150 YEARS OF HISTORY
ROOTS AND BRANCHES
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

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1866-2016
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Every Sunday when we light our chalice to start our worship service, we do so surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Among them are our founders, who 150 years ago set out to gather a Unitarian congregation in Wilmington. And so they did! Ever since, people of liberal faith have come together to worship, to care for each other, to learn from each other, and to advocate for progressive ethical and social principles. We who are privileged to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington full well that this thriving congregation is a gift from those who came before. History is written and read in gratitude for that gift. We also know full well that someday in the future this gathered congregation will look back at us in gratitude for what we have passed on. So let us celebrate both in gratitude for what we have received and in hope for what future generations will receive as our legacy.

Rev. Roberta Finkelstein, Developmental Minister, April 2016
SECTION ONE

Laying the Foundation

The church’s earliest leaders, both lay and clergy, laid the foundation for the practices and traditions and rhythms of congregational life that followed. Section One looks back at the people and phenomena early in the story and provides the context for First UU life in 2016.

Preface

Precursors of Unitarianism lie in 16th century Europe with the Protestant Revolution. Rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity, early proponents considered God a unified being, a unit, thus prompting the eventual label – Unitarian. Unitarianism made its first appearance, if not in name at least in belief in North America in the early 18th century. 1

When the Puritans arrived in North America in the 17th century, their leaders required each town “to establish a congregationally independent church that followed Calvinist doctrines,” tenets that allowed no religious choice. By the 1750s, however, believers whose faith embraced free will and a loving God found themselves opposing orthodox Puritan belief in “humanity’s eternal bondage to sin.” 2 As the 19th century dawned, many New England congregational churches wrestled with the doctrines of sin and salvation and, in particular, the Trinity.

Harvard, founded in 1636, opened the Divinity School in 1816, the country’s first non-denominational seminary. It became the primary training ground for Unitarian clergy who served congregations throughout Massachusetts and in nearby states. William Ellery Channing’s 1819 sermon, “Unitarian Christianity,” delivered at an ordination service in Baltimore, was key, articulating Unitarian belief and liberal religious practice. 3 In 1825, denomination leaders established the American Unitarian Association (AUA) in Boston.

This atmosphere of religious restlessness was the context, just after the end of the Civil War, in which a group of determined individuals established a Unitarian church in Wilmington.

Founders

In 1865, Wilmington’s population was approximately 23,000. The 1860 federal census reported 21,258 Wilmingtonians and by 1870 enumeration, the number had climbed to 30,841. 4 From the first country-wide enumeration, done in 1790, until 1930, each successive census reported an increase in population for the city. The 1865 estimate is based on the rate at which the city grew between 1840 and 1880.

The city had a total of 27 churches: three Baptist, six Episcopal, five Methodist, three Presbyterian, two Roman Catholic, one Swedenborgian, five identified only as “African,” and two Quaker meetings. 5 But among the city’s 23,000 people, a group of citizens found this range of faith options insufficient. In November 1865, Charles P. and Sarah Bent, Thomas Y. de Normandie, and Edmund Quincy Sewall, Jr. initiated a series of conversations with like-minded people. Their common interests led them to seek recognition for a Unitarian congregation in Delaware. 6

In February 1866, seventeen individuals signed a letter to the American Unitarian Association calling the attention of the organization to Wilmington as a place where “missionary labor in the interest of Unitarian Christianity” might bear fruit in the form of a Unitarian church. 7 These efforts elicited a positive response and
on 24 June 1866, a group of 61 aspiring congregants signed the constitution and bylaws establishing the First Unitarian Society of Wilmington and expressing the hope that “grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with us.”

Of these 61 signatories, 44 percent came to Delaware from elsewhere, many from New England, where Unitarianism first established a foothold in the seventeenth century. Several of the New Englanders had deep Unitarian roots. At least four of the founding families could claim family members who were Unitarian clergy. Edmund Quincy Sewall, Jr. moved to the Mid Atlantic from Massachusetts. He was the son of a well-known Unitarian minister. Henry David Thoreau described the elder Sewall as “an old-line conservative Unitarian clergyman who was actively opposed to the radicalism of Emerson and his friends.” The Rev. Sewall was apparently not an easy minister to accommodate. He served the church in Barnstable, Massachusetts where he was ordained in 1819; the church dismissed him in 1822. The Unitarian church of Amherst, Massachusetts installed him as its first minister in January 1825 and dismissed him the following year.

Brothers Charles and George Bent were sons of Adam Bent, who had helped establish the Hawes Congregational (subsequently Unitarian) Church in South Boston and who served that congregation as a deacon. Thomas Y. de Normandie, born in Pennsylvania and son of a doctor, had three brothers who were Unitarian ministers. Courtland Y. de Normandie preached at the Wilmington congregation's first service in 1866. He returned to Wilmington to offer the invocation at the dedication of its first church building in March 1868 and his brother, the Rev. James de Normandie, also participated, offering the benediction. In addition, Eugene de Normandie also served Unitarian congregations as a minister. All three served Massachusetts Unitarian churches.

But why exactly did these Unitarians come to Wilmington in the first place? Their close ties to New England gave way to business forces brought on by technological advances in transportation. The flourishing network of railroads along the east coast engaged the attention and services of several founding members.

