A HISTORY OF THE FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

1830-2005

BY

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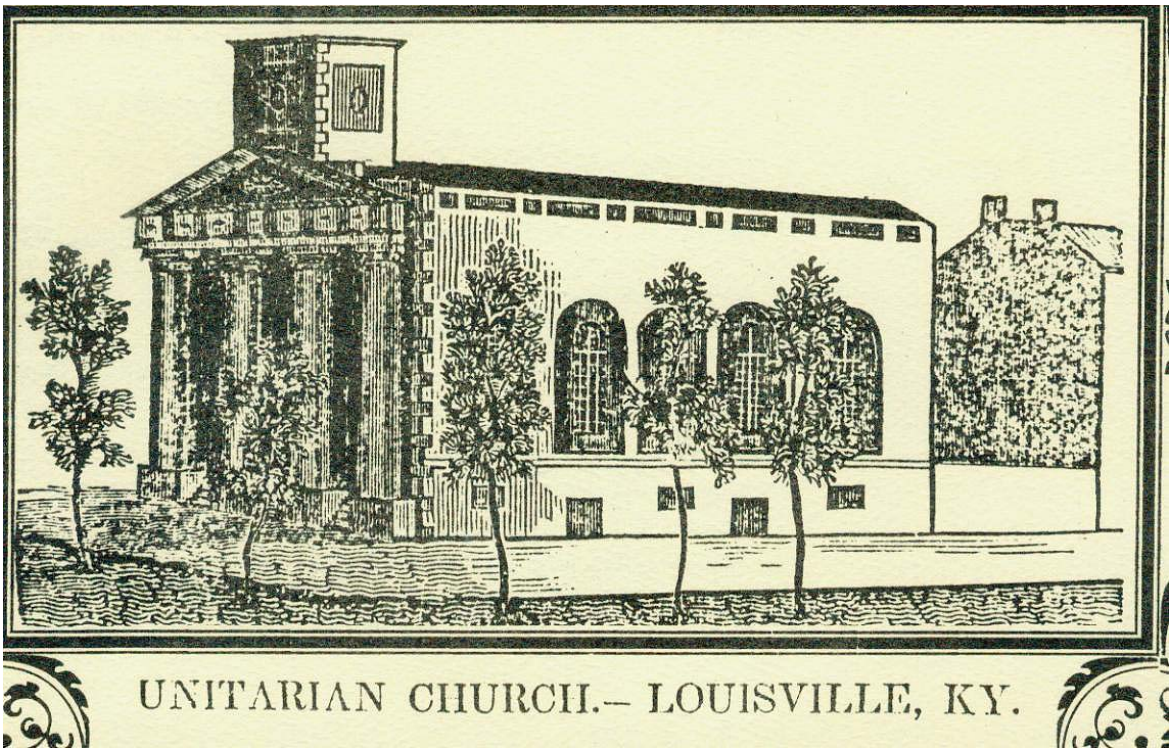
INTRODUCTION

This history of our church was a part of our 175th anniversary celebration and builds on earlier histories prepared for the centennial of the church in 1930, the 125th anniversary (1955), the centennial of the church building (1971) and the 150th anniversary (1980). It is based on the First Unitarian Church papers at the Filson Historical Society, the archives at the church, files of *The Western Messenger* in Cincinnati, and numerous interviews with past and present church members, files of the periodical *The Western Messenger* (1833-1841), and Unitarian and Universalist general histories.

We are grateful to Richard Beal, Barbra Donnelly, Robert French, Gordon Gibson, Anne Miller, Bob Reed, Carol Tobe, Ann Ulinski, Dick Weston, and Susan Wilburn for sharing their time and wisdom with us. We also want to thank the staffs of the Filson Historical Society and the Louisville Free Public Library, and Tom Owen of the University of Louisville archives for their assistance in helping us find resource materials for this history. Finally, our thanks go to Delbert Hillegas and his students in the print shop at Prosser School of Technology for their fine work in printing this book.



The First Unitarian Church, Fifth and Walnut, 1832-1871

The First Unitarian Church, Fourth and York, 1871-1985

A HISTORY OF THE FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH

1830-2005

Chapter 1: Beginnings in Boston and Louisville

Founded in 1830, the First Unitarian Church of Louisville, Kentucky, is almost as old as organized Unitarianism in the United States. In fact, the founding of the Louisville church was a direct result of the organization of the American Unitarian Association (AUA) in 1825. The primary motive for the formation of the AUA was the enthusiasm of young Harvard-educated ministers to extend Unitarianism into the American West. In 1825, the "West" was Louisville. The missionaries' success in establishing a church in Louisville gave shape to the AUA, even as the AUA missionaries gave shape to the Louisville church.

The organization of Unitarianism as a denomination in the United States was by no means a foregone conclusion. Throughout the late 1700s and early 1800s ministers of the liberal Congregationalist churches in Massachusetts resisted the label "Unitarian." After William Ellery Channing embraced the term and defined its characteristics in 1819, it was six more years before Boston-area ministers formed an association to promote Unitarian ideas and to develop and support new Unitarian churches. Opposition to forming an association was both socio-political and theological. Most Unitarian churches of 1825 had developed as "standing order" churches under the laws of Massachusetts. This meant that each congregationalist church was the church that was mandated to be both the town meeting hall and the tax-supported place of worship as each village in Massachusetts was settled. Many Congregationalist ministers saw no need to reach beyond the government approved and tax-supported churches to back the formation of

other churches. Massachusetts did not formally dissociate Congregationalist churches from government support until 1833.

Opposition to forming a denomination was more than just social, however. Many liberal ministers who were willing to accept the Unitarian label argued against a denominational or missionary effort on theological grounds. The liberals, who favored a practical Christianity that did not argue doctrines but focused on right living, feared that competition in the marketplace of Protestant Christian ideas would reduce Unitarianism to being one Christian sect among many. They did not want to fragment the energy of pure and practical Christianity in doctrinal arguments that they saw as being deeply divisive and divorced from the practical religion of Jesus. Their word for denominational competition was sectarianism. Sectarianism was denounced as antithetical to the peace and unity of the church and as a waste of Christian time and energy. Congregationalists especially did not want to see "pure and practical" Christianity placed in competition with emotional and uneducated expressions of Christianity that they deemed to be irrational.

Tipping the balance in favor of organizing an association to promote Unitarian ideas were the expansion of the country to the West and the belief among Unitarian ministers that duty called them to offer educated believers the option of a rational Christianity. The concern of these young ministers for a rational Christianity echoed the teaching of their Harvard Divinity School professor, Andrews Norton, and was reflected in the writings of Dr. Joseph Priestly as early as 1794: "I find nothing but the extremes of infidelity and bigoted orthodoxy…." The missionary effort of the newly developed AUA in 1825 was to provide a middle way for people who rejected orthodox or evangelical Christianity and thus were falling into infidelity because there was no rational church for them to attend. The missionary intent and national scope of the

association is clear in the Rev. Henry Ware, Jr.'s proposal for its establishment. Rev. Ware proposed that Unitarian ministers form:

> …a new organization…the chief and ultimate object [of which] will be the promotion of pure and undefiled religion by disseminating the knowledge of it where adequate means of religious instruction are not now enjoyed. Its operations will extend themselves throughout the whole country [and] will chiefly consist of the publication and distribution of tracts and the support of missionaries. (Quoted in Lyttle, *Freedom Moves West: A History of the Western Unitarian Conference, 1852-1952* (1952), p. 21)

New developments in transportation channeled the Association's missionary efforts along two pathways: by canal boat along the Erie Canal, where a church was founded at Rochester, New York, in 1829, and by steamboat down the Ohio River, where churches were formed at Cincinnati and Louisville in 1830 and at St. Louis in 1835.

After its May 1825 founding, the AUA's first "run" at the West was to send theology student Moses G. Thomas on a five-month mission of inquiry through 12 states. Thomas reported back to the AUA in the fall of 1826, identifying Cincinnati and Louisville as among the cities where he thought Unitarian preachers would be most helpful to the cause of religion. Of Louisville, Thomas reported finding a "…number of literary men who entertain liberal views of religion [but] at present seldom attend any church." The interest ascribed to "literary men" was typical of the appeal that Unitarianism held for those who desired to advance intellectual culture. Benefits of developing a Unitarian cultural milieu included establishing high standards of sermonic thought and literary production, as well as promoting non-sectarian public school systems, Lyceum lectures, public libraries, and evening classes for working people.

In 1829, the Rev. John Pierpont, another Unitarian missionary, preached in both Cincinnati and Louisville. The Louisville meetings were held in the school room of Francis E. Goddard, a former New Englander, on Green Street (now Liberty Street) between Fourth and Fifth Streets. Pierpont's report to the AUA made these observations:

> Society in the Western country is marked by strong features…. They are direct and prompt in their intellectual movements. They are further distinguished by intellectual activity and energy. Freedom of religious inquiry is encouraged. *They* will examine and understand and appreciate our faith! (Quoted in Lyttle, *Freedom Moves West*, p. 27)

Pierpont's efforts and eloquence on behalf of Unitarianism led to the founding of the Cincinnati church on January 21, 1830. The Rev. Bernard Whitman of Waltham, Massachusetts came to Cincinnati in May for the dedication of the new church building, and then headed downriver to Louisville to make calls on men who had been inspired by John Pierpont the previous autumn.

Bernard Whitman was a radical among the young, liberal Unitarians who had founded the AUA. At his home congregation in the textile town of Waltham, he had befriended the young women who worked in the textile mills, advocating more humane working conditions and organizing study groups. He also became close friends with Restorationist Universalists in Waltham. This was a radical association for that time, when many Unitarians considered Universalists to be among the dissenting sects who were creating divisiveness in Christendom. Universalist historians report that Universalists in Louisville in 1830 decided to contribute to the founding of the Unitarian Church rather than to organize and finance another liberal church in Louisville on their own. Bernard Whitman was one of the few Unitarians of his day who would have encouraged this Unitarian/Universalist collaboration in the cause of liberal religion. Unfortunately, the Louisville Unitarians later refused the Universalists permission to meet in the church, dealing the Universalist movement in Louisville a ten-year setback.

Whitman toiled in Louisville through June 1830, meeting with potential backers for the Unitarian Church. He gave the notice on July 2, 1830, that there would be a meeting at Mr. Goddard's School the next day at 3 pm of subscribers interested in building a Unitarian Church.

The "literary men" who responded to Whitman's invitation to make a home for rational faith in Louisville included educators Francis E. Goddard and Mann Butler, lawyers and judges S.S. Nichols and Henry Pirtle, an editor, Fortunatus Cosby, Jr., and businessmen S.S. Goodwin and George Meriwether. The July 3 meeting resulted in this resolution:

> On motion made and seconded it was unanimously RESOLVED,
> That the persons here present with their associates will form themselves into a Society, to be denominated the First Unitarian Society of Louisville.
> RESOLVED, That Simeon L. Goodwin, Edmund H. Lewis, Perley Chamberlin, Dr. I. Middleton, Archibald Allan, Frederick A. Kaye, Elisha Applegate, George W. Meriwether and John B. Bland be the General Committee of this Society to organize the Association, to receive and collect subscriptions, to procure a lot of land, and as soon as practicable to erect a Church, and do all things necessary to carry into effect the designs of the Society. The said Committee to have the right to draw up rules to govern their proceedings, to do all acts by a major vote, and fill up all vacancies in their own body.
> On motion adjourned.
> Geo. W. Meriwether,
> F.E. Goddard, Secretary

The Unitarian identity that the new Louisville society claimed was shared at that time by 120 Unitarian churches in eastern Massachusetts, nine in Maine, ten in the other New England States, three in Pennsylvania, and one each in New York City, Baltimore, Washington DC, Charleston, South Carolina, Rochester, New York, and Cincinnati. The Louisville church was only the third Unitarian congregation to form in a slave state (after Baltimore and Charleston) and the first congregation in slave territory to be recruited by the new American Unitarian Association.

In 1830, Louisville was a town of approximately 10,000 people. The 1832 Louisville City Directory lists only six churches, one each for the Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Catholics, and Unitarians.

Within the first month of its deliberations the General Committee of the First Unitarian Society of Louisville commissioned Francis E. Goddard to go to the eastern states "to solicit pecuniary aid in building a Unitarian Church." Goddard reported back with funds raised in the East in October 1830, although there is no record of the amount of money he raised. Both local and eastern financing paid for the construction of the first church building. By 1832 the society had built a handsome Greek Revival building and hired a minister. The society now called itself the "First Unitarian Church."

The new building, shown above in a sketch by James Freeman Clarke, was located at the corner of Fifth and Walnut Street (now Muhammad Ali Boulevard) where the Kentucky Towers apartment building now stands. The city directory of 1832 gives a detailed description of the

grandeur of this building. While to date no photographs of the exterior of this building have been discovered, the Church does possess a copy of an 1839 drawing of the church done by its then minister James Freeman Clarke.

James Freeman Clarke's writings and the church meeting minutes give clues to the appearance of the interior of the building. In his autobiography, Clarke noted that "One day I noticed a gentleman whom I had not seen there before, whose arm hung over the pew-door, holding in his hand a riding-whip…." Clarke's noting that the pews had doors, and the description of the location of the pews in the church minutes, supported the theory that the interior of the church repeated the pattern of boxed pews common to the congregational churches of New England. These boxed pews were <u>for sale</u> as the primary source of funds for the church's construction and endowment. There were 64 pews for sale on the main floor with 10 free pews for visitors and non-owners in a U-shaped upper gallery. The 64 pews on the first floor were divided by two side aisles with two pew boxes adjoining one another in the center section:

Aisle Aisle

It is likely that the Church repeated the New England pattern of a raised pulpit reached by a set of steps so that the people could see the minister above the walls of the pews.

The cost of joining the church by buying a pew was $100, $125, or $150 depending on the pew's location. In 2006 dollars, this translates into an investment in the church of from $2,100 to $3,250. Unsold pews could be rented for 10 percent of the purchase price per year.

Visitors who were not invited into a pew owner's box for a service were welcome to sit in the gallery. Pew owners were subject to pew taxes voted on by the Trustees when extra income was necessary for repairs to the building. The minister's salary was not paid from the sale or rental of pews but by voluntary subscription. Only pew owners, who could be male or female, could vote on the election of the five trustees who were the church's decision makers. Pew owners, renters, and church musicians were eligible to vote on the choice of a minister.

With subscribers found and the new church constructed, the proud new building was ready for dedication on May 27, 1832. Consistent with the involvement and support of Boston Unitarians in organizing the church, two outstanding Boston preachers came to preside at the dedication. The Rev. Francis Parkman preached the sermon, and the Rev. James Walker, who would later become president of Harvard University, read the scriptures. The text for the dedication sermon was John 4:23: "But the hour cometh and now is when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him."

GEORGE CHAPMAN
Born 1809—Died 1834
As he appeared when he graduated from the Harvard Divinity School in 1831.

Walker stayed to supply the church for the first two Sundays in June 1832. The Rev. Ephraim Peabody, newly installed as the Cincinnati minister, preached on June 17. Then on June 24, the first called pastor of the First Unitarian Church, the Rev. George Chapman, preached his initial sermon on the text Luke 6:46: "And why call you me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Consistent with the Unitarian emphasis on a Christianity of ethical living, rather than salvation from sin, the first minister's first sermon

was on doing.

The Rev. George Chapman was 22 years old when he graduated from Harvard in 1831 and 23 when he became the church's first minister. His pastorate lasted only one year. Little is known about his work in Louisville except that the trustees were pleased with it. When he resigned the trustees wrote a letter urging him to stay, fearing they would never find anyone as qualified as Chapman to promote liberal Christianity and minimize sectarian feelings.

Chapman's reply expressed his regret that he could not stay longer in Louisville, but neither his letter nor the trustees' alludes to his health, which was surely a significant cause for his resignation. He returned to his New England home where he died of tuberculosis in 1834.

The trustees appealed to the Church's mentor in Waltham, the Rev. Bernard Whitman, to recruit for them another Harvard-educated minister. Whitman's choice, James Freeman Clarke, graduated from Harvard in 1833. He preached the first sermon of his career in Whitman's church, then immediately departed for his assignment in Louisville. Whitman's service as mentor to the Louisville church ended in 1834, when he, too, died of tuberculosis.

