

Finding Aid

Reformed Church in America Record Group

GERMANIA/NORTH CENTRAL CLASSIS ARCHIVES

1915 - 1969

RCA 5

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Introduction

The Germania/North Central Classis Archives document the corporate institutional life of a regional classis of the Reformed Church in America based in northwest Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota in the 20th century. The records include the minutes of the classis, church statistics, financial materials, and clergy records. Collectively, these archives provide evidence for the historical growth over almost fifty years of a multi-generational German-immigrant regional church organization affiliated with a Dutch Protestant denomination in the trans-Mississippi prairies and northern plains.

Size: 51 cm

Provenance: Presumably, these records were deposited by one or more classis official.

Restrictions, copying, and permission to publish and citations: Use of these materials, copying, permission to publish and citations are subject to the specifications of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America. Contact Russell Gasero, Reformed Church in America Archives, 21 Seminary Place, New Brunswick, NJ 08901, Fax (732) 249-5412, E-mail rgasero@rca.org.

Processing Notes: This arrangement and finding aid were completed in 2015 by Doug Anderson.

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Historical Notes

The [Reformed Church in America](#) traces its beginnings to the celebration of communion in the colony of New Amsterdam in 1628 (the local church begun then exists today as the [Collegiate Reformed Church, New York City](#)). Although the Dutch colony became the British colony of New York later in the 17th century, services in the English language did not begin until the mid-18th century. After the American War of Independence, the Reformed denomination also established its independence from the Netherlands. The denomination was incorporated in 1819 as the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church; it became the Reformed Church in America in 1867.

Confessions: Historic statements of belief formally affirmed by the Reformed Church in America include the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Belhar Confession.

Polity: Each local Reformed church has a consistory, consisting of lay elders and deacons (elected by the congregation), and ordained minister(s). The clerk of consistory is responsible for the minutes; the consistory itself is responsible for the oversight of the life and order of the local church.

Multiple congregations in a geographic area form a classis. The classis consists of elected lay delegates (elders) and all the ministers enrolled in the classis. It has charge of the process of the training, examination, ordination, and oversight of clergy. It also has charge of overseeing local churches within its geographic bounds, including authorizing new ones and disbanding ones deemed no longer viable.

Multiple classes (plural of classis) form regional synods. (An older terminology is “particular synod.”) Regional synods consist of clergy and lay delegates from classes.

The denomination’s highest body is the General Synod. Minister and lay delegates from classes and regional synods, along with other authorized delegates, together have general superintendence of the whole church.

The Classis of Germania: Eight Eastfrisians left their coastal region of Germany in 1847 and settled near Freeport, IL. Eastfrisia—Ostfriesland—lay next door to the Netherlands, and Eastfrisians were, like most of their Dutch neighbors, Reformed Protestants. The Illinois colony, centered in German Valley, grew, and it also drew the attention of the Illinois Classis of the then Reformed Dutch Protestant Church (renamed the Reformed Church in America [RCA] in 1867). In 1851, the German-speaking colonists’ church was organized as the Silver Creek Reformed Church. Other Eastfrisian colonists settled in Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota. Eleven Eastfrisian RCA congregations formed the Pleasant Prairie Classis in 1892. A year later, the classis organized Pleasant Prairie College as an academy and junior college particularly concerned to encourage young Eastfrisians to enter the ministry.

By 1915, the original eleven churches of Classis Pleasant Prairie had increased to 39, and the classis covered an area that extended some 700 miles. The westernmost congregations (in

northwest Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota) petitioned for a new classis that would lessen the travel distance for them. (A new classis would also lessen the amount of business for Pleasant Prairie to transact.) With the authorization of the Particular Synod of Chicago, Germania Classis was organized September 16, 1915 at the Salem Reformed Church, Little Rock, IA. The eighteen congregations forming the new classis were,

- from Iowa: Baker Reformed, Melvin; Cromwell Center Reformed, Everly; Hope Reformed, George; North Sibley; Salem Reformed, Little Rock; and Sibley;
- from Minnesota: Bethany Reformed, Clara City; Bethel Reformed, Ellsworth; and Herman;
- from South Dakota, Chancellor; Davis; Delaware Reformed, Lennox; Dempster; Second Reformed, Lennox; Logan Reformed, Dell Rapids; Monroe; Scotland; and Worthing.

There is no evidence in the classis minutes that the name “Germania” or the use of the German language posed problems in 1917-1918, when the U.S. was involved in World War I. In the fall of 1962, however, the Consistory of Salem Reformed Church, Little Rock, IA (where the first meeting of the newly-formed Germania Classis took place) asked the classis to consider changing its name. The Germania name came, the consistory wrote, from “a time when all the congregations used the German language in the preaching services and the constituency of these congregations were people of German nationality almost entirely” (1962 Fall Classis of Germania, p. 7). Now, noted the consistory, such was no longer the case.

In 1964, then, the seventeen congregations of Germania Classis became North Central Classis. Five years later, the Particular Synod of the West dissolved Classis North Central. Of the classis’s seventeen churches, eleven South Dakota congregations joined Dakota Classis, two Minnesota congregations joined Minnesota Classis, one Iowa congregation joined East Sioux Classis, and two Iowa and one Minnesota congregations joined West Sioux Classis.

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Related Materials

This collection is closely related to that of the Pleasant Prairie Academy Archives. Further, South Dakota congregations of Germania/North Central Classis were reassigned to Dakota Classis, Iowa congregations to East or West Sioux Classes, and one Minnesota congregation to West Sioux.

For background on the Germania Classis, see the following:

Schnucker, George. *The German Element in the Reformed Church in America*. Aplington, IA: n.a., 1928. (Copy in the Pleasant Prairie Academy Archives.)

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Arrangement

The Germania/North Central Classis Archives are in four boxes. For the most part, it is arranged chronologically. The detailed arrangement is as follows:

GERMANIA/NORTH CENTRAL, 1915-1969			
BOX	FOLDER	CONTENTS	DATES
1	1	Howard G. Hageman on German Dutch, in <i>Church Herald</i> (photocopies, original).	1970s
	ledger	Formula for Minister's [<i>sic</i>] and Signatures [Dutch and English language].	1915-1969
	ledger	History of Organization and Minutes	1915-1922
	ledger	Minutes	1922-1929
	binder	Minutes	1929-1935
2	binder	Minutes	1936-1943
	binder	Minutes	1943-1948
	binder	Minutes	1948-1952
	binder	Minutes	1952-1955
	binder	Minutes	1955-1957
3	binder	Minutes	1957-1961
	binder	Minutes	1961-1962
	binder	Minutes [Classis Germania became Classis North Central from March 17 meeting to May 27 meeting, 1964].	1962-1966
	folder	[Minutes]	1965-1967
	folder	[Minutes; also Articles of Incorporation & Rules of Order]	1967-1969
	binder	Resume of minutes	1959-1969
	binder	Announcement of Classis Meetings	1959-1969
	binder	Delegates to Synods & Dismissal Certificates	1950-1969
	spiral notebook	[Notes of minutes]	[1958-1964]
	spiral notebook	[Notes of minutes]	1964-1969
4	folder	Notes	1969
	ledger	[Receipts]	[1951-1960]
	ledger	Funds—Income and Expense	[1961-1965]
	binder	Finances	1963-1969
	folder	Check stubs	1966-1973
	folder	Financial reports	1965-1970
	folder	Receipts	1966-1969