The 1830s witnessed substantial railroad formation in Delaware, beginning with the Baltimore & Port Deposit line in 1832. By 1838, company formation, merger, and reorganization produced a continuous line connecting Philadelphia and Baltimore, but it was a line run by three different companies. In February 1838, the three merged into the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad and among the founding members of the First Unitarian Society were seven individuals tied in one way or another to railroad operations. If one considers that there were approximately 28 actively employed men among the 61 founding members, then it is noteworthy that the seven railroad men constituted 25 percent of the church’s working males. Samuel Morse Felton was president of the PW&B from 1851 to 1856 and then he moved on to be president of the Delaware Railroad, which was leased by the PW&B. When Felton left the PW&B, Isaac Hinckley moved into the president’s chair and served until his death in 1888. Hinckley simultaneously participated in the management of a number of other subsidiary railroads.

In addition to two railroad presidents, there were five other men among the church founders who worked in some job linked to rail services. Nathaniel Gookin was the depot master for Wilmington’s PW&B station.
and William H. Jamar was the paymaster at the depot. Edmund Q. Sewall, Jr., was a Harvard-trained civil engineer working for the Delaware Railroad as superintendent, an assignment that followed several years of engineering work on actual railroad construction projects elsewhere. George W. Perry was a master railroad mechanic, so skilled a craftsman that in 1872 he received a patent for an innovation to improve the ventilation systems for railway passenger cars.\(^{18}\) George E. Bent worked for the PW&B Railroad with his brother-in-law, Samuel Morse Felton.

The liberal religion that Unitarianism offered attracted not only New Englanders with a Unitarian background, but also a number of Delawareans who became part of the congregation in its earliest days. Many of these new Unitarians were part of long-established local families and the ties to the Wilmington community grew stronger over time as prominent names like Lea, Pusey, and Pyle became associated with the church. There is only sparse denominational history of many founding members from Wilmington, but William G. Gibbons and Cyrus Pyle had been part of the Society of Friends (Quakers) before allying themselves with the new Unitarian church.

William G. Gibbons, like Isaac Hinckley and Samuel Morse Felton, was a leading Wilmington businessman. After joining the shipbuilding firm of Pusey & Jones Company in 1860, he rose through the ranks to become president of the company in 1879, a position he held until his death in 1886. Reporting on Gibbons' funeral, the local newspaper noted that after the short funeral service, there was a procession to the cemetery six blocks away, with 150 employees of Pusey & Jones leading the cortege and, following the hearse, “about 100 prominent business men, all of whom marched in twos to the cemetery.”\(^{19}\)

For some of the founding members, there were close family links that added strength to the faith community that they formed. Charles Bent, his wife Sarah, and his mother-in-law Sylvia Drayton and Charles' brother, George Bent and his wife, Martha, and three daughters, were all among the signatories to the constitution and bylaws. In addition, George's wife was Samuel Morse Felton's sister.\(^{20}\) Isaac Flint was married to Edith Pusey and Cyrus Pyle married Edith's sister, Mary. Lydia Sisson and her daughter, Mary, were among the people who also signed the July 1866 documents as was her other daughter, Augusta Conant, a widow.\(^{21}\) Augusta's son Heywood, a nine-year-old when the church was organized, went on to serve the congregation in several administrative capacities. When he died at the age of 32 in 1889, the church trustees marked his death in their board minutes, praising him for his faithful service as the board's clerk and taking special note of his life as an example of “the Unitarian influence into which he had been born.”\(^{22}\)

On Sunday 8 April 1866, a week after Easter, the hopeful new faith community gathered at 10:30 a.m. in the Scientific Hall of the Wilmington Institute. The Institute, a building dating from 1861, stood on the northwest corner of Eighth and Market streets.\(^{23}\) At the morning service, the Rev. Courtland Y. Normandie, brother of founding member Thomas Y. de Normandie, was the first Unitarian minister to address the new congregation; he had a crowd of 52 worshippers. The clergyman, visiting from Fairhaven, Massachusetts, spoke again at a second service that day at 3:30 p.m.; 104 people attended.
Three months later, on 9 July 1866, congregation leaders signed letters of incorporation on behalf of the church and, under the laws of the state of Delaware, the First Unitarian Society of Wilmington became a legal entity.\textsuperscript{24} It was thus that a small group of individuals laid a foundation that has withstood the tests of time and that in its fundamentals informs the life of the church 150 years later.

Clergy

Thirteen men provided the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington pastoral leadership in the congregation’s first 125 years.\textsuperscript{25} In 1866, the first, the Rev. Fielder Israel, although ordained as a Methodist minister, accepted the call from the Unitarian congregation. He came to Wilmington from Baltimore where he had served the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church as minister. Early in his Wilmington tenure he met with the trustees to “get the Society into working order,” suggesting the Church of the Disciples in Boston as a model for the Wilmington congregation.\textsuperscript{26}

James Freeman Clarke founded the Church of the Disciples in 1840 and, faced with a diverse congregation of individuals with widely ranging beliefs, developed three governing principles to bring the congregation together. Clarke wanted the church to be inclusive and democratic in a way that would reflect “the life of Christ in the individual and the society.”\textsuperscript{27} Clarke’s Social Principle sought to involve the entire congregation in intellectual and administrative concerns; the Voluntary Principle did away with pew rents and relied on voluntary financial support of church work; and the Congregational Principle expected all members of a congregation to be involved in worship.