Chapter 2: James Freeman Clarke Looks to the West

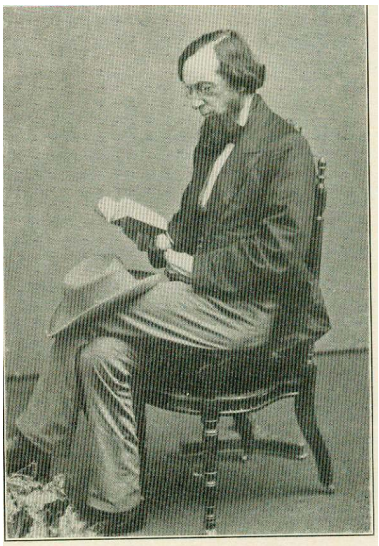
By education, background, and character, James Freeman Clarke was destined to serve as a Unitarian minister. Clarke was raised in the household of his namesake and step-grandfather James Freeman, the minister at King's Chapel in Boston. James Freeman occupies a unique place in Unitarian history as the reader and minister of King's Chapel for the 44 years from 1782 to 1826. King's Chapel was the first Episcopalian Church in New England. Freeman became its "reader" when the church reorganized after the American Revolution. When in 1786 Freeman's Unitarian theology did not receive approval for Episcopal ordination, King's Chapel broke from its connection with the Episcopal hierarchy to ordain Freeman as minister of an independent congregation. The church thus became the first avowedly Unitarian congregation in America. Louisville's new minister had been named for and raised by Boston's earliest and most established Unitarian clergyman.

James Freeman Clarke's autobiography, published in 1891, is an excellent resource for recapturing First Unitarian Church history. Well aware that as a 23-year-old Harvard graduate he could work anywhere in New England, Clarke chose instead the challenge and freedom of missionary work in the West. One motive he gave for heading west was to avoid settling into an old-fashioned Unitarian society where the work might subside into the routine. A second motive, deeper in its implications, was his realization that preaching Unitarianism in a community where the beliefs might be unknown or unpopular would be a test not only of his leadership but also of the beliefs themselves. The young Clarke intended to test the power of Unitarian beliefs to adapt to human needs in a new context. His intent was to try his faith and try himself.

Clarke traveled from Boston to Louisville in 1833 in a journey that included stage coach, steamboat, and the only railroad then existing in the United States – a short line that crossed the state of Delaware. He was greatly disappointed with the city that met his eyes:

> Louisville, which has since become one of the most beautiful cities in the country, was in those days one the ugliest. It consisted of plain brick shops and houses, without any grass plots, and with hardly a tree. The streets were never cleaned, the rain being expected to do the cleansing….Accustomed as I had been to the hills, the green lanes, and the pleasant shade-trees around Boston, I found the flat expanse on which this city stood very tiresome, and the dirt and ugliness hard to be borne. (James Freeman Clarke, *Autobiography*, (1891) p. 68)

The young minister wrestled anxiously with the form and content of the sermons he would preach. In regard to form, he had heard that people in the West preferred extemporaneous speaking. When he attempted to deliver his first sermon without notes, he was mortified when every thought in his head disappeared and he found he had nothing to say. In the future, Clarke read his sermon at the morning service and spoke from detailed notes in the evenings. In regard to sermon content, he considered whether to preach Unitarianism as doctrine or as practical Christianity. Doctrinal sermons would teach and defend Unitarian doctrines as opposed to the orthodoxy of the time and place. Clarke saw this as helpful in introducing new ideas but as potentially raising religious controversy. He decided instead to focus on preaching Unitarianism as a practical Christianity whose aims were to bring comfort to the sorrowful, to dwell on life's duties, and to appreciate the blessings of divine love.



JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE
Born 1810—Died 1888
As he appeared when he graduated from the Harvard Divinity School in 1833.

The young, kind, and very bright young man was to test his abilities and the power of Unitarianism to take root in the West for a period of seven years. Between 1833 and 1840, he

worked on the basis of annual contracts arranged with the trustees. Clarke was never installed as the church's settled minister. His contract permitted him with ample leave to make an annual trip to Boston, usually in the summer, and to make missionary journeys to New Orleans and Mobile, Alabama.

In addition to his work as a minister of a growing congregation, Clarke took on two other substantial commitments during his Louisville years. In 1839-1840, the city made him the agent (superintendent) of the public schools. For an annual salary of $400 Clarke oversaw eight primary schools. Also, between 1836 and 1839 he was the editor of *The Western Messenger,* a Unitarian journal that was published first at Cincinnati and then at Louisville on a (mostly) monthly basis from June 1835 through 1841. *The Western Messenger*, "devoted to Religion and Literature," was the effort of young ministers to promote a rational and liberal religion among western readers and to speak from a fresh perspective to their counterparts in the East. Under Clarke's editorship, the journal promoted Unitarianism through a non-sectarian mix of essays, book reviews, religious news, and moral poetry and tales of excellent literary quality. Clarke called upon his eastern friends Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller for contributions. . Articles in *The Western Messenger* are important in providing details of First Unitarian Church life in the 1830's and indicating topics that were addressed there. Many of Clarke's essays are subtitled "A Sermon, Preached in Louisville, Kentucky." The February 1839 issue contained the only illustration in the magazine's six-year span of publication – the woodcut of the Louisville church. In that issue, Clarke reported that the church "has slowly but steadily increased during the last six years, and was never so flourishing as now. There are 64 pews on the floor, which will accommodate four hundred persons. ."

The table of contents from Clarke's *Western Messenger* of April 1839

Clarke also mentioned a Sunday School, headed by S. B. Summer, in which 15 teachers worked with 75 children, who were also taught to sing. The church consisted of 40 members (or pew owners), but the weekly attendance ranged from 200 to 300, and a Ladies' Sewing Society, with 60 members, was affiliated with the church.

The February 1839 issue also contains these glimmers of information about church life:

> *Children's Concert*. A concert was given in the Unitarian Church by the children's choir, on the evening of Jan. 14, 1839. Ten pieces of music, Anthems, &c. were sung—and though the night was extremely bad, and torrents of rain falling, the streets pitchy dark, and the crossings nearly impassible—the church was very well filled. The proceeds went to buy books, &c. for the Sunday School. At the request of many persons, it will be repeated.
>
> —
>
> *Concert for the Poor*. Another very pleasant evening was spent by us in listening to a sacred concert in the Unitarian Church, for the benefit of the Poor of this city. More than $300 was taken, exclusive of expenses. The energetic lady who got up this concert, and those who assisted her, deserve much credit for their exertions.

Other articles in *The Western Messenger* indicated Clarke's concern with the major social and political issues of the day. One such issue was future punishment, or the concept of hell. In an article, *"Future Punishment,"* (August 1838), Clarke reviewed the Ultra-Universalist view that there was no future punishment and strenuously argued against this notion, concluding that it was unphilosophical, irrational, and unscriptural. He was careful to remark that he was arguing against the doctrine and not those who held it, some of whom, he thought, were "excellent Christians." Clarke was willing to consider more favorably the views of the Restorationist Universalists who believed that there would be a final restoration for all sinners after a period of retribution. He commended the Restorationists for their separation from the Ultra-Universalists, who had been the founders of the Universalist movement. Clarke's outspoken condemnation of the oldest wing of the Universalist tradition may account for the Universalist reports that they had contributed to the building of the Unitarian church but were not allowed to meet there.

In "A Temperance Tale" (May 1838) Clarke presented a fable about the currently popular issue of excessive drinking and reveals that he could also be very funny. This moralizing tale began: "In the city of Louisville, as is well known by the inhabitants, there exists a large and respectable community of rats…."

As the tale unfolds, the rats hold meetings to decide whether they should "take the pledge" not to eat delicious but-apparently poisoned pies and cakes that are appearing every evening in the warehouse where they live. The pastries are a puzzle to the rats, for they seem to be causing sickness and death. The arguments the rats raise for continuing to indulge in the sweets are a delightful send-up of the arguments made in defense of drinking alcohol. As the rats tell it:

"But….only those who have eaten a great deal have suffered. Those who only nibble a little are as well as ever, and the pies are really very good."

Liquor. Good? Evil? Clarke, like many other Unitarian ministers of his day, came firmly down on the side of the temperance movement.

The editors of *The Western Messenger* were far ahead of their times in publishing an article on "The Woman Question" in November 1838, ten years prior to the first women's rights convention. The article was written by Rev. Samuel Osgood, a young friend of Clarke's who worshipped with the Louisville church in 1836-1837, co-edited *The Western Messenger* with Clarke, and supplied the pulpit when Clarke made an extended journey to Mobile, Alabama, to found a church there. Osgood's knowledge of the incipient feminist movement was extensive. It is disappointing then that he concluded that women belonged to a separate (but noble) sphere. He quoted and applauded these lines from Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

For contemplation he, and valor formed;
For softness she, and sweet attractive grace;
He for God only; She for God in him.

Of all the political issues of the 1830s, none generated more heated discussion that the abolition movement. In various articles between 1836 and 1840, *The Western Messenger* turned again and again to how the Unitarian Christian was to respond to the issue of slavery. While Clarke personally abhorred slavery, at this point in his career he thought that the abolitionists were too extreme in their demands and that the Unitarians should attack the problem indirectly. In the April 1836 issue, the first that Clarke edited, he reviews William Ellery Channing's book *Slavery*. He agreed with Channing's argument that while slavery was "wrong and an evil," it did not necessarily mean that immediate emancipation was the best solution, nor that slave owners were sinners.

Clarke's reluctance to identify slaveholders as sinners stemmed in part for the respect and affection he felt for slave-holding families in Louisville. In Kentucky urban centers, slaves worked in the better hotels and performed household chores in the houses of the white elite. They also worked the hemp fields in the plantations in the outlying areas of Jefferson County. Among the deepest connections Clarke made in Louisville was with the Judge John Speed family who owned a hemp plantation named Farmington on Bardstown Road, five miles from the city center. The success of this plantation depended on the work of its 70 slaves. Clarke often stayed with the Speeds as a respite from life in the city. He read the Episcopal funeral service when the Speeds' seven-year-old daughter Anne died in 1838. Four of the 12 remaining Speed children became members of First Unitarian Church and raised their families there.

In the April 1839 *Western Messenger* Clarke reprinted "Duties of Masters Toward Servants: A Sermon, Preached in Louisville, Kentucky." He made the argument that slaves had

rights that they had no means to assert or defend – namely, the rights for just and equal treatment. In the context of the times, this was a liberal argument, but as his sermon developed, Clarke drew other conclusions about "the African race" that make a modern sensibility wince. Comparing the African and Caucasian races he notes that:

> One race is superior in some things, the other race in others. Thus the African has less of the inventive intellect but more of the imitative—he has less perhaps of the sense of right and wrong, but more of that feeling of Reverence which has been called the crown of the whole moral nature. This appears in the respect paid to age—in the greater politeness of manner shown toward equals—in the strength of religious *emotions*—in the quick and generally correct perception of superiority of character among the whites,--and in the strong attachment and respect shown toward their masters, when at all worthy of it. This is an alleviation, a compensation provided by a bountiful Providence for the evils attending their position. We may add to these traits that of susceptibility to praise and blame, which I have seen judiciously used as a motive to guide those unmanageable in any other way.

Having noted the African susceptibility to praise and blame, Clarke recommended governing domestic slaves with the same principles that make for the good governance of children—Reason, Kindness, Firmness.

In the August 1840 issue of *The Western Messenger* Clarke noted that his ministerial colleague George R. Simmons was compelled to leave the Unitarian congregation in Mobile, Alabama, after preaching two sermons against slavery. Clarke had a vested interest in the success of the Mobile church because he had been its missionary organizer. Clarke concluded that it is not the duty of the minister to preach against slavery <u>directly</u>. It was, however, the minister's duty to preach a kind of Christianity that would speak against slavery <u>indirectly</u>. He wrote that slavery was one "of those complicated and difficult subjects which may be approached indirectly. The best way to attack it is to spread the spirit of religion of an opposite character." As the 1830s progressed, Clarke felt more and more caught in a bind between his

own abhorrence for slavery and what he identified as his duties as a Christian pastor in holding together a church.

Clarke's life took a dramatic turn in August 1839 when he married Anna Huidekoper of Meadville, Pennsylvania. Clarke had met Anna the year before when he visited Meadville to consult with Anna's father, Harm Jan Huidekoper, about *The Western Messenger*. Huidekoper, a Dutch immigrant and land agent, had organized a Unitarian congregation in Meadville after a personal study of the Bible. He was an important presence in the fledgling denomination and, with Clarke's encouragement, became the founder of Meadville Seminary, whose purpose was to educate ministers for the west.

Clarke and his Pennsylvania bride lived in Louisville during the 1839-1840 church year, but that was to be Clarke's last year in Louisville. His wife Anna left Louisville ahead of him in the spring of 1840. In letters written to her at Meadville he expressed some of his doubts about his Louisville appointment. Personally, he was profoundly disturbed by the issue of slavery. He wrote "If I leave Louisville I shall wish to go to a free State. Every day I become more of an abolitionist." Professionally, he questioned how effective a job he was doing as minister. He felt that he was not a popular preacher, and he was concerned about the great influence of the wealthy pew-owners over the affairs of the church. He wrote to his wife: "What I should like best would be a church founded on elective affinities—not on the purse principle."

When Clarke left Louisville in June 1840, it was unclear whether he would return for the following church year. In August 1840 John Healy Heywood was hired to supply the pulpit until Clarke's intentions became clear. Clarke ultimately decided to remain in the East, where with the aid of his wife's father's wealth he was able to establish an unconventional, laity-centered and humanitarian-based congregation named "The Church of the Disciples." Clarke then

enjoyed the best of both worlds: he could work amidst the intellectual and social ferment of Boston, but he was also free from the restriction of serving a church of the standing order or a church financed by the sale of pews. He was once again privileged, as he had been in Louisville, to develop and test Unitarian views in a new setting.

His uncertainty about his return meant that he left Louisville without preaching a farewell sermon. He attempted to remedy this lack by writing a long farewell sermon that was read in a Sunday evening service in early 1841 and printed as an essay in the January 1841 *Western Messenger*. The opening and closing paragraphs of this lengthy address expressed Clarke's pastoral affection for the church. The intervening five topics addressed were reviews of the Unitarian positions that Clarke taught on sin, conversion, trinity, atonement, and the dangers of orthodoxy. Clarke reviewed these doctrines to vindicate the faith that he preached to the congregation. The young minister who debated whether to preach doctrine or practicality on his arrival in Louisville ended his ministry in the West with a scathing condemnation of orthodox Christian doctrine. He described how his attitude toward orthodoxy had become more critical: "Hitherto I have argued that I have done you no harm by omitting to preach to you the popular theology. I now maintain that *those do harm who preach it*. I now assert that because these popular doctrines are not profitable, therefore they are pernicious. They take away the attention from what is true." [emphasis added]

Clarke was not sure at his departure that he had succeeded in building a secure basis in Louisville for the truth as understood by liberal religion. He was pleased to cross paths in Boston in 1840 with a Mr. Bacon of Louisville who assured him "The society, when you went there, had no religious interest. It was based on a spirit of opposition—opposition to Orthodoxy.

Now it is different. There is religion and true spirit in it. You think you have done little in seven years. I do not see how you could possibly do more."

James Freeman Clarke continued his ministry in Boston until his death in 1888. He was instrumental in founding Meadville Seminary in 1844 and supported the organization of the Western Unitarian Conference in 1852. He remained interested in the progress of the western churches and became good friends with John Heywood, his successor in Louisville. A central figure in nineteenth century Unitarianism, he was the author of the "Five Points" of Unitarian belief that became the closest expression to a Unitarian creed at this time. Chiseled into stone in many Unitarian churches and reprinted weekly on thousands of church bulletins were Clarke's five Christian (not solely Unitarian) essentials of "the theology of the future." These five points are:

1. The Fatherhood of God
2. The Brotherhood of Man
3. The Leadership of Jesus
4. Salvation by Character
5. The Progress of Mankind Onward and Upward Forever.

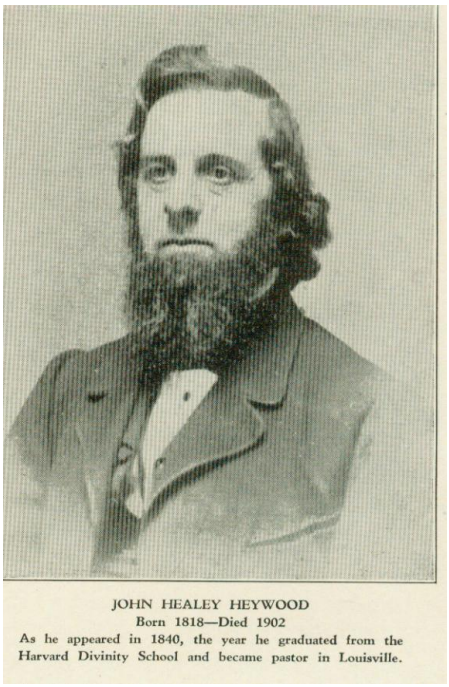
Chapter 3: The Unitarians at Fifth and Walnut, 1840-1870
John Healy Heywood Provides Stability

John Healy Heywood's 1840 arrival as minister was uncertain, as was his departure in 1879. The 39 years in between, however, were stable and busy years for the church and its minister.

