
Congregational Union of South Australia
(formerly The Congregational Union and Home Mission of SA)
History and records

SRG 95

Brief history of the Congregational Church in South Australia

The first Congregational church in South Australia was founded by the Reverend Thomas Quinton Stow at a service held in a tent on the banks of the River Torrens on 19 December 1837. The first temporary church building was erected on North Terrace the following year, and in November 1840 a chapel was completed in Freeman Street.

A *Congregational Union*, to be formed from independent congregations in order to 'discharge obligations which cannot be adequately fulfilled by local fellowships as such', was proposed at a meeting at Hindmarsh on 4 October 1849. The constitution and rules were decided upon at a subsequent meeting at Freeman Street chapel on 30 January 1850 with the general object of the society being 'the promotion of union, sympathy, co-operation, and the improvement, and the advancement of the body, without in any case assuming legislative authority, becoming a court of appeal, or attempting anything that shall compromise the perfect independence of the Churches'.

This Congregational Union was a separate organisation to the *Home Mission* which had been established some months earlier. It was not until 1866 that the two united to form the *Congregational Union and Home Mission of South Australia*. In 1955 the words 'and Home Mission' were dropped from the title.

Under a benefaction by the Hon. W. Parkin, Parkin Congregational Mission was incorporated in 1883, to pay annuities to selected widows of ministers, and to provide and pay the stipends of missionaries of the Congregational denominations. Under this benefaction missionary work was able to be undertaken in the more remote districts of the colony. Parkin had already, in 1877, founded a Trust with the principle object of educating and maintaining students for the ministry of Congregational or Independent Churches. Parkin Congregational College was established in 1910 under the trust to further this aim.

Between 1965 and 1976 the Congregational Union set up a number of united churches (U.C.) and parishes (U.P.) in conjunction with the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. This can be seen as a prelude to the more formal establishment of the Uniting Church in 1975.

The interim period was directed by the Joint Advisory Committee (J.A.C.) and involved all three church groups. Only those churches which were essentially Congregational are included in the record group SRG 95. When studying the interim period, researchers may need to consult records relating to other denominations as well. A useful list of Churches and United Parishes with year of closure, name changes and year of formation of united parishes is linked to the SRG 95 provenance record.

With the establishment of the Uniting Church in 1977 the Congregational Union ceased to exist. Records after this date will be found in SRG 198 - the Uniting Church.

The records

The records of the Congregational Union of South Australia were held for many years at Parkin College, Kent Town, and were transferred to the South Australian Archives when the College moved to new premises. These records are now held in the State Library of South Australia Archival Collection. The records comprise general administrative and financial records; the records of the Parkin Trust, Parkin College and Parkin Mission and of other district associations; official and other publications; personal papers of individual ministers and church members; and the records of particular churches. There are also records relating to the work of the London Missionary Society, pictorial records (photographs, lantern slides, printers' blocks) and various printed items, official and unofficial. Of particular historical interest are the subject files, apparently compiled by the late Hon. Archivist (Rev. J. R. Digance) (see SRG 95/5/6), which contain much early correspondence relating to the ministry, prominent lay persons and the establishment of individual churches. The diaries of the Rev. F. J. Cox, the manuscript sermons of the Rev. Dr. E. S. Kiek and the historical notes compiled by the Rev. L. Robjohns contribute further to an understanding of the history of Congregationalism in South Australia.

References:

F. W. Cox and L. Robjohns Three-Quarters of a Century, Adelaide, Vardon and Sons, 1912.

J. W. Digance Congregationalism in South Australia, unpublished thesis, n. d. (D 4859(T))

G. L. Lockley 'Congregational Archival Material in Australia' Archives and Manuscripts Volume 3, number 7, November 1968.

E. S. Kirk Our First Hundred Years, Congregational Union of S. A., 1951. (Z285.89423 K47)

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