To some extent Israel enjoyed success in involving members of the congregation in many aspects of church affairs. On the other hand, his own personal popularity violated the Social Principle, which posited that no member was more important than any other. Israel proved so popular a minister that some among his flock took to calling themselves “Israelites,” elevating him in a way he doubtless did not intend.\textsuperscript{28}

His first term as minister, from 1866 to 1869, ended because the young congregation could not guarantee that it could pay Israel’s promised $2,500 annual salary without help from the American Unitarian Association (AUA) and there was no guarantee of such assistance. Israel told the trustees that he could not accept employment that was “in any way contingent upon the future action of the A.U.A.”\textsuperscript{29} He left Wilmington for Taunton, Massachusetts, where he served until 1872, after which he returned to Wilmington for another term as minister. He again left after four years, however, because the First Unitarian Society’s “inability to meet its financial obligations … worked very serious injury to the Pastor.”\textsuperscript{30}

During his two terms in Wilmington, Israel demonstrated his commitment to good works outside the church as well as to satisfying his pastoral duties. On Memorial Day 1869, the city witnessed an interracial, interdenominational procession that made its way to Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery where music and speeches ensued. Both white and black Civil War veterans marched in their respective patriotic units. Representatives from a number of local churches joined the parade as did at least three musical ensembles, the African-American Mount Vernon Cornet Band, a group of “Irish Nationalists with the harp and the sunburst flag of Erin,” and a choir. Israel delivered an oration in which he characterized the defeated South as “the murderers of those whose memories we are here to honor.”\textsuperscript{31} The congregation, in its celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the church building’s dedication, remembered him as “a warm friend of the colored race, and . . . a member of the ‘Freedmen's Bureau’ . . . (who) used every effort to aid in suppressing slavery.” In 1864, while still living in Baltimore, Israel was one of 30 civic and religious leaders who formed the Baltimore Association for the Moral
and Educational Improvement of Colored People and he served on the association’s board of managers. The group, which worked as a close partner of the Freedmen’s Bureau, saw education as the duty of the state and “moral improvement” as “the bounden duty of Christian men.”

In Wilmington, he organized the Workingmen’s Institute, which provided educational classes, a place for recreation, a library, and a clearinghouse for job information. The *Boston Weekly Journal* noted in its obituary of Israel “The poor had no kinder or more thoughtful a friend than Mr. Israel. He was known in every circle, and was especially a welcome visitor among the workingmen.” The Rev. Fielder Israel’s example of service provided the new Unitarians an example of what a congregation might expect in a minister. The men who followed Israel as minister were individuals who, in their own ways, followed his lead.

Frederic A. Hinckley, who ministered to the Wilmington congregation from 1913 to 1917, embraced a liberal version of Unitarianism. After he finished his schooling in Massachusetts, Hinckley worked in business as a bookkeeper and cashier for over a decade before his 1878 Unitarian ordination in Providence, Rhode Island. He provided pastoral leadership in Providence; Northampton, Massachusetts; and at Spring Garden Unitarian Church in Philadelphia before being called to Wilmington. When Hinckley arrived in Philadelphia, *The Cause*, a magazine devoted to “Moral Progress and the Interests of the Society for Ethical Culture in Philadelphia,” congratulated the Spring Garden church, describing him as “a broad-gauge Unitarian minister.” While there, Hinckley made clear the liberal character of Unitarianism that he embraced. Speaking to his congregation of every person’s right to judge beliefs and ceremonies and the Bible and Jesus, he declared unambiguously that “Unbiased, unhampered, unrestrained, the mind must be free to think, the heart to feel, the soul to aspire.”

Hinckley felt called to advocate on behalf of the right of women to vote and for fundamental reforms to the institution of marriage that would “emancipat[e] women from ‘the servility of enforced sexual relations’ within marriage.” Hinckley’s interest in woman suffrage was a passion that he shared with his wife Elizabeth Shepard Carter Hinckley whom he married in 1869. While he was minister of the Unitarian church in Providence, she, now the mother of two small children, held office in the Rhode Island state suffrage association and, in 1881, was on the executive committee of the National Woman Suffrage Association. Hinckley remained active in promoting votes for women as he moved from Rhode Island to Massachusetts, then to Pennsylvania, and finally to Delaware.

Hinckley’s drive for equality extended to the labor movement as well, another cause that his wife shared with him. Together they joined the Ten-Hour League to support legislation to limit the work day to ten hours. In reflecting on his first address to the Free Religious Society in Providence in the 1870s, Hinckley recalled that he “made a plea for the laboring classes in their struggles for larger opportunities, which left no question as to where my sympathies were.” In 1910, at a meeting of the National Federation of Religious Liberals in Philadelphia’s First Unitarian Church, the delegates adopted a “testimony” that Hinckley offered in which he pointed an accusing finger as “the limitations of poverty and the demoralization of excessive wealth,” protested against child labor and against unequal pay between men and women doing the same work, and advocated for arbitrations in all industrial disputes.
Perhaps based on his pre-clergy work experience, he took an interest in manual training and developed what he called the Northampton system, so named because the Northampton, Massachusetts schools were the first to use it. He designed a training course accessible to elementary and middle school students, both boys and girls, in their regular classrooms. In 1893 the Massachusetts Commission on industrial education included in its report his illustrated essay on the system. The following year, the annual convention of the Manual Training Association met in Philadelphia and among the presentations was one that Hinckley gave on his manual training system. In 1895 he published *Woodwork in the common school: a manual for primary and grammar grades.*

Of course, Frederic A. Hinckley was also a minister. In addition to his manual training publications and some poems, he published three books of his sermons and a tract entitled *What Unitarians Believe.* He died while still the minister to the Wilmington Unitarians and was gratefully remembered for his leadership and for his tireless service in the interests of “truth and righteousness.”