The trustees of First Unitarian originally hired the young Reverend Heywood in August 1840 to fill the pulpit until they could persuade James Freeman Clarke to return. Heywood himself lamented to Clarke in a December 23, 1840, letter, "When I came to Louisville I had no intention of remaining for more than two or three months, and when the Society voted to ask you to return I had strong hopes that you would, as then I could go back to New England…." He said that he would stay "some months longer" until the Society found someone to settle permanently. Heywood said that he could not make a home in the West because he was responsible for his mother and younger brother who wished to stay in the East. Heywood must have found some compromise between his work and his family because his "some months" extended into nearly 40 years. By March 1841 the trustees had persuaded Heywood to commit to living in the West. After eight years of hiring ministers to serve on one-year contracts, the trustees realized that these temporary commitments were not conducive to a strong and stable church. With Heywood's consent, the church voted to install him as the congregation's first settled minister.

Like his predecessors Chapman and Clarke, Heywood was a recent graduate of Harvard College, just 22 years old when he came to Louisville. From the time of his graduation from Harvard, Heywood was an excellent record keeper and historian of his ministry. He kept a sermon diary, a journal that accounted for his whereabouts on every Sunday of his ministerial career through 1879. On most Sundays he was preaching, morning and evening, either in Louisville or in Boston during the summer. The journal gives the date, number, scriptural text,

and title of every sermon that Heywood preached from 1840 to 1879. The young minister had preached six sermons before his arrival in Louisville and the journal ends with sermon 3006 at Louisville in 1879. The 3,000 entries for the Louisville years are an excellent resource for recovering which texts and ideas were put before the congregation at key moments of church, city, and U.S. history.



JOHN HEALEY HEYWOOD
Born 1818—Died 1902
As he appeared in 1840, the year he graduated from the Harvard Divinity School and became pastor in Louisville.

Heywood's first sermon in Louisville was on a text that encourages spiritual and ethical living. These verses from Matthew 6:19-21 are an injunction to refrain from living life selfishly: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

His text for the evening service that day was Romans 14:7: "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." These first day scriptures, which emphasized connection to others and to the holy spirit, set the tone for Heywood's entire ministry.

Throughout the 1800s the church held both a Sunday morning and Sunday evening service, with the Sunday evening service being more flexible and sometimes more informal in its content. The first Sunday evening service of each month was communion, possibly indicating that this rite was not deemed essential to the more formal worship on Sunday mornings even as

early as 1840. Sunday evenings were also the preferred time for memorial services. Heywood's sermon entries for Sunday evenings indicate that on most nights he preached extemporaneously.

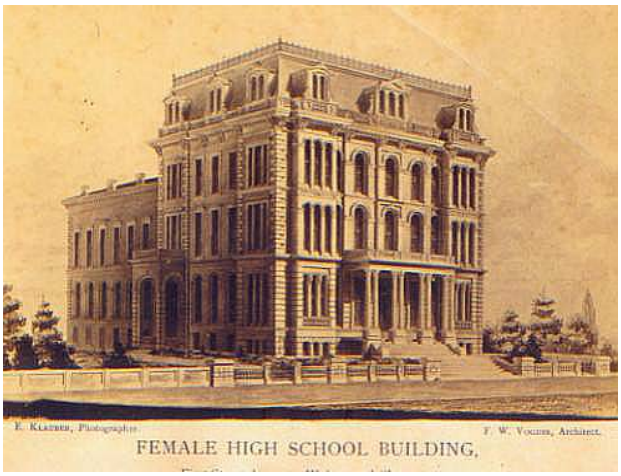
In the fall of 1843 Heywood preached a 12-sermon series on "sectarianism" that reveals his dedication to a Christianity that unites people in faithful action rather than dividing them by doctrinal argument. Notice the inclusivity and peacemaking emphases in just three of these 12 sermon texts:

> John 3:35: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."
> Luke 10:29: "…And who is my neighbor?" [This is the introduction to the parable of the Good Samaritan.]
> Genesis 13:8: And Abram said unto Lot, let there be no strife I pray thee between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we are brethren."

Heywood's clear sense of a Christianity that united all people and favored deeply spiritual and ethical living struck a chord with the congregation that helped to grow the church.

Among the records that Heywood carefully kept are the annals of those from First Unitarian Church who were baptized, married, or buried. While the church records do not include Sunday morning attendance figures for the 1800s, the dramatically increasing numbers of baptisms, marriages, and deaths in the church records indicate that more and more people were making First Unitarian Church their spiritual home. In his first full year of ministry, 1841, Heywood baptized four people (three infants, one adult), married three couples, and led five funerals. In the last full calendar year of his ministry, 1878, he baptized 14 children and adults, married six couples, and led 25 funerals. The startling number of funerals in a single year reflects the high rate of infant mortality in the nineteenth century and the deaths of people of all ages due to the lack of antibiotics and other modern medical practices. The entries in the funeral journal, though brief, reflect a courtesy and tenderness on Heywood's part as minister. Most infant and toddlers' deaths are recorded to the exact month of the child's age.

While Heywood was helping the church grow in the 1840s, he was also helping to develop the Louisville's public school system. The city asked him to replace Clarke as agent for the city schools. Heywood's work for the schools culminated in 1856 in the opening of the first two public high schools in Louisville. The Boys' High School (today's Male High School) opened at the corner of Fifth and York Street with 42 pupils. The Girls' High School (today's Atherton) opened at Center and Walnut (Muhammad Ali) with 60 pupils.



An emphasis for all members of the church in the 1840s was increasing educational and scholarly activity in Louisville. In 1841 church member A.G. Munn conducted a nonsectarian Sunday School on Tenth Street. At that time, Sunday Schools existed to teach basic literacy as well as the content of biblical morality. From 1832 through 1847 the church operated a public lending library in its basement. Judge Henry Pirtle, an active member of the congregation, played a leading part in the foundation of the Kentucky University of Louisville in 1846 (now the University of Louisville) by organizing its School of Law. First Unitarian members Mann Butler and Henry Pirtle were founders of the Kentucky Historical Society, and Butler is regarded as Kentucky's first historian.

The 1840s were also a time of close cooperation with Boston. In 1844 Heywood welcomed church musician Joseph Brown Smith, another Harvard graduate, to work on the church staff as the part-time organist. Smith was the first blind man in America to graduate from college. In 1844 he moved to Louisville to become professor of music at the Kentucky Institute

for the Blind. Smith worked for the Institute for the Blind and for First Unitarian Church for nearly 15 years until his death in 1859 at age 36. Throughout the 1800s First Unitarian Church had close ties to the School for the Blind. Church member B.B. Huntoon became director of the school in 1871 and an organizer of the American Printing House for the Blind. John Healy Heywood later served on the Board of Directors of the American Printing House.

In 1845 the church hired another staff member from a Boston program, D.A. Russell, to assist in the capacity of minister-at-large. Originally known as the Ministry to the Poor, the Ministry-at-Large was an AUA effort that began in 1826 to minister to Boston's urban poor. Its organizer was Boston minister Joseph Tuckerman, whose thinking about social reform laid the groundwork for later social work agencies and spoke to the social consciousness of the liberal religious tradition whose members tended to be wealthy. Russell's assignment in Louisville was to assist Heywood in family relief and rehabilitation and in education.

The decade of the 1840s ended for Heywood personally on notes of profound joy and sorrow. In 1847, he joined the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF), a lodge whose members aspired to improve society through acts of charity. Heywood remained an Odd Fellow for the rest of his life, receiving a special award for 50 years of membership in 1897. In August 1848 he married Sarah Burrill of Providence, Rhode Island. The church responded to his marriage by giving him a handsome raise and allotting him ownership of a church pew for his new bride and future family.

It is a rare occurrence in Heywood's recordkeeping when he takes note of events in his personal life. It is therefore startling when his sermon diary for Sunday, October 21, 1849, reads "Dear Sarah very low." His wife Sarah lay dying that Sunday from complications from childbirth. The text for his Sunday morning sermon was 1st Timothy 6:12: "Fight the good fight

of faith, lay hold on eternal life, unto which thou art called and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses." The text for "Dear Sarah's sermon" the following week at her funeral was Psalm 126:5-6: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him."

The Heywood's' baby, Mary Healy Heywood, survived her mother's death but died at eleven months of age on September 13, 1850. A month later, on October 13, Heywood preached "Dear Mary's sermon" on what would have been her first birthday. The theme of his remarks was "Is it well?" extrapolated from the questions in this passage from 2nd Kings 4:26: "Run now, I pray thee to meet her [the Shunammite woman], and say unto her, It is well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child? And she answered, 'It is well.'"

Heywood persevered in his Louisville ministry, opening the church year in 1850 with a "Tenth Anniversary Sermon" to mark his first decade with the church. His selection of a text may have been tongue-in-cheek. Isaiah 30:21: "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." Maybe he was telling the congregation there was no escaping them!

The 1850s were busy and turbulent years for the church. The church added 32 pews to the existing 64 in 1853 to accommodate the growing congregation. In January 1852, Heywood attended the dedication of the majestic new building for the Church of the Messiah in St. Louis. The pastor of this church was William Greenleaf Eliot, whose long ministry in St. Louis from 1835 to1873 paralleled Heywood's career in solidifying a Unitarian presence in a major western city. The pastors present at the St. Louis dedication met again in Cincinnati in May 1852 to form the Western Unitarian Association to support western church development. By 1852 there were many Unitarian churches in Illinois and Missouri. Boston's leadership seemed far away and it

seemed practical to form a conference to support Unitarianism in the West. James Freeman Clarke, loyal to his western experience, came from Boston to preach the keynote sermon at the 1852 Cincinnati conference.

As the pastor of one of the AUA's most successful churches in the West, Heywood was an important contributor to the life of the new Western Conference. In 1854, the conference met in Louisville. Ironically, the views that Heywood expressed at that conference were critiqued as conservative within Unitarian circles but roundly condemned as liberal and heretical in Louisville Christian circles. The Rev. Henry M. Denison, a Presbyterian minister, was so shocked by the theological content of the Unitarian conference that he wrote a 155-page book, *A Review of "Unitarian Views"* that condemned Unitarian heresies. The next year Heywood wrote an equally long rebuttal. This was one of the few instances where Heywood expended much energy in doctrinal and sectarian dispute.

The conservative opposition within Unitarianism of Heywood's views came in a controversy about the constitution of the new conference. Heywood, his congregant Henry Pirtle, and his colleague Rev. William Eliot of St. Louis introduced a resolution that the preamble to the Western Conference constitution that read:

> We regard Jesus Christ not as a mere inspirational man but as the Son of God, the Messenger of the Father to men, the Mediator between God and Man, the Redeemer of the World. We regard the miracles of the New Testament as facts on which the Gospel is based.

The Heywood-Pirtle-Eliot resolution was clearly made in reaction to the theology of Boston Transcendentalist minister Theodore Parker, who had rocked the Unitarian theological world in 1841 with his "A Discourse on the Transient and Permanent in Christianity." In this address, delivered to the graduating class at Harvard, Parker claimed that the biblical miracles (including the Resurrection), the inspiration of the scripture, and the divinity of Jesus were not

permanent or necessary essentials of Christian or Unitarian faith. Heywood, Pirtle, and Eliot were attempting to set the foundation of the Western Conference in opposition to Parkerism.

While many of those gathered agreed with the anti-Parker position, the resolution came under criticism as being creedal in form and content and therefore violating Unitarian sensibilities about the freedom of belief and the importance of being non-sectarian. The conference reached a compromise in keeping the words of the Heywood-Pirtle-Eliot preamble, but prefacing it with a disclaimer that read:

> Under our organization as the Conference of Western Unitarian Churches we have no right to adopt any statement of belief as authoritative or as a definition of Unitarian faith other than the New Testament itself, which is the divinely authorized rule of both faith and practice.

The stormy national theological scene of 1852-1855 was matched in intensity by a local tragedy and miscarriage of justice that occurred in 1853. Church member William H.G. Butler, 28 years old, a teacher in a private high school for young men, was murdered by the older brother of a student whom Butler had disciplined. The assailant, Matthew Ward, shot the unarmed teacher at point blank range in the presence of his students. The wealthy Ward family hired 18 lawyers to craft their son's defense. After a sensational trial, a crows of 8,000 stormed the Jefferson County Courthouse in protest at Ward's acquittal. The church's role in the tragedy was to provide comfort to Butler's wife, child, and brother, who were church members, and to support young Alfred Pirtle, age 14, a church member who had witnessed the murder and testified for the prosecution.

In 1853, Heywood, a widower for the past four years, deepened his ties to the Louisville congregation by marrying into the church. In December he wed Margaret Cochran, the daughter of John and Helen Cochran, a prominent church family. John Cochran was a wholesale merchant and a church trustee. John and Margaret Heywood enjoyed a happy marriage that

lasted 49 years. The couple had just one child, Helen Cochran Heywood, who was born in October 1855 and raised in the church. Helen, called Lellie, became a church musician and soloist.

In marrying into the church, Heywood's family life becomes illustrative of the church culture at this time. In an era when large families were common, when relocation to other cities was difficult, and when most members lived within walking or riding distance of the church, many members of the church were kin to one another. The four Speed families in the church baptized 19 Speed grandchildren among them. Lellie Cochran might expect to see her six Speed cousins in church, and 13 of her cousins' cousins, as well as her own Cochran cousins, grandparents, and seven aunts and uncles. In marrying Margaret Cochran, Heywood became brother-in-law of her sister Jane's husband James Speed, who was U.S. Attorney General from 1864 to 1866 during the presidencies of Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson.

The late 1850s were uneasy times for Kentucky, about to play an unusual role in the approaching Civil War. Kentucky was a slave state, but the Kentucky legislature of 1861 voted not to secede from the Union. Already occupying an anomalous position as a slave state that remained in the Union, Kentucky compounded its oddity by at first voting to remain neutral in the conflict. This meant that the state legislature did not intend to raise a state militia to fight for either side, and that Kentucky merchants were free to prosper by trading with both the Union and the Confederacy. In September 1861, the legislature did raise troops to drive out Confederate forces that had invaded western Kentucky in violation of Kentucky's neutrality. This action placed Kentucky on the Union side. About 75,000 Kentuckians eventually fought for the Union and 35,000 for the Confederacy.

Lincoln regarded Kentucky's Union affiliation as crucial to Union success. The rail line from Louisville to Nashville was a key supply route for troops and equipment. Lincoln depended on his Kentucky friends, the brothers Joshua and James Speed (James was a church member), to work politically to keep Kentucky in the Union.

As a northerner and an anti-slavery man, Heywood had a difficult time during the Civil War. The church was deeply divided between northern and southern sympathizers. Heywood had expressly preached against slavery in 1846, but he had not allowed differences of opinion about slavery to divide the church. His approach to the war was to care for the wounded on both sides and to continue to preach a Christianity that was all-inclusive. War broke out on April 12, 1861. On Sunday, April 14 his sermon title was "The Great Love of God." The text was Ephesians 2:4-5: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)." It is interesting that Heywood associated the outbreak of the war with a time when people were "dead in sins." He must have preached that despite slavery, fratricide, and the horror and sin of war that there is the possibility of the renewal of love. He was reassuring his congregation that the love of God was bigger than this war.

The following Sunday Heywood's sermon addressed the problem of friction among church members about the war. The sermon title was "Afflictions' Effect on Love of God and of Friends" and the scripture was 1st John 4:7: " Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." Heywood's ability to stand on principle and yet keep together a congregation that included fervent partisans of both sides made him a highly regarded voice of moderation in the city. Unitarians were prominent in their public

expressions of humanitarian views and in helping the sick and wounded troops from both sides of the war.

From 1861 to 1865 John Heywood served as vice-president of the Kentucky Branch of the U.S. Sanitary Commission that established hospitals for the Federal and Confederate sick and wounded and made provisions for disabled soldiers and refugees. Nationally this effort was organized and led by Unitarian minister Henry W. Bellows. In 1864-1865 Heywood and two other Unitarians, B.B. Huntoon and J.L. Danforth, were three of the five members of the Louisville Relief Board.

Only once during the Civil War did Louisvillians have real cause to fear that Confederate and Union forces might fight a battle in Louisville. Union forces, however, held back a Confederate advance into Kentucky at the battle of Perrysville, Kentucky, on October 8, 1862. After the battle a large meeting was held at the Jefferson County Courthouse. Mayor John M. Delph presided; John Heywood made an address describing the resources of the Relief Society. Church member James Speed also addressed the gathering. On October 15, a week after the battle, a long train of ambulances brought 700 wounded men to Louisville to receive care. *The Memorial History of Louisville's* article on the Civil War lists the names of 33 women who worked heroically in the relief effort. Of these 33 women, ten are easily identifiable as First Unitarians.

