys Club started by Anne W. Abbot. The CSU was incorporated in 1876, and that same year moved to 15 Brattle St. In 1889 the CSU again moved, to the William Brattle House at 42 Brattle St. During World War I the CSU suffered a decline in gifts and contributions as well as in services offered. In 1937 a feasibility study was conducted, and as a result in 1938 the CSU and the Boston Center for Adult Education started the Cambridge Center for Adult Education (CCAЕ), which offered evening courses. In 1941 the CCAЕ became an independently administered institution and Lydia Weare was made the Director. The CCAЕ almost closed in 1942 due to a lack of enrollment, but persevered another year and was quite successful throughout World War II. In 1948 Brattle Hall was sold in order to concentrate on developing the CCAЕ's educational facilities, and in 1972 the CCAЕ bought the Blacksmith House at 56 Brattle St. and the Dexter Pratt House at 1 Story St. from the Window Shop. As part of the sale, the CCAЕ agreed to keep the Window Shop bakery and its employees until they all retired. The CCAЕ is a non-profit organization that offers classes for adults ranging from cooking to foreign languages to computer programming and software.

Scope and Content

The collection includes the annual reports of the CSU from 1875-1916, CSU by-laws, records of meetings and members 1870s-1890s, business correspondence, program information, financial records, records of library accessions, two scrapbooks that contain mostly newspaper clippings, a sonnet by John Lothrop Motley, and a framed

reproduction of a portrait of General William Brattle. This collection documents the early history and changes over time of an important and long standing Cambridge institution.

Box List

Box 1 of 6 / annual reports

- This box contains multiple copies of annual reports from 1875 through 1916. It also contains responses to an invitation to meet the subscribers to the building fund at Brattle Hall (42 Brattle St.) and two copies of the invitation.

Box 2 of 6 / annual reports (contd)

- This box contains multiple copies of annual reports from 1875 through 1916.

Box 3 of 6 / records of meetings and members, 1870s-1890s

- Cambridge Social Union by-laws
- Records of meetings 1871-1873
- Records of members 1870s-1891 (bound volume)
- Records [of meetings?] 1871-1894 (bound volume)
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Box 4 of 6 / correspondence and program info.

Folder titles:

- (untitled) contains Brattle House info., newspaper clippings, and duplicate copy of John Lothrop Motley sonnet.
- Sonnet by John Lothrop Motley, 1831
- (untitled) contains notebook titled Pottery II, Jaqui Thornell
- CSU: correspondence, 1940s
- CSU, corporate correspondence, 1920s
- CSU- corporate correspondence, 1930s
- CCAE News Release "Cambridge Center for Adult Education Celebrates Centennial of service to Adult Education" 1971
- Cambridge Social Union Report of a Study of the CSU, December 1937
- Miscellaneous correspondence, 1904-1919
- Better Brattle House Fund, post-fire insurance info., etc. 1955
- Cambridge Social Union: miscellaneous correspondence
- Miscellaneous program information

Box 5 of 6 / ledgers

Item labels:

- Records of library accessions, dates unknown (bound volume)
- Expenditures, 1921-1928 (bound volume)
- Charles River Trust Co., three deposit slip books, one book for interest paid on deposits

Box 6 of 6 / scrapbooks

- Two bound scrapbooks with mainly newspaper clippings

Unboxed single item:

- "Reproduction of General William Brattle portrait (framed)."

Provenance

James Smith, Executive Director of the Cambridge Adult Education Center, loaned part of the collection to the Cambridge Historical Commission in May 1998 and additional material in January 1999.

Related Sources

Cambridge Historical Commission. "Cambridge Center for Adult Education" folder, filed under "Clubs, Churches, Associations."

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