William A. Vrooman, Hinckley’s immediate successor, followed the model for ministry that his predecessors established. Born in Ontario, Canada, Vrooman trained initially as a pharmacist but subsequently was ordained to the Methodist ministry in 1892; his first pastorate was St. Paul’s Methodist Church in Boissevain, Manitoba. He moved to Unitarianism around 1904, when he helped organize the First Unitarian Church in Winnipeg and served as the congregation’s first minister. Although he was minister to two American congregations briefly, most of his pastoral service before Wilmington was in Canada. While he was still in Winnipeg, Vrooman wrote an article for *The Christian Register* that emphatically urged Unitarians to embrace a sense of missionary enterprise, telling his readers “In every community I know are many men and women to whom the Unitarian interpretation of religion is like the breaking of light through clouds of darkness. The gradual fading away of belief in the orthodox dogmas has in many cases left only a formal religious service without conviction or joy.”

Emulating examples of zealous advocacy that the Rev. Israel and the Rev. Hinckley provided, Vrooman turned to work on behalf of prisoners, helping found Delaware’s Prisoners’ Aid Society in 1920. One of the factors that may have sparked Vrooman’s passion when he arrived in Wilmington from Canada to begin his pastorate was the fact that the state still used the whipping post to punish convicted criminals.

As early as 1866, Wilmington Unitarians were vocal about the shame of the whipping post. In their letter to the trustees of the Taunton, Massachusetts Unitarian church, the Wilmingtonians wrote that they could not release their minister, the Rev. Israel, to go to Taunton as minister. He was, they proclaimed, essential “to the cause of liberal Christianity in this city” for many reasons, including the fact that in Delaware there was continued use of the pillory and whipping post “as instruments of what they conceive to be good Christian government!”

In 1915, a person convicted of breaking into a dwelling at night could be sentenced to between twenty and forty lashes; for using “false lights” to run a vessel aground and wreck it, thirty-nine lashes; and for perjury, the court had the discretion of sentencing the defendant to forty lashes. In March 1945, Vrooman wrote a long article for the local newspaper, declaring there was “No Good Reason For Whipping Post Use” and offering statistical evidence that the punishment was worthless as a deterrent to crime. The state was slow to respond to pleas to banish Delaware’s justice system had employed the whipping post since 1717 and eventually also used the pillory to mete out punishment. The pillory was abolished in 1905 but the whipping post was still in use in 1918 when the Rev. William A. Vrooman became pastor to the Wilmington congregation. He campaigned tirelessly for better treatment for prisoners; the state banned the whipping post in 1972, twenty-three years after Vrooman’s death.

(Delaware Public Archives)
the whipping post. Although the last recorded flogging was in 1952, the use of the whipping post remained a punishment available to Delaware courts until 1972.50

Vrooman and the Prisoners' Aid Society sought a range of changes: a move toward more humane treatment in prison, assistance for prisoners after release, and aid for their families. He served the organization as executive director from the organization's formation in 1920 until the mid-1940s. He spoke extensively on behalf of the organization's goals. The Prisoners' Aid Society eventually became the Delaware Center for Justice, which created the William A. Vrooman Exemplar of Justice Award to recognize individuals who work to improve the quality of justice in Delaware.

Among the clergy who served the Wilmington Unitarians, some heard the call to the ministry at a young age. After completing their theological educations, they worked in pastoral ministry throughout their entire careers. In addition to Fielder Israel, who followed this pattern, William A. Vrooman and John G. MacKinnon also devoted all of their working lives to various congregations. Vrooman ended his forty-five-year pastoral career in Wilmington, although he continued to support with his presence the Unitarian congregation that he helped establish in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. MacKinnon, a minister in Hillsboro, Ohio, at age 26, served a congregation in Richmond, Virginia, before coming to Wilmington in 1946. He stayed in Delaware until 1959, then went to Indianapolis to serve All Souls Unitarian Church where he stayed for a decade. Even after his fulltime ministry ended, he provided assistance to the infant Unitarian Universalist congregation in Pottstown, Pennsylvania and in the early 1970s was interim minister at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Rockford, Illinois.

At least four of the clergymen who served the Wilmington congregation eventually pursued other work. The Rev. Delos W. O'Brian moved from pastoral ministry to working for AUA in California, where he was active in reviving a Unitarian church in Palo Alto. Others, however, moved from the ministry to other employment. The Rev. William H. Thorne, who served in 1871 and 1872, turned to writing and publishing as his life’s work. The Rev. Cicero A. Henderson gravitated to the world of commerce and taught business psychology at Babson Institute, a business college in Wellesley, Massachusetts. When the Rev. Charles W. Phillips left the ministry, he joined the staff of Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey in Washington and continued on Humphrey's staff when the senator became vice president. Phillips's particular area of expertise was in employment and vocational training as a strategy for rehabilitating prisoners.