Worn down by the work and the controversy of the war years, Heywood requested a sabbatical in February 1865, his first extended leave in nearly 25 years of ministry. His sermon diary for April 2, 1865, records that he was leaving the church and going abroad for his health. He may already have left the country by the time the war ended on April 9.

Despite the demands of the Civil War, church members were very active during the 1860s and succeeded in important initiatives beyond their contribution to the war effort. Based on entertainments given by Louisa May Alcott in Syracuse, New York, the Dickens Club had been founded in 1858 as a church organization that did theatrical works and tableaus based on the works of the great English author. In 1862, the club began giving public entertainments to raise funds for charity. By 1868, the club had raised $10,000 for various Louisville charities.

Chapter 4: The Universalists at Two Locations, 1840-1865?

While the First Unitarians were growing a church from 1830-1865, Universalist believers in Louisville were also seeking ways to live out their understanding of liberal Christianity.

Universalist missionary efforts in Louisville began in the 1830's. Universalist hopes to work cooperatively with the Unitarians were dashed in 1832 when the Unitarians did not permit them to meet in their new building. In 1836, Universalist minister Rev. Nathan Wadsworth attempted to develop a congregation by preaching, pamphleteering, and publishing a Universalist newspaper, *The Berean*. The Reverend George Rogers of the First Universalist Church in Cincinnati made repeated trips downriver to encourage Universalists in Louisville to organize as a church. Finally, in 1840, the Rev. W.W. Dean, who had served an apprenticeship as minister in Cincinnati, came to Louisville to organize a congregation and Sunday School. The new society bought and repaired a former Episcopal Church on Chapel Street, below 10th Street, which could accommodate 200-250 people. The church's location, down near the waterfront in the warehouse district, was a block or two below the gas lights that had been installed in Louisville in 1839.

When Dean moved farther west in 1843, the church turned to the 27-year-old Rev. Enoch Merrill Pingree to be its pastor. He was a native of New Hampshire and a life-long Universalist who, after two years of higher education at Newberry Academy, had begun preaching when he was 19. He was a young man of tremendous energy and passion in arguing for Universalist views. In 1842 he noted that he had preached in 146 different places (116 of them in Ohio) and given a total of 743 sermons. He had done settled work in Cincinnati, Montgomery, Mason, and Edwardsville, Ohio. In addition, he had been a circuit rider, a common form of Universalist missionary work. In 1844, he was installed as the Universalists' first settled minister.

Pingree's great joy was to debate with orthodox, Calvinist clergy of any denomination who saw Universalism as a great heresy. Theological debates in those days would last several days or evenings in a row, drawing hundreds of people who regarded them as entertainment rather than as education. Pingree was confident that any time he debated he could win over a score or more of the audience to Universalist views. These converts would then become the nucleus for a church. In arguing for Universalism in new territory, he had nothing to lose and as many church members as possible to gain. Some of his debates were epic. His debate in 1844 with Dr. N. L. Rice of the Central Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati was published as a 400-page book. The Universalist penchant for sectarian debate did not meet the approval of the Unitarians, who regarded such theatrics as promoting sectarianism.

The energy Pingree brought to sectarian debate he also brought to fundraising. Arriving in Louisville in March 1843, he was troubled by the size of the church building: Pingree was successful in convincing the congregation to build a new brick building to seat 600 people. The new church was located near the southwest corner of Market and 8th Streets, one building west from the corner. The building was completed by November 1843 and was nicknamed "The Devil's Chapel" by those opposed to Universalist views. The opposition's reasoning ran that the devil inspired the Universalists to lead people astray by teaching them there was no hell. Without the threat of punishment in hell, the anti-Universalists feared that people would feel free to behave in whatever destructive or evil ways they chose.

There is evidence that the Universalists were unpopular in Louisville not just for their theology but also for their politics. Pingree fervently believed that the gospel of universal salvation meant that everyone deserved fair and equal treatment in this life as well as in the life to come. Pingree and his congregation were outspoken in their opposition to slavery, alcohol, and capital punishment. They believed that their faith called them to work for the eradication of human bondage, oppression, and degradation, all radical views for the 1840s.

Pingree's success in building up Universalism extended beyond Louisville. He was an able organizer and was responsible for the creation of a state Universalist convention in Kentucky and its subdivision into three jurisdictions or associations. Like Heywood at the Unitarian Church, Pingree was the first minister that the Universalist Church installed as a settled minister. This event took place on June 1, 1844 in their new church building.

Sadly, the momentum that Pingree gained for Universalism in Kentucky from 1843 to 1849 was lost when he died of tuberculosis on January 6, 1849. His biographer, George Emerson, provides a graphic description of his death. "about four o'clock on Saturday morning Br. Pingree called for water, and before his wife was able to hand him the same, raised his head and vomited a large quantity of blood and lungs and fell back in his sleeping position, dead." Universalism in Louisville and in the state of Kentucky never quite recovered from the loss of this charismatic leader.

A leading Universalist thinker, Rev. Isaac Dowd Williamson, served a short tenure at the Louisville Universalist church between 1852 and 1854. Williamson had a distinguished career as a Universalist writer and theologian. During his time in Louisville he edited a Universalist journal, *Herald and Era*. His books include *Examination of the Doctrine of Endless Punishment*,

published while he was at Louisville in 1854, *The Philosophy of Universalism* (1866), and *Rudiments of Theological Moral Science* (1870).

Williamson was also a national leader in the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF). Many Universalist ministers in the nineteenth century took leadership roles in this organization. The theology of the lodges under the guidance of Universalist ministers was non-sectarian. Jews and Muslims were accepted into membership, and prayers were made directly to God and not through Jesus Christ. Williamson served as national chaplain for the Odd Fellows for several years and composed a large part of the ritual of the IOOF. In 1855 he published *The Philosophy of Odd-Fellowship*.

According to city directories, the Rev. W.W. Curry was pastor of the First Universalist Church from 1856 to 1860. Curry's ministry was praised by the Rev. Theodore Clapp, a renowned Unitarian/Universalist minister from New Orleans who lived in Louisville from 1856 until his death in 1866. Clapp wrote to the Boston-based journal *The Trumpet* that Rev. Curry presented "the great principles and leading facts essential to our faith" in an excellent manner.

In 1861, the city directory lists John F. Grassow as minister of the First Universalist Church. How long he stayed is not known, because city directories were not published during the Civil War, and the 1865-1866 edition contains no listing for the Universalist Church.

There is evidence that the Reverend Theodore Clapp served the First Universalist Church over the years, but there is no information as to what years he served. He was never installed as its pastor, probably because of his age and declining health. It is likely that he was serving the church during the early 1860s when the congregation was feeling the strain of the Civil War.

Clapp's history as a national figure who considered himself as both Unitarian and Universalist may have a bearing on Unitarian and Universalist history in Louisville. Born in

1792 in Massachusetts, he was a graduate of Yale College and Andover (Calvinist) Theological Seminary. In 1816 he traveled to Lexington, Kentucky, and then to Louisville, where he taught school and occasionally preached. In Louisville he married Adeline Hawes, who was a native of Boston. In 1822 the Clapps moved to New Orleans, where he became pastor of the second Protestant church in the city. By the early 1830s, Clapp had become a Unitarian through private study. By 1838, Clapp was also claimed by the Universalist denomination. He was listed as an unaffiliated Universalist preacher in the denomination's *Register* from 1839 until his death. A charismatic preacher and leader, Clapp developed the First Congregational Unitarian Society in New Orleans that taught Unitarian and Universalist views. The church was also identified simply as "Parson Clapp's Church" or "The Stranger's Church." Clapp's preaching drew 1,000 or more people into the church's pews every Sunday. His church became a New Orleans tourist destination, with visitors from all over America and Europe. The building that housed Clapp's unique Unitarian and Universalist ministry burned down in 1851. It was replaced by a new church building that Clapp named "Church of the Messiah." In 1856 at age 64 Clapp retired and moved with his wife back to her family home in Louisville. From 1856 to 1866 he moved between the Unitarian and Universalist churches in Louisville, participating in worship at the Unitarian Church and in worship and leadership with the Universalists.

An entry in the Board of Trustees records provides evidence that Rev. Clapp regularly worshipped with the Unitarians. This entry also stands out as a rare instance of humor in the church's recordkeeping. According to the minutes, a member of the Unitarian congregation who was going to Europe for two years had offered Rev. Clapp the use of his pew while he was away. This was a generous gesture, except that the church member, Dr. Elliot, had also appealed to the board of trustees to be exempt from the annual pew tax while not in residence. When Rev. Clapp

was asked to pay tax on the pew where he had been invited to sit as a guest, he replied "not a farthing." The board then passed this response to Dr. Elliot's request not to be taxed the annual $50 fee: "On motion, it was resolved, that Dr. Clapp be allowed the privilege of sitting in Dr. Elliot's pew, and Dr. Elliott be allowed the pleasure of paying the tax on the same."

Clapp died in May 1866 and his funeral service was held at First Unitarian Church. The funeral cortege then took his body to Cave Hill Cemetery, where he was interred next to the Universalist minister Enoch M. Pingree.

Chapter 5: The Church of the Messiah, 1870-1879

In April 1868, the Universalists, who had apparently not been meeting regularly for some time, offered the First Unitarian Church about $15,000 toward the building of a "new and suitable house of worship." The Universalist trustees set two stipulations on their offer to contribute toward a new church. First, they requested that a joint Unitarian/Universalist committee purchase property for the new church within a year's time. Second, they wanted all parties to agree that the name of the new church would be "Church of the Messiah." The urgency in the Universalists' first request is understandable, given that their congregation had already ceased to hold Sunday services. The second request, for a new name, indicates that the Universalists wanted to do more than contribute their funds to a Unitarian enterprise. Their intent was to work alongside the Unitarians in forging a new congregation whose name and mission would be welcoming to Unitarians and Universalists alike.

Although the proposal of the Universalists appeared to come out of the blue, the historical records show that John Healy Heywood was intimately acquainted with his Universalist colleagues in ministry, perhaps through their mutual membership in the International Order of Odd Fellows. In 1849 Heywood participated in the funeral service for Enoch M. Pingree. Pingree's biographer George Emerson writes of Heywood's funeral prayer: "…[h]is kindness on the occasion gave much better evidence of the Christian than of the sectarian; and certainly it will never be forgotten by the Universalists of Louisville, nor by the friends generally of Brother Pingree." In 1852 Heywood officiated at the funeral service for Rev. Isaac Dowd Williamson's 17-year-old son. In 1858 he baptized Universalist minister W.W. Curry, his wife, and three children in an afternoon service in the Universalist Church. In 1861 and 1862 he conducted the funerals for two of the Curry children he had baptized. In 1866

Theodore Clapp's obituary describes Heywood's friendship and sympathy as one of the highest and purest sources of comfort and solace to Clapp in his declining years. John Heywood's role as a private and public minister to his Universalist colleagues was one way that the Universalists of Louisville came to know and trust the ministry of First Unitarian Church. When the time came to make a decision about their religious future, the Universalists were willing to invest their funds in a shared church mission with the Unitarians.

The 1870s began with the construction of the new church at Fourth and York, an exciting and healing endeavor after the troubled times of the Civil War. A total of 122 individuals and families signed the charter of the new "Church of the Messiah" when it was incorporated in February 1870, representing members of both former churches. The trustees named in the act of incorporation with the state of Kentucky were Edward A. Gardner, James Speed, George Davis, James Kennedy, Jacob Merker, Columbus Chamberlin, and George A. Houghton. The first four represented the Unitarian membership, and the last three, the Universalist membership. The name "Church of the Messiah" proposed by the Universalists was agreeable to people from both denominations. For the Universalists, the name called to mind a church served by their friend Theodore Clapp in New Orleans. For the Unitarians, the name echoed that of two flagship Unitarian Churches in New York City and St. Louis, Missouri.

Construction of the stone walls that the church now inhabits proceeded rapidly. The stones were hewn locally at Beard's Station quarries. The interior had an open timbered roof in the Gothic style and woodwork, including the pews and pulpit, made of black walnut and ash. The main entry to the church was from Fourth Street through arched doorways that now hold stained glass windows. The altar for the church was in the east end of the building where the

alcove of the social hall is now located. The cost of the church's construction was about $65,000.

The first services were held in the new building on September 4, 1870. Unfortunately, John Heywood's evening sermon on "Reasons for name 'Church of the Messiah'" has not come down to us. Realizing that John Heywood was always thinking like a theologian, it is likely that he reflected in that service on the meaning of the word "Messiah," a Hebrew title given to the chosen or anointed one who comes to deliver or liberate the people. Heywood would have been delighted to minister in a church that saw as its main identity the mission to deliver or liberate the people from conditions of material or spiritual poverty. Messiah as a religious term lends itself to the form of practical and ethical Christianity that Heywood consistently preached. In 1896 Heywood observed that the name Church of the Messiah was adopted by the congregation "in expression of its loving reverence for its spiritual leader, Jesus, the Christ, and of its desire and purpose to be loyal to the principles of his benign and beneficent religion."

The new church was officially dedicated on January 15, 1871. It was appropriate that William G. Eliot of the Church of the Messiah in St. Louis came to Louisville to be the dedication speaker.

Unfortunately, the glow of happiness that came from the new church's formation and building was soon replaced by the glow of a major fire. On December 31, 1871, the main auditorium of the new church burned but the Sunday School and social area of the church remained intact. Throughout 1872 until the church's rededication on December 15, the congregation met in the social hall. The Rev. Dr. Henry W. Bellows of New York, the leader in establishing the National Conference of Unitarian Churches in 1865, spoke at the church's

rededication. The church was restored to more than its former glory with a rebuilding cost of about $33,000.

The cost and energy of building and then rebuilding the church took a toll on church finances. This was compounded by the financial panic of 1873 that led to a four-year national depression. The trustees' notes from the 1870s are full of concerns about money. Heywood did not like for the church to be in debt and threatened at one time to resign if the trustees did not work seriously to reduce the church's bonded debt. The financial crisis worsened to the point that there was not enough income to meet the church's operating expenses. At the annual congregational meeting on December 17, 1877, the trustees recommended a reduction in staff salaries because the church could not continue to operate with annual deficits. At a subsequent meeting, a motion was made to appoint a committee to find ways to remove the bonded debt of the church. A substitute motion was offered to ask the ladies of the congregation to put their society into operation to repay the church's debt. The substitute motion carried. The centennial history of the church described the 1877 financial crisis in these words: "It was in this crisis that the women's work, which so often before had turned many a mickle into the needed muckle, was again called for. In it, old and young joined, and never was heartier enthusiasm shown than in the work of the next ten years, though the church has always been blessed with earnest, willing women."

The work of earnest, willing women appears in James Freeman Clarke's 1839 descriptions of church activities and is evident throughout the church's history. In 1866, the women of the church, led by Margaret Heywood, were instrumental in founding the Widows and Orphans Home with the financial support of the Dickens Club. The home opened for its first "inmates," as they were called, on January 1, 1867, in a plain brick house at Seventh and

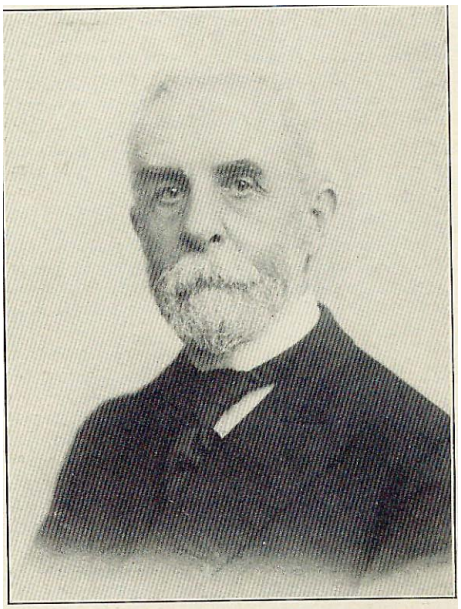
Kentucky Streets. Once they were admitted, women paid nothing to stay at the home, and every effort was made to create a home-like ambience. In 1882, the church transferred the property to the Cook Benevolent Institute, uniting what was by then known as the Old Ladies' Home with the Cook home.

After the 1871 fire, women of the church raised money through annual bazaars, called Helping Hand fairs after 1877, at which, among other things, women dressed up to look like storybook characters and sold dolls. Other fundraisers included picnics, silver teas, rummage sales, bridge parties, dances, and, until the 1880s, Dickens Club entertainments. In the late 1880s, the Ladies' Sewing Society was replaced by the Young Ladies' Aid and the Junior Alliance, and in 1896, these groups merged to form the Women's Branch Alliance, which continued the same active program of charitable work.

Despite the work of the women in the 1870's to retire the church's debt, money problems continued to plague the church during this decade. The problem was not only the lack of the fund but also ethical decision making about how to spend the funds that were available. In 1878-79 Heywood and the board of trustees entered into a serious disagreement about the use of the church's funds. Rent from pews still financed the church's building. The collection at the Sunday morning service paid for staff salaries. The collection from the Sunday School classes, about $520 annually, was applied to program costs or given to charity. The disposition of this money, a trustees' decision, led to serious controversy in the 1870s.

In 1869, the Sunday School money was donated to Mary Caspari, a local woman who ran a school for black children, the kind of charitable purpose that Heywood favored. But by 1879, Heywood and the board of trustees were arguing about whether the Sunday School funds would be used to pay for professional musicians – a soprano, alto, and tenor – to sing for Sunday

morning services, or whether they would be donated to charity. The controversy in the church was known as –Music, or Charity? Heywood expressed his emphatic conviction that a portion of the money be set aside for charity. The church attempted to solve the controversy by giving Heywood a vote on the board of trustees when the Sunday School funds were apportioned. This compromise broke down when Heywood became too upset with the board to attend their meetings. By the end of the church year in 1879 Heywood was feeling distressed on several fronts. The Heywood's' only child, Helen, had not been well. The church was feeling a financial strain in meeting his salary. The board of trustees was making decisions that he felt were selfish rather than charitable. On June 2, 1879, he addressed the board indirectly in a letter that he asked the board secretary to deliver to the trustees. In part, the letter reads, "permit me to say through you to the Board of Trustees – that for health reasons and for other reasons that seem to me of great weight, I propose going to Europe with my family, with the expectation of remaining abroad for one year….Will you have the goodness to say to the Board, that as my salary will of course, cease with the month of June, I hope and trust my going will lessen in some measure, the anxiety felt by the Trustees in regard to the fiscal affairs of the church. And you will, also, please to say that should the Board find among the ministers, whom they may invite to fill the pulpit, some earnest and gifted man, possessed of power not only to interest our own congregation but, also, to attract new members – I hope there will be no hesitancy in inviting him to become the pastor."



JOHN HEALEY HEYWOOD, D. D.
"Our dear friend and teacher,
Our long and well beloved pastor."

The trustees replied with a peacemaking gesture, telling Heywood that they considered his request a "reasonable period of rest," and hoping that he would continue his ministry at the church "for many years to come." But that was not to be. The Heywoods were delighted with the first six months of their year abroad as the European climate and medical treatment restored Helen's health. But once healthy, Helen contracted typhoid fever in San Remo, Italy, and died on January 25, 1880, after a brief illness. Following Helen's death, Heywood submitted a final letter of resignation to the Louisville church and his ministry with the church officially ended in August 1880, exactly 40 years after it had begun. His decision not to return to Louisville was compounded by grief, fatigue, and the difficult relationship with the board of trustees. In an 1882 letter to congregation member Alfred Pirtle, he wrote, "I don't know what the 'Church of the Messiah' now stands for – so various are the reports that reach me. It will always be very dear to me and I shall always yearn for its truest and most abiding spiritual life and prosperity. But whatever the Church may represent now, certainly there was no doubt as to what it stood for in the days when your honored Father wrote his "Unitarian Views"…. Heywood was concerned that the church in its new building and location had lost a sense of what it should stand for.

Heywood lived in his native New England for ten years, serving two Unitarian churches as pastor – at Plymouth and Melrose, Massachusetts. In 1889 when he was 71 years old he and Margaret returned to Louisville to live, probably to be close to Margaret's family. When he died in January 1902 there was a tremendous outpouring of gratitude from the people of Louisville and the church.

Chapter 6: The First Unitarian Church at the Turn of the Twentieth Century, 1880-1920

During Heywood's absence in 1879, the church hired the Reverend C.J.K. Jones as interim minister and later as settled pastor. In hiring Jones the church departed from its prior practice of choosing ministers who were Unitarian from birth and Harvard-educated. Jones belonged originally to the Dutch Reformed church and was educated at Rutgers College in New Jersey and Union Theological Seminary in New York. Jones continued as pastor until 1883, left for Florida for family health reasons and practiced law there for eighteen months, and then returned to Louisville at the church's invitation in 1885 to resume his ministry. During Jones' 18-month absence the Rev. John B. Green led the church. Green's early religious upbringing was as a Roman Catholic. In looking to a former Presbyterian and former Catholic to lead the church, the Church of the Messiah was stepping away from a close connection to the world of Boston Unitarianism.

The best characterization of the Jones years comes from Heywood, who wrote a brief history of the church for the *Memorial History of Louisville* (1896). He wrote that "Mr. Jones gives no dull, prosy sermons. His hearers may agree with him, or may dissent from him, but they never sleep." Jones was enthusiastic about evolution, deeply interested in natural history and science, and brought erudition and liveliness to his preaching. Under Jones' leadership, the church was in good financial condition, no mean feat since the mid-1890s was also a time of national economic depression. Heywood noted that the members of the choir were held in high esteem not only for their musical ability but also for their deep interest in the welfare of the church, possibly an oblique reference to a time when music and charity were at odds in the

congregation. He noted especially the work of the Ladies' Aid Society in buying a motor for the organ, warming the congregation with the purchase of first-class furnaces, and delighting the trustees with a $500 gift, and the Helping Hands, an organization for girls who sewed clothing for the poor. The Sunday School flourished during this period under the leadership of its superintendent, Mrs. Anna C. Bower, and through its extension, the Highland Unitarian Sunday School, created in 1893 and located in a building called the Highland Chapel at 1034 Bardstown Road where it served Unitarians in what was then considered the suburbs.

In all likelihood, the highlight of these years was the visit by Susan B. Anthony, the ageless campaigner for women's suffrage, and Carrie Chapman Catt, another leading suffragette, who spoke at the church in January 1895. They spoke in the Sunday School room to appease those more conservative members who did not believe that a non-ordained person should speak from the pulpit in the sanctuary of the church. Anthony and Catt were on a Southern tour to try to involve women of the region in the movement to win for women the right to vote. Anthony spoke with great self-confidence and humor as she described the background of the suffrage struggle, and Catt spoke on the current situation with regard to votes for women, emphasizing the good consequences that Wyoming, where women had voted for 25 years, had experienced.

Jones left for California in 1898, apparently under a cloud of scandal, and was replaced by the Rev. Arthur W. Littlefield, described as "active and inspiring" but plagued by health problems that forced his departure in 1900. The next minister was the able Fred V. Hawley, a very tall man whose intellectual sermons attracted many Louisvillians who were not members to Sunday morning services. But Hawley left after just two years to become secretary of the Western Unitarian Association, where he worked until he was killed in an accident in 1924. His replacement was William H. Ramsay, who served the church from 1903 until 1909 and was, with

his wife, noted for his pastoral and civic work and influence. Harriet Harris Weller, a church member at the time, described Ramsay as "not very tall, [with] great big ears and huge hands that he used, spread out, palms up, to emphasize his fine sermons, and EVERYONE loved him dearly."

The congregation at the beginning of the twentieth century was much different from the congregation in the early twenty-first century. The 1902 parish register lists about 420 members, including children, all of whom believed in a kind of Christian Unitarianism. Most members lived in what is now Old Louisville, while others lived on East or West Broadway, Walnut, Chestnut, or Jefferson streets. An even smaller number lived in Crescent Hill or the upper Highlands areas. No one lived in Indiana. The congregation was all white, largely upper middle class, and included a number of socially prominent citizens. For example, Charles Hermany was the chief engineer and superintendent of the Louisville Water Works, F. N. Hartwell was a vice-president of the Louisville Board of Trade, John Bacon was president of Bacon and Sons, a dry goods and carpet store, and A. G. Munn and W. G. Munn were president and treasurer, respectively, of the Southwestern Agricultural Works, manufacturers of farm machinery. Other members were officers in such businesses as woolen mills, cotton mills, wholesale groceries, cement, wagon axle manufacturing, and tanning. One of the few non-professional members was Herman C. Tafel, an electrician and the father of long-time member Olga Tafel.

In 1910, Maxwell Savage was installed as minister of the Church of the Messiah. Born in June 1876, Savage earned an A.B. from Harvard in 1896 and a divinity degree from Meadville Theological School in 1899. He served a church in Lexington, Massachusetts, before coming to Louisville. In 1911, he married Margaret Dowling, an illustrator and painter. Savage stayed in Louisville until 1916, when he left to return to Massachusetts, where he was minister of churches

in Lynn (1916-1919) and Worcester (1919-1946). During his ministry in Louisville, church membership grew by almost 150, and a new organ was purchased and installed in 1912. The Women's Alliance thrived during this decade. The yearbook for the Women's Branch Alliance of the Church of the Messiah for 1916-1917 lists 156 women as members. Fifteen of these women, including the minister's wife, Mrs. Maxwell Savage, are also listed as members of Louisville's Women's Suffrage Association.

In a 1915 sermon, Savage tackled the controversial topic of evolution, "held to be the progressive revelation of God." The overt Christian orientation of Unitarianism at that time is notable. Not only was the church called the Church of the Messiah, but the order of service, following James Freeman Clarke's five points, declared that the church "accepts the religion of Jesus, holding in accordance with His teaching that practical religion is summed up in Love to God and Love to Man."

The new organ was funded through the disposal of the Highland Chapel. By 1912, urban transportation had improved to the point where the Sunday School extension was no longer needed and the building was sold, with the proceeds going to the organ fund. In the picture to the left, taken in 1937, the organ can be seen on the left side of the sanctuary. It remained the church organ until 1971, when a new tracker organ was purchased and installed.

Savage was succeeded in the pulpit by Dilworth Lupton, who stayed until 1919. World War I dominated national life during most of his ministry, and the weekly order of service carried a "Roll of Honor," listing those members and friends who were serving in the armed forces, a number that ranged from 22 to 47. The church hosted an open house on Sunday afternoons for enlisted men from Camp Taylor, as well as a biweekly dance on Wednesdays. In June 1918, the church aligned with the Anti-Saloon League to push for the ratification of a "Dry Amendment" to the state constitution. Although the Anti-Saloon League was conducting an education campaign, Lupton's comments in an order of service left no doubt that he needed no education to know that liquor was bad.

The beginning of a formal move away from a Jesus-centered religion came in February 1918, when the church requested the state to amend its charter to change its legal name from the Church of the Messiah to the First Unitarian Church of Louisville. On March 16, 1918, the state authorized the change and issued a certificate of incorporation for the church under its new name. While this was an important symbolic statement, it would be nearly 40 more years before references to Jesus were dropped from the church's statement of mission and purpose.

The Rev. R. Ernest Akin served First Unitarian Church from 1919 until 1923, coming to Louisville after service as an army chaplain and a year's work with the YMCA. He attracted people to the church by instituting a Sunday evening movie series, taking advantage of the booming popularity of film after World War I. Akin also worked with organist Carl Wiseman to schedule Sunday afternoon concerts that were well attended. Akin's activities in Louisville evidently attracted the attention of the American Unitarian Association (AUA), which appointed

him to the post of lecturer and organizer of youth activities in the Midwest. Notably, his last sermon criticized the narrow view of mainstream Christianity that only good believers will go to heaven. He stated that no good man should want to go to heaven as long as suffering existed anywhere in the world, since a truly good man would want to try to alleviate the suffering rather than escape it by going to heaven.

First Unitarian's next minister was Lon Ray Call (1923-1929). He was born in Advance, North Carolina, in 1894 and graduated from Wake Forest University in 1916. After a year's service as a chaplain in France during the war, he graduated from the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1920. Before coming to Louisville, he worked as a Baptist minister and Sunday School director in St. Louis. Curtis Reece, a leader in the humanist movement of the 1920s, was a great influence on Call, who himself became known for his humanist views. Call's first sermon in Louisville, "Is Religion Coming or Going?", reflected this philosophy by posing the question whether religion was for "the social passion or the heavenly home," and leaving no doubt as to where he stood. Among the earlier ministers of First Unitarian, Call was among the most interested in growth and community service. Membership grew from 340 to more than 400, and a successful series of community forums drew new people to the church and frequent mention in the local press. One of the highlights of his years at First Church was the return of Carrie Chapman Catt, who spoke at the church on November 25, 1924, on "Men, Women, and "Politics," in her capacity as honorary president of the League of Women Voters. After leaving Louisville, Call was celebrated for his work in the Unitarian extension

service, working as an AUA minister-at-large from 1941 to 1951 and founding 13 churches during that time.

In these years, much of the community service for the church was done by the Women's Alliance, with additional contributions from the Layman's League. Some of the work of the Women's Alliance helped the church. In the early years of the twentieth century, for example, the alliance supplied flowers for the pulpit every Sunday, raised money to buy a new gas range for the church, and presented the church with a painting of prominent long-time member A. G. Munn. The alliance also contributed $50 to help build a new city auditorium and sewed nightshirts and made 2,000 gauze bandages for troops serving in World War I.

In 1920, the Layman's League was founded, with Gustave A. Breaux as its first president. The group approved an affiliation with the national association and chose the name "Heywood Chapter" for itself. Open to any male over the age of 16, the Layman's League had between 24 and 32 members, met monthly, enjoyed a dinner "cooked by the ladies (the Women's Alliance)," and a program that might have been on travel, political issues, or music. The league did maintenance work around the church, including heavy cleaning, coordinated ushering at services, sponsored a Boy Scout troop and at various times, a city league basketball team, and helped organize the community forums during Call's ministry. The members held outings in city parks, where they played softball and horseshoes, and as the picture above shows, seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves. Occasionally, league members involved themselves in weightier matters, looking into labor-management relations in Louisville during the 1920s and urging that the United States join the

World Court. In the depression years of the 1930s, the Layman's League raised funds through minstrel shows and strawberry festivals, urged the peaceful resolution of problems between the United States and Japan, and studied the question of whether the national Unitarian Church should change its name to the "Free Church of America."

During the 1920s and 1930s, many church members enjoyed district conferences and other outings, often held at Clifty Falls State Park near Madison, Indiana, or on boats cruising the Ohio River. Delegates to these conferences came from surrounding states, heard distinguished Unitarian speakers and indulged in a variety of social and sporting activities. Pictures from the era, such as this one showing the 1930 baseball team from First Church, known as the "Mosquitos," reveal that a large number of mostly younger church members regularly attended these functions and clearly had a good time..

Chapter 7: First Church at Mid-Century, 1930-1960

In November 1930, First Unitarian Church celebrated its centennial with a four-day schedule of gala events, including a concert and organ recital on Thursday, November 20, a congregational banquet the following night, and a lecture on the political crisis in India on Saturday, presented by the distinguished guest for the occasion, Dr. John H. Lathrop, a Unitarian minister from Brooklyn, New York. More than 160 members attended the banquet, and the candles on the birthday cake were lit by Miss Josephine Danforth and Mrs. Robert Brown, the two oldest living members of the congregation.

On Sunday, November 23, the celebration was culminated with the installation of

Richard W. F. Seebode as the new minister of the church. Only 26 at the time, Seebode was born in Cincinnati and was a graduate of the University of Chicago and Meadville Theological School. He had been ordained in December 1927 and had served as minister of Church of the Saviour (Unitarian) in Brooklyn before his call to First Unitarian.

By all accounts, Seebode was an engaging young minister who introduced Christmas vespers services in 1931. But the Great Depression deepened during the early years of his ministry and brought serious financial problems to the church, as it did to the rest of the city and nation. The church budget was reduced from $14,000 to about $7,000 in the early 1930s as members could not pledge at the level they had during the prosperous 1920s. While there is no

evidence that the church would shut down, the situation was serious enough that in 1934, an outside consultant, Charles R. Joy, was brought in to conduct a survey on the state of the church and make recommendations for improving its condition. In his report, Joy noted with satisfaction that even though Louisville was a very "orthodox" city, First Unitarian's membership growth had kept pace with the city's growth, even during the worst years of the depression, rising from 287 in 1931 to 309 in 1933. Some of Joy's suggestions were cosmetic; to relieve the dark, drab appearance of the sanctuary, which was also too large for the number of people attending services, he suggested putting in a divider, using brighter colors for the next paint job, and making greater use of flowers, even if they had to be artificial ones. Joy recommended that Seebode wear his colorful Meadville hood over his somber black robe, and that the "rather horrible" windows be replace with leaded or cathedral glass, paid for, perhaps, with memorial gifts. The window behind the pulpit was "useless," he thought, and should be covered with something decorative and symbolic.

Joy also recommended the addition of men to the choir and, to save money, the elimination of paid soloists, who were not part of the common worship spirit. He also suggested that Seebode vary the kinds of services he offered, and that the auxiliary organizations, especially the Layman's League, be "reinvigorated." Joy was nothing if not thorough in his work, and his twenty-page report gives us a good picture of the state of the church in the mid-1930s. We do not know to what degree the congregation acted on Joy's recommendations, but in January 1936, Seebode brought former minister Maxwell Savage back to Louisville for a week-long "institute of liberal religion," open to the public. This outreach effort, sponsored by the Layman's League, featured evening lectures by Savage, as well as a Sunday morning service.