Although Harvard was the first seminary in America dedicated to training Unitarian clergy, some of the early ministers studied elsewhere. The earliest of the Harvard men, J. M. W. Pratt, was in the class of 1878. Alexander T. Bowser was in the class of 1880 and Henderson was class of 1901. Others among the ministers studied at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, Episcopal Theological Seminary at the University of Virginia, the University of Manitoba, Boston University Theological Seminary, and the University of Chicago.51 Over the years, additional seminaries emerged that trained Unitarian clergy, most notably among Wilmington clergy, Meadville Theological School and Starr King School for the Ministry.52

Not all the ministers started out as part of the Unitarian fellowship. Fielder Israel was a Presbyterian before he became a Unitarian. William H. Thorne, raised in the Church of England, was initially ordained by the Presbyterian Church and served a Presbyterian church in Allentown, Pennsylvania, before moving to a Unitarian church in Philadelphia and eventually coming to Wilmington. J. M. W. Pratt was raised in the Presbyterian Church and William H. Johnson was ordained an Episcopal priest in 1872, but allied himself with Unitarianism in the mid 1880s. Delos W. O'Brian came from a staunchly Methodist family and attended Boston University School of Theology, a Methodist seminary, but was ordained Unitarian in 1932, soon after he completed his seminary training.

In the nineteenth century, the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington could claim two ordinations associated with the congregation. In 1878, J. M. W. Pratt had just graduated from Harvard Divinity School when he came to Wilmington. His ordination in Wilmington on 28 January 1878 brought him both into the ministry and into his first pastorate.53
George W. Stone was among the founding members of the First Unitarian Society of Wilmington. Born in New York, his work as a dealer in manufacturing supplies brought him to Wilmington.54 His service to the church as a layman spanned nearly three decades, from its church’s organization in 1866 until 1895 when he and his wife left Wilmington for Boston, where he assumed the responsibilities of treasurer for the American Unitarian Association. In 1898, prompted by an interest in “the missionary work of the church,” he was ordained and became a field secretary for the denomination, first in Kansas City and then on the Pacific coast. After several years covering all the territory west of the Rocky Mountains, he resigned to become minister of the Unitarian church in Santa Cruz.55 With time, Unitarianism lost some of its luster for Stone, although his sense of duty to his community did not wane. He turned to politics and served one term as mayor of Santa Cruz.

In 1964, the congregation participated in a second ordination in its church. The Rev. Dr. Robert M. Doss officiated at the ordination of church member, Donald L. Wassman. He came to Wilmington as a DuPont employee but resigned after a decade with the company. With financial assistance from the Wilmington church, he entered Crane Theological School at Tufts University and, once ordained, served parishes in Sharon, Massachusetts, and West Hartford, Connecticut before leaving parish ministry to work with the elderly.56

The preaching and writing that the thirteen ministers offered over the church’s first 125 years reflected shifts in Unitarian theology. Among the early ministers, the expressions of theology were strongly Christocentric. There was little doubt of Unitarian identification with Christianity. In 1873, for example, the Rev. Israel, addressing the question of peace, reflected that peace would not come all at once, “but by the gradual entrance of the Christian spirit into society.”57 In 1878 at the Wilmington ordination of the new minister, J. M. W. Pratt, the Rev. Henry Whitney Bellows of New York preached on “The Nature and Claims of Jesus Christ.”58 The Rev. Alexander T. Bowser, while serving the First Unitarian Society of Toronto, preached a sermon invoking the image of “the spiritual cross of Christ” made up of two pieces. “Truth is the upright piece,” he declared, “and love is the horizontal piece reaching from east to west, so as to embrace all men.”59

Others of the congregation in addition to the clergy also demonstrated devotion to principles of Christian faith. In 1895, the women of the Wilmington church’s Ladies’ Aid Society reorganized themselves and became the Wilmington Branch of the National Alliance of Unitarian and Other Liberal Christian Women, clearly invoking Christian connections. The 1901 church membership book declared that “Our Faith” included the elements “The Fatherhood of God,” “The Brotherhood of Man,” and “The Leadership of Jesus.”60

With the 20th century, there was a turn toward social issues and away for doctrinaire theology. In 1910, the Rev. Henderson preached at the Joseph Priestley Conference about religion freed from artificiality “and existing only as the interrelation of spirit and truth in a life of service which is worship.”61 Christianity had certainly not disappeared completely; the Membership Book 1918-1937, for example, declared that the members of the congregation “unite to maintain Christian worship” and the Rev. Vrooman preached a series of sermons on the theme “Christian Ideals and American Life.”62 Vrooman appears to have been reluctant to give up the denominational attachment to Jesus. In 1933, when he wrote a “Unitarian Confession of Faith” for the church directory, he included among the elements of faith in which Unitarians believed “God, the Father Almighty,” “the Brotherhood of Man,” “the Leadership of Jesus,” “salvation of character by repentance,” and “the Progress of Mankind Onward and Upward Forever.”63

Perhaps because of the economic buffeting that the country took in the Great Depression and changing theological reaction to profoundly difficult times, in the late 1930s and the years following, the ministers demonstrated greater concern for people working together out of compassion to solve social issues. Encouraging social justice, they moved away from traditional theology that focused on the power of God and Christ to change lives.