The January 1937 Ohio River flood did not spare the church, and water invaded the first floor to a depth of about 30 inches. A $5,000 interest-free loan from the AUA helped the congregation bear the costs of cleanup and repair, which amounted to more than $8,700. Restoring the public areas of church to their pre-flood state took about seven months and was celebrated with a Service of Dedication on October 24, 1937. Other flood-related damage was repaired over the next ten or fifteen years as money was available.

> In November 1938, a new minister, Carl B. Bihldorff, was installed in a service featuring former minister Dilworth Lupton, who spoke on "Religion—Moral, Mental and Mystical." Another former minister, Lon Ray Call, was present and participated in the installation, giving the charge to the new minister and his congregation. Bihldorff, a graduate of Brown University and the Yale Divinity School, came to Louisville from a church in Duxbury, Massachusetts, and delighted the congregation by getting married in the church not long after his arrival. His sermons, described by one church member as "deep and eloquent," did not flinch from commentary on controversial issues of the day. One of his favorite targets was the Roman Catholic Church, which he believed was hostile to the concept of democracy. He also defended the *Courier-Journal's* right to run an advertisement for birth control after the local diocese had attacked the newspaper.

World War II came to the United States in December 1941, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and while the orders of service during the war years did not list those church members serving on active duty, the congregation did what it could to support the war effort. The Women's Alliance launched a scrap copper drive, and the Channing Club, the organization

of younger adults in the church, hosted open houses on Sundays for servicemen stationed at Fort Knox that included supper and an evening of "informal entertainment."

In the spring of 1942, Bihldorff accepted a call to a church in Brookline, Massachusetts, where he would stay for 33 years, and Augustus P. Reccord served as acting minister for several months before Maynard Van Dyke was installed as the new minister in early 1943. By this time, gas rationing had begun in Louisville, and orders of service implored members to "try to save enough gas for church-going on Sunday." Van Dyke came from the Northside Unitarian Church in Pittsburgh, and although he arrived in an atmosphere of much enthusiasm, his short ministry at First Unitarian was troubled and deeply divisive. Within fifteen months of his arrival, a significant number of members objected to what they considered his "abnormal and objectionable interest in sex," especially with respect to young women in the congregation, his use of liquor during business hours and at public functions, and his self-centeredness. On the other hand, many other members believed strongly that the allegations against Van Dyke were unfounded and continued to be very supportive of him. The anti-Van Dyke faction brought the matter to the 1944 annual congregational meeting in May and demanded his immediate dismissal, rather than accept Van Dyke's offer to resign effective August 31. Van Dyke's supporters rose to his defense at the meeting, and no action was taken on the fate of the beleaguered minister. Later, a settlement was reached that allowed Van Dyke to continue as minister through the 1944-1945 church year, after which he left. However, the affair was damaging to the congregation, and several families departed for more peaceful church pastures.

First Unitarian was served by an interim minister, William Safford Brown, during the 1945-1946 church year, and in the fall of 1946, Robert Terry Weston became the new permanent minister. Born in Slayton, Minnesota, in 1898, Weston graduated from Harvard Divinity School

in 1919, after service in World War I, was ordained a Unitarian minister in 1929, serving churches in New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts and as a navy chaplain in World War II. He was minister of First Unitarian for fourteen years, the longest since John Healy Heywood, and during his important tenure, the church underwent some major changes. Under Weston, the church became more secular and less Christian-oriented; the Lord's Prayer was dropped from Sunday services, and the name of Jesus was eliminated from the formal statement of mission and purpose. Although somewhat controversial, these moves recognized that more agnostics and atheists were coming to church. Weston brought more publicity to the church with his willingness to work with other ministers on community projects, with his regular appearances on WHAS radio's "The Moral Side of the News," a local radio (and later television) program begun in 1952 by church member Dorcas Ruthenberg, in which he was a member of a panel of clergymen discussing current events from varying points of view. In addition, he began running small advertisements in the *Courier-Journal*, each with a short paragraph explaining some tenet of Unitarianism. Members of the children's choir were pictured on the cover of the March 28, 1948, *Courier-Journal Magazine*. Weston's wife, Ruth, took an active role in church and community affairs and set the tone for later wives, such as Jeanne Reed and Joan Beal. Weston also worked actively with other ministers in the center city area; for example, First Unitarian participated in "Brotherhood Month" every February, during which pulpit exchanges and social activities were highlighted. The effort to bring about interfaith harmony was seen in 1956, when a stained glass window was installed to honor Rabbi Joseph Rauch of the nearby Adath Israel Temple, who had worked very closely with Weston on interfaith issues, and was a fellow

panelist on "The Moral Side of the News." It was the first time in Louisville that a window placed in a church honored the spiritual leader of another religion.

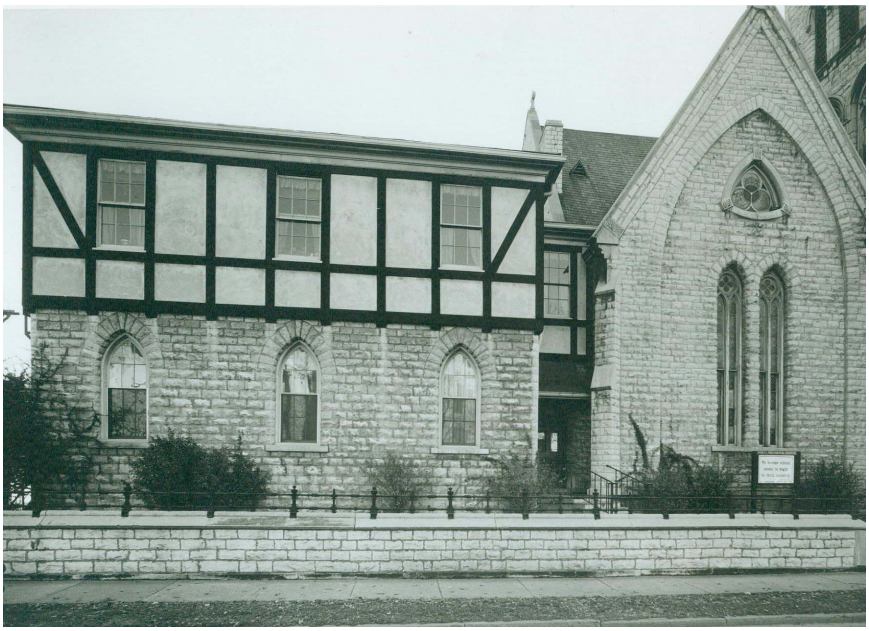
Among Weston's community involvements was an effort to bring about more racial diversity in Louisville's traditionally "white" churches, including First Unitarian. When the Westons first arrived in Louisville, the congregation still bore many of the traits that it had developed generations earlier. It was white, quite prosperous, and, true to Louisville's southern heritage, quite segregationist. This concerned Weston, who was aware of the beginnings of the civil rights movement after World War II in such ways as the desegregation of the armed services under President Harry S Truman and the integration of major league baseball in 1947, and he worked to make the congregation more sensitive to the African American community. In February 1950, Weston told members of a Jewish social fraternity, Pi Tau Pi, that he was "humiliated" that "no colored persons are welcomed into the churches of Louisville, including my own." Perhaps because of his role as a panel member on "The Moral Side of the News," the church began receiving a few African American visitors in the 1950s, and Ruth Weston personally welcomed them at the door. Carl and Anne Braden, nationally-known fighters for racial justice in the 1950s, were married in the church, and the church's first African American member, Maxine Whidbee, a sister of the noted singer Billy Eckstein, joined about 1956 and sang in the choir but moved to Pittsburgh less than a year later.

Although not a polished, eloquent speaker, Weston was thought of as intellectual and a good writer. Many of his sermons were published in booklet form, and there was an effort in the 1970s to publish a book of his collected writings that failed only because funding was not available. He was warm and personable, and absolutely useless at doing chores around the house, but he was a good father to his two sons and two nephews he and Ruth raised as foster

children. He was very interested in Unitarian outreach and during his time in Louisville, he was instrumental in starting fellowships in Lexington, Kentucky, and in Fairhope and Mobile, Alabama. His absences on these missions were often covered by assistant ministers, whom Weston employed after the early 1950s. Among them were John Isom and Donald Stout, who helped with pastoral duties, led informal summer services, and occasionally substituted for Weston on "The Moral Side of the News."

Shortly after the Westons' arrival, the congregation bought a house at 2315 Bonnycastle for use as a parsonage. Financed with the help of an AUA loan of $10,000, the Bonnycastle house remained the Weston's residence during their fourteen years in Louisville, but it was not as suitable for the younger ministers who followed Weston and was sold in the early 1960s. In 1968, the board of trustees helped facilitate the purchase of a house at 1806 Gresham for Robert Reed and his family and since that time, the minister's compensation package has included a substantial housing allowance.

A more important physical change was the expansion of the church in 1951 with the addition of what was called a "parish house" to provide much needed administrative and religious education space. Long-time member W. G. Munn had proposed the creation of a building needs committee in 1946, and the congregation approved a Rehabilitation Committee at the 1947 annual meeting. This committee studied the issue for two years and reported to the congregation in May 1949 that First Unitarian should remain in its present location and undertake to expand its church school



facilities through a building project at the east end of the church. The congregation approved the idea and a gift of $10,000 from the Conrad family was announced as a kick-off for further fund-raising. Architect and church member Ossian P. Ward drew up the preliminary plans, and Carl Berg, a landscape architect, was chosen to head the Building Committee. A Building Fund Committee was established in the fall of 1949, chaired by Gustave Breaux and Mrs. A. H. Bowman, and raised more than $40,000 in donations or pledges by May 1950. More than $55,000 was eventually collected. Construction began that month, and the Theophilus Conrad Parish House was dedicated on April 15, 1951. It included a two-story extension on the east side of the church, with administrative offices, a kitchen, and a "social hall" (named Breaux Hall for Breaux, who had worked harder than anyone else to see this project through) downstairs, and a number of classrooms and a chapel upstairs for the religious education programs.

The years after World War II marked the "baby boom" and the rapid growth of suburbs, made possible by general prosperity in the country that allowed most families to own an automobile. In Louisville, this growth occurred mainly in the east end of the city, extending past where the Watterson Expressway runs today. For First Unitarian, this signified the likelihood of continued growth, but at the Fourth and York location, despite the recent addition of the parish

house, there was still no room for the increasing number of babies, and too few rooms for Sunday School classes. Moreover, the political and social climate of the 1950s was conducive to a renewed interest in religion and attending church, and as with many churches of all denominations across the country, First Unitarian saw considerable growth in the decade, with an average of nearly fifty new members yearly. Church leaders, worried about the overall growth of the congregation as well as the longer distances many members of the congregation had to drive to come in from the newer areas in the east end, began thinking of a suburban Unitarian Church. At its annual meeting in 1956, the congregation approved the formation of a Community Unitarian Extension Committee, with Earle Fowler as its chair, which would look into the possibilities of creating a Unitarian presence in the suburbs, either through renting space in a school or an old house, or buying land and building a new church. The latter was the favored option.

After consulting with realtors, the committee reported in December 1956 that three sites could be recommended: one on Lime Kiln Lane near Route 42, one on about eleven acres on Old Brownsboro Road near Herr Lane, and one on Newburg Road. Some members thought expansion was too risky and expensive and that there was too much work yet to do at the downtown location, but at a congregational meeting, a resolution was passed authorizing the committee to move forward as soon as a capital fund drive had raised at least 15 percent of the estimated purchase price.

The capital fund drive was successful, and First Unitarian bought the 11-acre plot of land off Brownsboro Road for its "suburban chapel." Weston conducted services in the existing old farmhouse on the property for the fifty families that relocated their church homes to the east end of the city. In 1960, those attending the Brownsboro Road church decided to form their own

congregation, and First Unitarian donated the property it had purchased to them. Late in 1960, the new congregation decided to build a church as part of a long-range development program. This church was dedicated in December 1964, and Thomas Jefferson Unitarian Church became the newest Unitarian church in Louisville.

During the Weston years, the old traditional auxiliary organizations began to decline in membership and importance within the church community. This was brought about by two factors. First, the church was becoming more and more bureaucratic, with additional committees taking the time and energy of key members, both men and women. Secondly, more women were having babies or entering the work force, leaving them less free time to participate in the Women's Alliance. The Evening Alliance, formed in 1942, was designed especially for women who were working during the day but remained a much smaller organization than the original Women's Alliance, which came to be known as the Day Alliance. In 1947, for example, the Women's Alliance numbered 103 members, while the Evening Alliance had only 30. The Laymen's League, with 44 members in 1947, declined rapidly in the postwar years and disappeared altogether in the 1950s. A new organization, The Heywood Club, a more socially-oriented club for couples and singles, prospered for a number of years, but it too folded and was later replaced by the Couples Club, and even later, FUUFs (First Unitarian Universalist Families) as social groups within the congregation.

First Unitarian Church in 1949 in its urban setting. This photograph was taken from the northwest corner of Fourth and York Streets, showing traffic, rain, and part of a house that has since been demolished.

Chapter 8: Years of Activism and Change, 1960-1985

In February 1959, Philip Smith became assistant minister at First Unitarian. He and Bob Weston developed a close working relationship, and when Weston resigned to move to a church in Omaha, he recommended that Smith be hired as his replacement. The board of trustees decided to do this in lieu of a traditional search for a new minister, and Smith was installed October 8, 1960. A young minister with a wife and two young sons, Smith was a native of Bangor, Maine, and had earned degrees from Tufts University and Crane Theological School, and had been minister at Second Parish Unitarian Church in Marlboro, Massachusetts, before coming to Louisville. He had considerable training in psychoanalysis, and many of his sermons reflected this background. To some members, he was charismatic and a great speaker, and he related well with the young people in the church. But in the fall of 1962, he and his wife separated, and rumors abounded that he was planning to marry a University of Louisville student. Some church members urged him to resign and devote his time to straightening out his personal life, but the board felt that since he was undergoing marriage counseling, he could still work effectively in most aspects of his job. However, Smith did resign in February 1963 after he announced that he and his wife could not reconcile. The congregation met and accepted his resignation on February 24, 1963.

After a search, the congregation called David Brown to be its minister, and he was installed November 10, 1963. Born in California in 1924, Brown served in World War II, and earned a B.A. at Reed College and a B.D. at Starr King Seminary. As minister, Brown was

energetic and innovative. He initiated evening discussion groups held at members' homes, and introduced jazz music, which he loved, into many services. One service, conducted on May 3, 1964, was titled "The Men and Women of the Earth." It featured jazz selections by Kenneth Spring that warranted a *Courier-Journal* article. In the community, Brown was instrumental in the formation of the Allied Organization for Civil Rights and, later, in the Area Council of Race and Religion. Brown's sudden death from a cerebral hemorrhage in April 1967 at the age of 43 was a shock to the congregation; his memorial service on April 30 was highlighted by a jazz rendition of his favorite hymn, "River of My People."

By this time, Anne Miller had become the Religious Education Coordinator for First Unitarian. While early Unitarian religious education directors had borne the traditional title of Sunday School Superintendent, they were known as Directors of Religious Education (DRE) after World War II, and Dorothy Schmitt was probably the first to hold that title. She had come to work at the church about 1947 as office manager and RE director when her husband became ill, and after he died, she virtually lived at the church, running the RE program in what some members felt was an inflexible and overly structured manner, although in 1965, she worked with David Brown to initiate a two-hour RE program on Sunday mornings. But Brown recognized the need for change, and Schmitt was eased out in 1965 as a new RE director, Barbara Clapp, was hired. Her tenure was cut short when she and the board president formed a relationship and left town, and for a time, the RE Committee ran the program. When this proved not to work very well, Anne Miller went to Brown and offered her services. Hired for 15 hours per week, she took over the program shortly before Brown's death. At that point, she began working 30 hours

per week, 15 of which were as a parish assistant. After the hiring of Bob Reed, Miller, now a DRE, settled into the job on a 30 hour per week basis and served in that position until her retirement in 1990, effectively building up the program, developing an expertise in curriculum matters, and serving as an instructor and role model for RE directors throughout the Ohio Valley UU District.

In 1968, the country was deeply divided over the Vietnam War abroad and the civil rights movement at home. President Lyndon Johnson was discredited and would not seek re-election in November, and Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy were both assassinated. In January of that year, First Unitarian welcomed Bob Reed as its new minister. Reed was born in 1929 in Buffalo, New York, moved with his family to Easton, Pennsylvania, in 1939, and graduated from Lafayette College with the intention of becoming a Presbyterian minister. A developing sense of political liberalism and an interest in world affairs, however, led him to the Russian Institute at Columbia University and six years as a civilian employee with the Navy Department. By this time, he had married Jeanne, his high school sweetheart, and they lived in Arlington, Virginia. He read a sermon of the local Unitarian minister stressing the need for social action, and this helped direct him to Meadville Theological School. Ministerial service in Arlington, as well as Evanston and Bloomington, Illinois (where he conducted the funeral for former presidential candidate and U.N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson in 1965) preceded his move to Louisville. Reed came to Louisville because he sensed an "urgent need…to relate liberal religion to the problems of race relations, poverty, blight, and suburban sprawl in an urban setting," according to the Bloomington (IL) *Pantograph*.

From the beginning of his years in Louisville, Reed took a very active role in social issues. He became deeply involved in local community affairs by working with organizations such as the Neighborhood Development Council (NDC) and the HELP Office, helping needy people not only acquire material goods but also a greater sense of empowerment. While the congregation, under the leadership of member Ed Stone, a lawyer, had voted its opposition to the Vietnam War, and while David Brown was clearly anti-war, there was not much in the way of organization. Reed was active in counseling of young men about to be drafted into military service in Vietnam and in talking with troops home on leave. An anti-war organization headed by David Banks had an office in the church, and in 1970, the church gave the anti-war Muldraugh Coffee House space after it had been evicted from its location in Muldraugh, near Fort Knox. In addition, Reed did abortion counseling well before *Roe v Wade* made most abortions legal. His work was part of a national movement, the Clergy Consultation Service, that worked to arrange abortions when necessary, through an impressive pre-computerized network of Christian, Jewish, and Unitarian clergy. Finally, Reed led the congregation in adopting a pro-school busing position when that issue erupted in Louisville in the mid-1970s.

Some social action issues brought controversy to the congregation. In the early 1970s, when gays and lesbians faced discrimination at almost every turn, a gay church, the Metropolitan Community Church, asked permission to hold Sunday evening services at First Unitarian. Reed suggested they simply become Unitarians and join the church, but they did not care to do that. He said that the congregation would have to approve their use of the sanctuary, and asked the Board of Trustees to make a policy on this. The board asked Reed to make a recommendation, and he urged that the MCC be allowed to meet at the church. When this was brought to the congregation, there was considerable debate and a close vote to approve the recommendation,

not because MCC was a gay church but because it was a fundamentalist Christian church. At least one prominent church member asked to withdraw his pledge for the year, but the MCC did meet at the church for a number of years.

On the lighter side, the streaker incident marked a memorable moment in the church during the mid-1970s. Streaking, the practice of running nude through a public place, had become a somewhat popular fad at this time. At church, a new adult course, "About Your Sexuality," was offered to church members in the spring of 1974. The class ended in June, and during a service that month, at which the sermon topic was "The Fun of Being a Unitarian," three young streakers, two of whom had apparently been in the sexuality class, entered the sanctuary from behind the pulpit and dashed down the center aisle to the delight of some and the dismay of others in the congregation.

The Reed ministry also saw some significant changes to the physical setting of First Unitarian. In June 1968, a congregational meeting was called to discuss the purchase of an organ to replace the existing one that had been in service since 1912. A capital funds drive in 1961 had allowed purchase of the parking lot south of the church but had not yielded enough money to build a new education wing on the church, and the parking lot continued to serve as a source of modest annual income. While a new education facility had not been forgotten in 1968, interest in a new organ emanated from a $10,000 pledge by Elsie Land and additional funds from the Durand family bequest. A second congregational meeting in October 1968 resulted in the approval of the purchase of an organ for $35,000 plus an additional $5,000 to make the changes necessary to install the organ at the east end of the sanctuary. An Auditorium Design Committee worked with local architect Jasper Ward to create a set of recommendations for a more comprehensive renovation of the sanctuary, including such features as better acoustics and

lighting, an area of flexible seating, a stage area for dance performances, and a library space, all at a cost of between $60,000 and $80,000.

In June 1969, the congregation, by a close 36-32 vote, authorized the expenditure of between $55,000 and $70,000 on church alterations in connection with the new organ and other needs. But in September, the congregation reconsidered and rescinded its June decision as too extravagant from a financial standpoint. Plans were solicited for a more modest renovation, and by October, the board of trustees discussed four different plans. Time was an issue because the organ builder needed to know the exact location of the organ by January 1 if the instrument were to be installed during the summer of 1970. After more meetings and further discussion, the congregation met in December and approved a plan designed by member George Gibson that placed the organ on the east side, provided for some flexible seating and a raised area at the front of the sanctuary.

Meanwhile, in October 1968, the congregation had voted to accept the offer of organ builder Phares Steiner of Louisville to construct and install a mechanical tracker organ for $35,000. Once the decision was made on the sanctuary renovation, the old organ was removed (and sold to a church member for $350) and the installation of the Steiner organ was

completed in the fall of 1970, a few months behind schedule. The formal dedication of the organ was delayed so that it could be part of the celebration of the centennial of the church building in March 1971.

The new organ did not, of course, solve the continuing problem of religious education space, so when the house at 809 South Fourth Street, next door to the church, came on the market in 1978, the board of trustees took the steps necessary to purchase it for $42,500. The eclectic, neo-classical house was built in 1880 by a Dr. J. B. Marvin, who practiced medicine there for some years. At some later date, it fell out of the Marvin family's possession, may have seen service as a brothel, and, by 1968, was a badly run-down rooming house, a fate not uncommon for older houses of this type in the mid-twentieth century. A three-year capital funds drive raised more than $65,000, not counting $21,000 more in special gifts. These funds and a $30,000 Veatch loan from the UUA allowed the congregation to complete the purchase of the house and undertake the extensive renovations that were necessary. Much of the work was done by dedicated members of the congregation, and the result was a substantial increase in the space available for religious education and organizational meetings. Named the Heywood House in

honor of the great nineteenth-century minister, John Healy Heywood, the building was dedicated on March 16, 1980. And as a final touch, new Fourth Street entrance doors were installed in 1982 at a cost of $5,623.

The dedication of Heywood House coincided with the sesquicentennial of the church in Louisville. While no thorough updating of church history was undertaken for this event, Carol Sutton Whaley edited the publication of a book, *The Past and the Promise: Brief Histories of Unitarian Universalist Churches in the Ohio Valley District*, and Carol Tobe contributed attractive line drawings of each church. At a special service on May 1980, Olga Tafel, the oldest member of the church, unveiled a historical marker signifying the site of the first Unitarian Church in Louisville at the corner of Fifth Street and Muhammad Ali.

The congregation was honored in 1979 when long-time member Nell McGlothlin was chosen to serve a term on the national board of directors of the UUA. But her service to the denomination was overshadowed in the early 1980s by two controversial issues that tested the ability of the congregation to resolve conflict and arrive at decisions with which the great majority could concur. At the annual congregational meeting in May 1984, the idea of a Memorial Garden on the church grounds was finally approved. This idea had been under discussion for several years, and while most members liked the concept of such a garden, the details of its implementation brought forth many conflicting notions that involved everything from the placement and identification of cremains to their security to the responsibility for the costs associated with such a project.

A far more divisive issue dealt with the question of harboring one or more political refugees from El Salvador. In 1981, the administration of President Ronald Reagan had intervened in civil conflicts in both El Salvador and Nicaragua, and one of the results had been

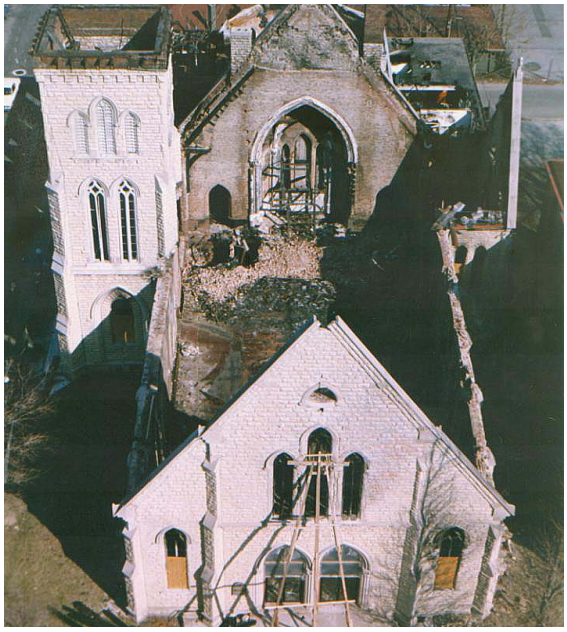
the creation of significant numbers of persons who were at risk of imprisonment, torture, or death at the hands of powerful political factions in these countries, especially El Salvador. Many of them had come illegally to the United States and were being sheltered by individuals and organizations who opposed the administration's policy of finding them and sending them back to Central America. This practice of sheltering refugees became known as the "sanctuary" movement. St. William Catholic Church in Louisville had become involved in the sanctuary movement, and many at First Unitarian wanted to follow suit. But others in the congregation were very uneasy about entering into something that was illegal and that involved what could become a very long-term commitment. In March 1983, a task force was appointed to investigate whether the church should give sanctuary to one or more Salvadorean refugees, and congregational meetings in November 1983 and January 1984 resulted in a decision not to grant sanctuary but to give public support to St. William.

During these years, the congregation had leveled off at some 300 members and 240 pledge units, placing it between a pastoral church, where most of the responsibility rests with the minister, and a program church, where a larger congregation collectively takes a more active role in aspects of church management. To try to move in one direction or the other, the congregation involved itself in a denominational program called Sharing In Growth that involved surveys, small discussion groups and other techniques designed to help the congregation better understand itself. While considerable time and energy were spent on Sharing In Growth, the membership level of the church did not significantly change.

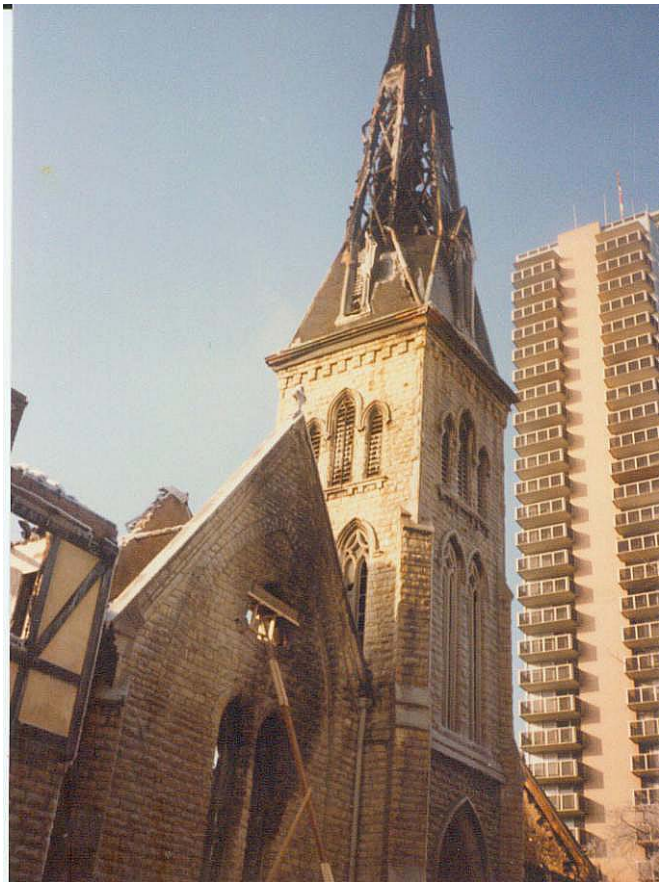
In early 1985, after seventeen years at First Unitarian, Bob Reed decided that it was time to move on. While he was disappointed by the failure of the congregation to grant sanctuary (which he had favored) and by what he perceived as the growing inability of the congregation to

take on major issues and resolve them smoothly, he was attracted by an opportunity to challenging administrative work at Plandome, a Unitarian institute on Long Island, and left for there in the spring. The board of trustees arranged for an interim minister, Virginia Perrin Knowles, to occupy the pulpit while a search committee sought a new permanent minister.

Chapter 9: Fire, Rebirth, and New Challenges, 1985-2006



Early in the morning of December 14, 1985, a spectacular fire destroyed the interior of First Unitarian Church. The roof collapsed into the sanctuary, and debris almost completely filled the basement. The fire started about 3:00 am, the first alarm was called in at 3:27, and the blaze was under control by 5:00. It was a bitter cold night, and that added to the firefighters' difficulty. One fireman was injured by some falling debris, but most observers agreed that the disaster could have been far worse. Steve Smeltzer, the building custodian, and his family escaped from their apartment in the Heywood House, which did not catch fire. Continuing fear that the stone walls would collapse led to the closing of York Street between Third and Fourth Streets until a supporting structure had been erected. Eventually the outer walls of the church were deemed to be structurally sound enough so that they did not have to be pulled down. The cause of the fire was never discovered, but suspicion centered on the old boiler in the basement.



Sunday services were moved to Spalding University Center, and the Christmas Eve Vespers service was held at Calvary Episcopal Church, just down Fourth Street. Within a short time, the congregation selected a Process Committee to determine how to go about recovering from the fire and decided, with very little dissent, to rebuild at the same location and continue to fulfill its social responsibility to the downtown neighborhoods. This committee contacted other churches that had suffered similar calamities to learn of their experiences. In late April, the congregation elected a Building Committee, chaired by Claudia Runge, and one of that committee's first actions was to bring in Dr. Edwin C. Lynn, an architect and a Unitarian minister from Ipswitch, Massachusetts, as a consultant. At a congregational meeting on May 8, Lynn suggested various alternatives such as keeping only the streetside walls and moving the main entrance of the church from Fourth Street to the York Street side. Others at the meeting suggested incorporating Heywood House into the new church design. Lynn was particularly helpful in assisting the building committee with charting its course and identifying its priorities. During the summer, the committee interviewed and saw presentations from a number of selected architectural firms, and ultimately chose the Louisville firm of Grossman Chapman Kingsley, which had substantial experience in designing churches in the area and was very interested in trying to accommodate

the desires of the congregation. The committee spent nearly a year discussing preliminary plans and models before the congregation was asked to approved a recommended design. Then the committee spent another several months dealing with estimates from builders, finally choosing Weir Construction, a firm that proved to be very accessible and dependable Weir did work of good quality and stayed within the budget, although some painful decisions had to be made along the way. The actual construction took about nine months in 1988 and early 1989 and went smoothly, although a surveying error left an uneven second floor that necessitated a short ramp.

In the rebuilt church, the old roof was replaced by a flatter roof with clerestory windows that allowed much more light into the sanctuary, as the photo above shows. The orientation of the sanctuary was shifted to the west (Fourth Street) end because of the decision to place a folding wall to separate the sanctuary from the social hall, yet allow for the two spaces to be made into one large space, for the sake of flexibility. The church was linked to Heywood House

by a library that was constructed in the space between the two, and a second floor at the east end of the church, also linked with the second floor of Heywood House, provided Sunday School rooms, a DRE Office, and a choir practice room. Church administrative offices were located in what had been the rear of the first floor of Heywood House, and a new main entrance was situated at the southeast corner of the building, with access from Library Lane, an existing alley that runs between Third and Fourth Streets.

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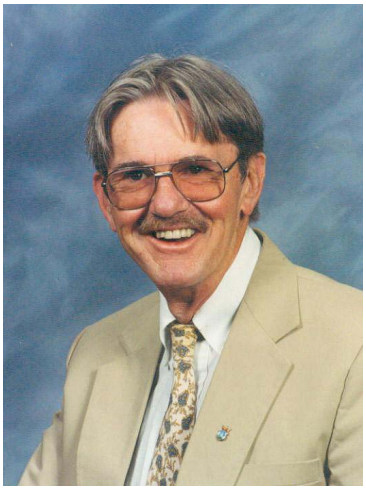
The rebuilding was paid for with about $2 million from insurance on the old building and another $400,000 from a capital funds pledge drive. Financing was made more complicated by the collapse of the bond market in 1987, which cost the church about $225,000. The capital funds drive, however, was successful and included $178,000 from the Mary and Barry Bingham,

Sr. Foundation, which paid for the outdoor courtyard behind the church, and a substantial donation from the Grosscurth family, which paid for the church lighting, and another donation from Armin Willig for the construction of a new minimalist steel steeple to replace the traditional one that had not survived the fire. At the end, the money left over was sufficient to purchase a Ewing Fahey sculpture for the courtyard and to pay for stained glass window designs by Julia Wyrick. Various members of the congregation donated additional money for the fabrication of these windows by Peter Eichhorn for the sanctuary, where they remain as memorial windows.