In his farewell sermon to the Wilmington congregation at his retirement in 1936, the Rev. Vrooman declared “Only a liberal, modernized, socially-minded religion uniting men to establish justice, abolish
economic poverty, prevent war, provide suitable employment and cultural advantages for all, and banish the hells of misery on earth is of value in our modern world.” From then onward, many of the sermons the Wilmington congregation heard grappled with issues of right versus wrong, social responsibility, and the challenges that congregants faced discerning what they believed as Unitarians and how to live out their Unitarian faith. Liberal Christian tradition waned; compassionate humanism ascended.

In 1963, the congregation welcomed the Rev. Dr. Robert M. Doss as its new minister. His predecessor’s tenure had been a bumpy one, but the Rev. Doss proved to be a good fit. Bringing a diverse background that included military service and prison chaplaincy experience as well as parish ministry, he skillfully piloted the church along a path toward strong lay leadership, a growing religious education program, a complement of robust small groups, and a committed congregation willing to tackle social issues in a positive, productive manner. His powerful, thoughtful preaching endeared him to the members, his leadership reached beyond Wilmington to the larger Unitarian world, and his pastorate provided essential balance as the merged Unitarian and Universalist denominations worked out what it meant to be Unitarian Universalist.

In 1961, theology took on a new complexion when the Unitarians merged into a single fellowship with the Universalist Church of America to become the Unitarian Universalist Association. Universalist theology taught universal salvation, the belief that, although humans are sinners, in a world created by a loving God every person will eventually be saved by repentance and that everyone will indeed repent and be saved. Each denomination was liberal in its outlook and approach and each placed similar issues high on its priority lists. The imperative to seek social justice for all people remained common to both denominations. Unitarian and Universalist leaders recognized that their combined “liberal religious voice” would be stronger by merging their efforts and numbers. In the end, the benefits were bountiful. “Our history has carried us from liberal Christian views about Jesus and human nature,” writes Unitarian Universalist minister Mark W. Harris, “to a rich pluralism that includes theist and atheist, agnostic and humanist, pagan, Christian, Jew, and Buddhist.”

Architecture and art

Having organized themselves into a church, the members set about building a house of worship. In 1866 the infant congregation bought from William B. and Ann Sharp a parcel of land in the 800 block of West Street, a quiet Wilmington residential neighborhood. On 23 September 1867, church leaders obtained the necessary permit to construct the building and, when the cornerstone was laid in October, a local newspaper congratulated the congregation on obtaining “the only vacant (lot) in that beautiful section of the city.” Church members must have felt extremely lucky to have found so hospitable a location for their new venture.

George W. Stone and his building committee settled on the Boston architectural firm of Ware and Van Brunt. It is unclear how Stone came to know about the young architects. Quite possibly Harvard provided the link. Both William Robert Ware and Henry Van Brunt graduated from Harvard, Ware in 1852 and Van Brunt in 1854. George W. Sewall, a founding member of the Wilmington church, was also in the class of 1854 and trained in engineering, so he could easily have known Van Brunt when they were university students together.

Stone may also have relied upon Unitarian ties to connect with the architects, both of whom sprang from Unitarian roots. Ware was the son of a renowned Unitarian minister. Ware’s father, Henry Ware Jr., from 1830 until his death in 1843, taught “Pulpit Eloquence” and “Pastoral Care” at Harvard Divinity School, the country’s first and at the time premier seminary for training Unitarian ministers. The senior Ware’s work extended to composing hymns, writing books on aspects of Christian character and editing The Christian Disciple, a Unitarian periodical (later called The Christian Examiner). William Robert Ware also entered academia. While still in Boston, the architectural office that he and Van Brunt maintained provided extensive architectural training for students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1881, having dissolved his design partnership with Van Brunt, Ware left Boston for New York.
York City where he joined the faculty at Columbia University and established the university’s architecture school.\textsuperscript{71}

Henry Van Brunt’s early education was at Boston Latin School, he graduated from Harvard, and he like Ware was a member of First Church Boston, a substantial Unitarian congregation that dated back to the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{72} In spite of his ties to Boston, in 1887 he and business partner Frank M. Howe moved their design firm to Kansas City where Van Brunt and Howe designed railway stations for the Union Pacific Railroad. In 1893, Van Brunt served on the Board of Architects that oversaw architecture built for the World’s Columbian Exposition, the Chicago World’s Fair. He and Howe designed the fair’s Electricity Building and Wyoming Building.\textsuperscript{73}

Ware and Van Brunt, both 35 years old, embarked on their partnership in 1864 and, in the 17 years they collaborated, they designed such noteworthy Boston landmarks as First Church Boston (1868) and Memorial Hall at Harvard (1870-78). They produced a number of additional buildings at Harvard and for other Cambridge institutions.\textsuperscript{74} For some unknown reason, when they provided plans for the Wilmington church, they charged the congregation nothing for their services.\textsuperscript{75}

The young architects’ design for the Wilmington Unitarians captured the style of the day, a building similar to a church that Ware, in partnership with Edward S. Philbrick, designed for the Swedenborgian congregation in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1860. The Wilmington church mimicked the Brookline design in its Gothic Revival lines – sharply pointed windows, a high, steeply pitched roof, and, in the west end of the church interior, a soaring relieving arch.\textsuperscript{76} Although the Massachusetts building was of stone and the Delaware building was of red brick, both demonstrated the apparent joy that the Victorian age took in designs based on the Gothic period.

In the Wilmington building, Ware and Van Brunt inserted horizontal bands of darker brick below and above windows, lines of color that emphasized the placement of openings along the building’s façade and drew attention to the elegant shape of the windows. Handsome heavy timber doors complemented the ruddy red exterior and offered an appearance of security. The entire structure lent a sense of gravitas to the undertakings that the congregation anticipated for its new life on West Street.

On the interior, the architects used dark walnut and “oiled pine” generously, crafting paneled wainscoting along the walls, creating a spacious chancel area for the substantial seating provided for congregation leaders, and laying out a fanned array of walnut and poplar pews focused on the west end of the sanctuary. Over the chancel area, a tall relieving arch helped bear the weight of the roof. The arch eventually also provided support for installation of a much-admired memorial window behind the chancel. Just as the bricks of the church exterior were red and black, so the furnishings in the auditorium were also red and black. The carpet was “crimson and black” and a reporter declared that the “crimson cushions” on the pews were “as handsome as any we ever saw and without exception the most comfortable we ever sat on.” It was, in short, “a handsome interior.”\textsuperscript{77}

The congregation had worshipped in this impressive interior for 25 years, when, in 1893, the appearance of the sanctuary underwent an immense transformation triggered by two losses. In 1887 founding member Lydia Ball Davis Sisson died at 81 and only two years later her young grandson, 31-year-old Heywood Conant,
died. While Mrs. Sisson’s age meant that her death was not particularly unexpected, the loss of Heywood was much more difficult for the congregation and for the larger community to bear.

Heywood Conant, son of Lydia Sisson’s daughter, Augusta Conant, was five years old when he came to Wilmington with his mother. After his schooling in Delaware, he went on to great success at Cornell University. Following graduation from the university, he returned to Wilmington to work for one of the local newspapers, the _Every Evening_. He involved himself with the community and with the Unitarian church, serving as clerk to the board of trustees for many years. The victim of “paralytic affections” (some variety of debilitating paralysis, perhaps a stroke), he eventually succumbed to kidney failure and a brain hemorrhage.  

In 1893, his mother, Augusta Conant, and his aunt, Mary D. Sisson, donated funds for the creation of the Angel Window that church leaders installed in the sanctuary’s west wall. The donors intended the window as a memorial to Lydia Sisson and to Heywood Conant. Friends of the popular Heywood joined in paying for the gift and they were afforded a private viewing of the window on the Saturday before it was “unveiled” for the congregation. At a meeting following the window’s installation, Mrs. A. D. Warner moved that the congregation extend “our hearty thanks . . . to the generous friends outside of our society to whom we are indebted for the handsome window lately placed in our church.”

Frances Darby Moore Sweeney, who created the window, was a remarkable artist. Although she was born in Wilmington, as an adult she lived and worked in Philadelphia. Widowed in 1891 at the age of 36 with two young daughters to support, she turned to the training she had received at Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art in the 1880s. She established her own business, the Decorative Glass Company, producing “stained, mosaic, and wrought glass for churches, public buildings, private dwellings.” Not unexpectedly, when she advertised her company, she identified herself as “F. D. Sweeney, Proprietor,” doubtless thinking that potential clients might shy away from dealing with a woman.

In 1893, the same year the window was installed in the Wilmington church, Sweeney had the distinction of being the only stained glass artist to exhibit in the Pennsylvania Building at the Chicago World’s Fair. She had an exhibit of her work at the School of Industrial Art in 1894 and again in 1909. In addition to running her business, she taught at her alma mater between 1899 and 1909, finally giving up her faculty position because of “the increased demands of her studio work.”

It is unclear how Sweeney’s work came to the attention of Augusta Conant and Mary Sisson. There were certainly regular, friendly exchanges between the Philadelphia and Wilmington Unitarian congregations. One possible connection may have been through the Rev. William H. Johnson, who was the minister in Wilmington between 1889 and 1893. During 1889, as he was beginning his tenure in Wilmington, he also traveled regularly to West Philadelphia, to hold services with a new church there. When his Delaware congregation began to grow, he gave up his work in Philadelphia because of demands in his home church. The Spring Garden Unitarian Church, organized in 1881, was probably the congregation to which Johnson was giving assistance. Interestingly between 1880 and 1891, Sweeney was living in the Spring Garden area.

Regardless of the path that brought donors and artist together, the reaction in the local press was enthusiastic. The Sunday that the window was unveiled, the local newspaper declared that “no more beautiful and appropriate tribute to the memory of loved ones gone could be devised than the handsome memorial window of stained glass which has just been placed in the Unitarian church.”

Donors added two more memorials to the church in 1925, windows of pale milky-yellow-green opalescent glass. Darker opalescent panes of swirled blues and browns marked the panel edges. In the lower center panel
of each window, a light blue glass insert designed to look like a scroll or banner identified the honorees. The new windows stood opposite one another, the Warner Window on the north side of the church and the Founders panel on the south. Alfred D. Warner, Jr. gave the Warner Window to honor his father, Alfred D. Warner, who had died in 1915, and several descendants of the founders gave the Founders' Window. At the January 1925 dedication, Alfred D. Warner III unveiled the Warner Window and Mrs. John P. Wales (Ellen M. Wood Wales), the only surviving founder, unveiled the Founders’ Window.

Over the years it is noteworthy that the church building reflected changing times. Of course, gaslights gave way to electric light bulbs and a vacuum cleaner joined the array of cleaning tools available to the janitor. More interesting, however, is the theological shift that interior decoration revealed. In a late-19th-century photograph of the interior, on the edge of the relieving arch above the chancel area the words “Blessed Are The Pure In Heart For They Shall See God” were painted in large shadowed block letters. By the 1930s, the motto was gone.