In the wake of the fire, the congregation had called Richard Beal as its new permanent minister, beginning in September 1986. Beal, a graduate of Goddard College and Harvard Divinity School, had been minister of two small congregations in Maine, was not too interested in Louisville at first because he saw no room for change and innovation at the church. But the fire changed that situation, and Beal saw the rebuilding process as an attractive challenge. He worked closely with the board and building committee in the rebuilding process. Interested in race relations, Beal recommended to the board that it arrange for First Unitarian to lease the Plymouth Congregational Church at 41st and Herman Streets in Louisville's heavily African American west side. The lease, which ran from April 1987 to April 1989 cost $10,000, plus $1,000 for minor maintenance. The move to the west end did not please everyone in the church, and a few

members never attended services there. Most, however, approved of the move and pitched in to clean, patch, and paint the Plymouth Church, which was not in very good condition. The two congregations occasionally had joint services and shared a viewing of the documentary history of the civil rights movement, *Eyes on the Prize*.

The first service in the new church was held Easter Sunday 1989, with a formal dedication service conducted on September 24. Two institutional changes brought about by the fire were the creation of an Endowment Committee, with income from endowments to be used for maintenance and small capital purchases and an Art and Architecture Committee to decide on suitable aesthetic amenities for the church and grounds. The board of trustees also voted to host the 1990 Fall District Conference at the church in order to show it off to a wider Unitarian community and to signify the congregation's recovery from the fire. Whether or not the fire wrought fundamental changes in the congregation is a question that many have asked, but given the fact that a new minister arrived less than a year after the fire, it is a difficult question to answer. What is clear is that the fire and its immediate aftermath brought the members of the congregation closer together, brought some lapsed members back to the church, and attracted some highly committed new members.

Richard Beal led the church through the 1990s, years of relative calm after the turmoil of the sanctuary issue, fire, and rebuilding of the preceding decade. In 1990, DRE Anne Miller retired after more than 25 years of service to the youth of the church and was replaced by Abby Henry (1990-1992) and Kim Johnson (1992-1995), both young educators in transitional states of their careers. They were succeeded by Cathy Leary, a seminary student

who finished her studies in 1997 and was ordained a Unitarian minister in 1998. The board then appointed her associate minister and DRE, a position she held until 2000. In late 1993, the board terminated music director Terry Borne's employment after irreconcilable problems developed over such issues as practice time in the church and his reputed insensitivity toward visitors to the church and church members. He was replaced by a succession of music directors and instrumentalists, including Frank Richmond, Jim Oxyer, Cheryl Black, Tim Glasscock, Michael Megahan, Marian Ziebell, Rebecca Johnson, and Will Plummer..

Beal was also instrumental in the advancement of the Partner Church program and First Unitarian's own involvement in it. The program, which brings together a North American congregation with one in the Transylvania region of Romania, is an attempt to link American Unitarianism with its sixteenth-century roots, as well as a means of providing financial support to small, impoverished congregations in a relatively poor European nation. Beal used part of a sabbatical leave in the spring of 1992 to visit First Unitarian's partner church in Nagyenyed, Romania, and later in the 1990s, led two groups of members on tours to Nagyenyed and the surrounding area. He also helped found and served as president of the Partner Church Council for two years, through which he did much to promote the program within the denomination.

Closer to home, Beal initiated more traditional summer services to place the church on a year-around schedule and continued the involvement of the church in social action programs, although with less of a public face than his predecessors. A pagan group, CUUPS, formed and integrated into the life of the church with little controversy, as did a number of gay, lesbian, and transgendered members and friends who formed a group known as Interweave that was important in the church's becoming a "Welcoming Congregation" in 1996. In the community, Beal and members of the church were active in the Fairness Campaign to convince the city

government to pass an ordinance forbidding discrimination against gays and lesbians, and Beal conducted many gay and lesbian weddings in the church. Beal was also involved with the HELP Office and the Interdenominational Ministers' Coalition, in which he was one of only two white ministers. Although the move to the west end did not yield any lasting results in making the church more racially diverse, Beal organized the first local Kwanzaa celebration in a predominantly white church, served on the NAACP board, helped lead a study of the state of desegregation in Louisville, and staged a public protest in front of the all-white Pendennis Club in downtown Louisville. Members of the church, spearheaded by Janet Rink, also did volunteer work at Tingley House, a haven for impoverished single mothers and their children, Habitat for Humanity, and the Center for Women and Families.

Yet there remained the problem of a flat membership that no locally-devised strategy or denominational program, such as Decisions for Growth, was able to alleviate. As the decade wore on, financial strains became more severe, with a number of disappointing canvass results. Innovative fund-raising projects helped relieve the squeeze somewhat. Beal suggested holding an annual holiday Food Fair, a descendant of the old bazaars organized by the Women's Alliance nearly a century earlier, as a major fund-raising event, and this continued for several years. Members made a wide variety of holiday foods and crafts and sold them to the public on a Saturday in December, bringing in several thousand dollars each year. But it was very labor-intensive and by the end of the decade, became too much for willing members to take on. The Service Auction, a tradition that had begun with merchandise auctions in the 1970s, earned increasing amounts of money in the 1990s with the leadership of the Miller and Taylor families. But it was hard to conceal the fact that while the proceeds from these extra fund-raising efforts

had originally been used for special purchases, they were now a vital part of the general church budget.

Changing times brought changes to the church structure. The Layman's League and the Evening Alliance had long been gone, but the Women's Alliance struggled on with an increasingly elderly membership of only 18 or 20 in the early 1990s. Mary Gilbert and Emilie Louise Clinkenbeard were effectively president and treasurer for life, and they were both nearly 90 when, in 1995, they officially disbanded the Women's Alliance, one year short of the centennial of its founding. As the Women's Alliance declined, a more informal group of mostly younger women, affiliated with the UUWF (Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation) met at church, held annual retreats at Hopscotch House, a women's center in eastern Jefferson County, and did some significant community building within the congregation. These women continue to meet and in 2005 resurrected the Women's Alliance name. Youth and young adult groups, such as the Parker Club and the Channing Club, no longer existed, nor did the Couples' Club. A group of mostly retired members, the Brownbaggers, did meet once a month for lunch and a program, and a small group of retired men, ROMEOs (Retired Old Men Eating Out), did just that one day a month. High school and junior high school youth bonded with periodic events, such as sleepovers, cooking an Easter pancake breakfast for the congregation, and, for a time, operating a haunted house in the church basement at Halloween. But the extensive structure of specialized social organizations had, by the end of the 1990s, fallen victim to the increasingly hectic pace of American life.

The church year of 2000-2001 saw the resignation of Associate Minister Cathy Leary and the retirement of long-time office manager Marge Warden, both key figures in the administration of the church. Leary was succeeded by the capable Lisa Willner, a church member, but

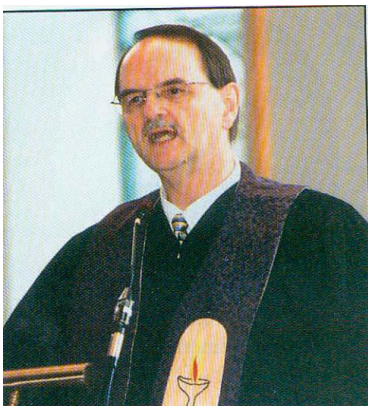
replacing Warden proved to be a daunting task, with several individuals occupying her post during the succeeding years. In 2001, a new position, Shared Ministry Coordinator, was created. The coordinator's job is to find church members willing to volunteer at the church and to help other members of the church staff as needed. Laura Jennings was the first to hold this half-time position, but she left in 2002 to pursue graduate studies at the University of Illinois. She was succeeded by Barbara Kearley (2002-2004) and Linda Givens, the present coordinator.

If the congregation at the beginning of the twentieth century was composed of all-white, upper middle class, socially conservative Christian families who lived within a two-mile radius from the church, the congregation a century later was radically different in almost every way. While the church directory lists a slightly higher number of members and friends, including children than the 1902 parish register, far fewer are economically well-to-do or Christian Unitarians. There is greater racial and ethnic diversity, and our number now includes a significant percentage of gays and lesbians. More than 20 percent live in southern Indiana, and relatively few live within a two-mile radius of the church. Rather than officers in businesses or manufacturing concerns, our members now tend to be students, teachers, social workers, or retired.

In the spring of 2001, Richard Beal announced his resignation after 15 years in the pulpit. According to Beal, his resignation was prompted by a sense that he had been at First Unitarian long enough and that neither he nor the church was growing. An interim minister, David Parke, was hired for the 2001-2002 church year while a search for a permanent minister proceeded.

The church was saddened during the 2001-02 church year by the death of Jackey Dorsett, the church's building supervisor. After many years of treatment and several hospitalizations, Jackey lost her battle with severe depression and ended her life by suicide in April 2002.

The work of the 2001-2002 Search Committee, chaired by Claudia Runge, led to the calling of Norbert (Norm) Stewart as the church's new minister. He came from a church in Vancouver, British Columbia, and was hired in part for his administrative and financial background.



In the final year of Beal's ministry, a new and highly controversial issue arose that has continued to dominate congregational discussion to the time of this writing. This is polyamory, whose adherents believe that it is possible for a person to have loving, committed, and intimate relationships with more than one other individual. Part of a national group called Unitarians United for Polyamory Awareness (UUPA), First Unitarian's polyamorists asked for recognition as a special interest group of the church, with the privilege of advertising their meetings and events from the pulpit and in the church newsletter, *Steepletalk*. Some members of the congregation strongly supported this group's aspirations to become an official part of the church community, while others fiercely opposed granting polyamory that status, citing their opinion of its questionable morality and the damage that its identification with the church would do to the church's image in the community. Although a compromise was reached that allowed the group to meet at the church but not publicize its activities in written or electronic church publications, the issue was as divisive as any the church had known for years, causing some families to leave the church and others to

reduce their financial commitment to the church. This served only to worsen the deteriorating financial condition of the church.

The continuing financial problems and other divisive issues contributed to Norm Stewart's resignation as minister in June 2006. An interim minister, Elizabeth Scheuerman, will occupy the pulpit in the 2006-2007 church year.

As the church embarked on the many activities of its 175th anniversary program, however, some of the more challenging issues seemed to recede into the shadows, and a new sense of commitment and enthusiasm arose. An all-church picnic in July 2005, a family dance in October, a special ceremony commemorating the occasion when Susan B. Anthony spoke at the church, the revival of the holiday food fair (renamed Yuletide Fare), and the collaborative making of an anniversary quilt were some of the events that served to create a more positive attitude among many members and friends and to inspire them to look more hopefully toward the next 175 years.

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TIMELINE:
IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

1817-1827 Unitarian Horace Holley is president of Transylvania University, Lexington,
1825 American Unitarian Association (AUA) formed in Boston
1829 Unitarian John Pierpont, an AUA founder, preaches in Louisville and helps form a congregation
1830 (July 3) First Unitarian Society formed in Louisville
1832 (May 27) Dedication of Unitarian church at Fifth and Walnut
1832-1833 Ministry of George Chapman (1810-1834)
1833-1839 Ministry of James Freeman Clarke (1810-1888)
1840 Universalists buy and repair Methodist church on Chapel Street near Market
1840-1880 Ministry of John Healy Heywood (1818-1902)
1843 Universalists build church at 832 W. Market Street
1843-1849 Ministry of Enoch M. Pingree (1816-1849) at Universalist Church
1852 First Unitarian Church participates in inaugural meeting of Western Association
1852 First Unitarian Church expands building at Fifth and Walnut to add 32 more pews
1856 Universalist minister Theodore Clapp moves to Louisville
1856 Heywood becomes Superintendent of Schools in Louisville
1864-1865 Heywood serves on U.S. Sanitary Commission in Louisville during Civil War
1865 First Unitarian Church establishes Widows' and Orphans' Home
1869 Universalists suggest merger with Unitarians in new church to be called Church Of the Messiah
1871 (Jan. 16) New Church of the Messiah, at fourth and York, is dedicated
1871 (Dec. 3) Fire destroys interior of Church of the Messiah
1872 (Dec.) Rebuilt church is dedicated
1880-1883 Ministry of C.J.K. Jones
1883-1884 Ministry of John B. Green (1833-1905)
1884-1898 Ministry of C.J.K. Jones
1895 (Jan. 12) Susan B. Anthony and Carrie Chapman Catt speak on suffrage at church
1898-1900 Ministry of Arthur W. Littlefield (1859-1928)
1900-1902 Ministry of Frederick V. Hawley (1862-1924)
1903-1909 Ministry of William H. Ramsey (1856-1917)
1910-1916 Ministry of Maxwell Savage (1876-1948)
1916-1919 Ministry of Dilworth Lupton (1883-1972)
1918 Name of church changed legally back to First Unitarian Church
1919-1923 Ministry of R. Ernest Akin (1889-1969)
1923-1930 Ministry of Lon R. Call (1894-1985)
1930-1937 Ministry of Richard W. F. Seebode (1904-1983)
1938-1941 Ministry of Carl B. Bihldorff (1908-1990)
1942-1945 Ministry of Maynard Van Dyke (1903-1964)
1946-1960 Ministry of Robert T. Weston (1898-1988)
1951 Theophilus Conrad Parish House dedicated

1952-1960	Weston participates in radio show, “The Moral Side of the News” on WHAS
1957	First Unitarian Church purchases land for a suburban branch that later becomes Thomas Jefferson Unitarian Church
1961	Unitarians and Universalists merge nationally
1961-1963	Ministry of Philip Smith (1930?-)
1963-1967	Ministry of David Brown (1924-1967)
1968-1985	Ministry of Robert Reed (1929-)
1971	Installation of new tracker organ and renovation of sanctuary
1979	Acquisition of Heywood House just south of the church
1985 (Dec. 14)	Fire destroys church, leaving only exterior walls standing
1986-2001	Ministry of Richard Beal (1944-)
1987-1989	Congregation meets at Plymouth Church
1989 (Mar. 26)	Rebuilt church is dedicated
2002-2006	Ministry of Norm Stewart (1946-)

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Those interested in pursuing the history of the First Unitarian Church further should start at the Filson Historical Society, which holds a collection of church papers taken to the society a few years before the 1985 fire that destroyed many other church records. The archives at the church is useful for post-1985 organizational records: annual reports, board of trustees minutes and other committee materials, church directories, church newsletters, orders of service, newspaper clippings, and photographs.

The first published church history is probably that by John Heywood, written for the *Memorial History of Louisville* (1896). In addition, the 1930 centennial history, *An Historical Sketch: First Unitarian Church*, compiled by Edith Fosidck Bodley and Gustave Breaux, is helpful. Later histories, published in 1955, 1971, and 1980, are quite brief and only skim the surface of our church history. Carol Tobe, a church member, wrote the entry on the church for the *Encyclopedia of Louisville* (2001). That book also contains references to some other prominent Unitarians but, surprisingly, not to John Healy Heywood, our most notable and longest-serving minister.

Much of the history of our church in its earliest years is found in articles published in *The Western Messenger*, the journal for Unitarians in the region. Our minister, James Freeman Clarke, edited the journal from 1835 to 1839. Copies of all *Western Messenger* articles quoted in this history are on file in the archives at the church.

Newspapers in Louisville, including the *Courier-Journal* and *Times*, reported on events related to the church, but there is no comprehensive index to these papers, making their use more difficult. .Information on some, but not all, of the ministers of First Unitarian Church can be found through the Unitarian Universalist Association's archives in Boston.

Two denominational histories include brief synopses of Louisville church history. These are *Freedom Moves West: A History of the Western Unitarian Conference 1852-1952* by Charles H. Lyttle (Boston, Beacon Press, 1952) and *The Larger Hope, vol. 1, The First Century of the Universalist Church in America, 1770-1870* by Russell E. Miller (Boston, UUA, 1979). UU minister David A. Johnson published an article "Beginnings of Universalism in Louisville" in *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, Vol. 43, 1969.

Two nineteenth century texts provide insight into the lives of early ministers. These are *Life and Writings of Rev. Enoch M. Pingree* by Rev. Henry Jewell (Cincinnati: Longley & Brother, 1850) and *James Freeman Clarke: Autobiography, Diary and Correspondence,* edited by Edward Everett Hale. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1891).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

John Findling has been a member of First Unitarian Church since 1971 and has twice been president of the Board of Trustees. He earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of Texas and is a professor emeritus of history at Indiana University Southeast. He has published widely in the areas of world's fairs and expositions and the modern Olympic movement.….

Jennifer Lavery joined First Unitarian Church in 1996. She holds an M. Div. from the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and an M.A. in feminist theology from Vanderbilt. Jen has twice taught year-long history classes at First Unitarian Church, led summer worship series for four summers between 1997 and 2002, and worked for 20 months from 2001-2003 as the interim Church Administrator. She has served on the Celebration of Life Committee and the Church Council.

While the writers cheerfully collaborated on the whole of this project, Jen's special interest and research was on the era from 1830-1900 and John's from the turn of the twentieth century to the present..