Time also brought sufficient success that the congregation needed more room. Some 20 years after the church was dedicated, the congregation built a parish hall at the rear of the building; the original design included a Sunday school room that extended from the west end of the sanctuary. The new construction added a parlor, kitchen, and study for the minister.

Half a century later, in 1941, the trustees purchased the three-story brick dwelling at 800 Washington Street, a property that backed up to the rear of the church property on West Street. Naming the building the Channing Building to honor William Ellery Channing, a leading 19th century Unitarian theologian, the congregation designated it for Sunday school classes, two church youth organizations, a Boy Scout troop, and other church and community activities. In 1952, the congregation acquired a second house on Washington Street and named it the Jefferson Building after Thomas Jefferson who shared with Unitarians many theological ideas.

The congregation’s identification with Channing and Jefferson found further expression in 1954 when local sculptor, Charles C. Parks, created a pair of doors for the church’s main entry. The church’s minister, the Rev. MacKinnon, worked with Parks to develop the themes for the project.

The sculptor cast two aluminum panels that recorded in raised letters quotes from Channing and Jefferson. Channing’s words, “I call that mind free which has cast off all fear but that of wrongdoing, and possesses itself though all else be lost” spanned the center of the left door. Above the panel Parks installed a cast aluminum bas-relief plaque showing Channing preaching and below the words a similar plaque showing Channing helping a slave to his feet. The right door bore a panel with Jefferson's words, “I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.” Two bas-relief plaques on the door showed Jefferson writing and Jefferson being vaccinated.
Working with carpenter Milo Clark, Parks mounted the quotation panels and the bas-relief depictions on a pair of fine walnut doors. Parks also revised the shape of the entry door opening, which had been designed originally to accommodate pointed Gothic doors. He installed a walnut panel at the top of the doorway and ornamented it with “an arabesque tracery of leaves and stems” also cast in aluminum. Irving Warner gave the doors as a gift to honor his parents, Alfred D. Warner and Emalea Pusey Warner. On 28 March 1954, the congregation gathered for a dedication service. After the service ended, the members reconvened outside on West Street to watch Emalea Warner Steel Trentman, Irving Warner’s daughter, unveil the doors.  

Even as the congregation installed the new doors, they were struggling with issues of maintenance that grew increasingly expensive because of delays in making needed repairs. The minutes of trustees’ meetings noted the poor condition of the roof, the weak and sagging floor of the parish hall, exterior brickwork that needed attention, and electrical problems demanding repair. Funding the list of urgent work was an uphill battle. In addition, the congregation needed more space and for a time considered purchasing the adjacent property at 801 West Street where Salesianum School had operated.  

In the end, however, the membership settled on a plan to relocate from West Street and to build a new church. Starting in 1956, they assessed several possible sites, reviewed the costs that other nearby congregations had incurred in recent new church construction projects, and determined what criteria to apply to the plan they intended to pursue – that the new facility meet the needs of 400 member families, have parking for 200 cars, be in a location that was good for 50 to 100 years, and be centrally located for the majority of the then current members.  

The congregation purchased the building site for its new church from Woodlawn Trustees, a development company that was in the process of subdividing acreage and selling parcels of land in a neighborhood the company called Sharpley. As was their wont, Woodlawn included in the deed that conveyed land ownership a restriction that allowed the developer veto power over the design of buildings proposed for erection in Sharpley. After the architects prepared several potential designs for the church to be built on Halstead Road in Sharpley, they presented them to the building committee, which picked one. But before the designs could go to the congregation for input, the architects were obliged to undergo a review session with representatives of Woodlawn Trustees. Eventually, the plans passed muster and the building committee shared them with the congregation.  

Whiteside Moeckel Carbonell, the architectural firm of church member Joseph Carbonell, won the contract to design the new church. When he presented the plans to the congregation, he came with both drawings and a model of the proposed building. He discussed the size and layout of the building, the features other than the main auditorium that the plan included, and the materials that would go into construction of the modern church.  

After the groundbreaking in April 1959, it took about a year for the construction company to complete the project. On 13 March 1960 the congregation passed into the new church for its first services. Just as Ware and Van Brunt had used the rich dark woods so popular with their Victorian clients, Whiteside Moeckel Carbonell also used woods in the new interior that suited the tastes and expectations of their twentieth-century clients. They chose warm burnished cherry to frame the lower portion of the soaring walls and extended the wood upward into a 20th-century version of a sounding board above the chancel. They extended the use of
wood to the church auditorium ceiling and to the church organ, where they used narrow stepped and offset mahogany panels to create an engaging wooden sculpture framing the organ pipes.

Before the congregation could sell the old church, it suffered a devastating fire. In light of the long-recurring complaints about electrical problems in the building on West Street, it was hardly surprising that in October 1960, “defective wiring around the pulpit” sparked a blaze that rendered the 19th century building unfit for use. The congregation sold the property and the new owners demolished what remained of the structure.94

The stained glass windows had already been removed to storage and the memorial doors had been installed in the new church building on Halstead Road by the time the congregation began to worship there. At the time the memorials were removed from the old building, the sheer size of the Angel Window as well as changes in theology and taste prompted the congregation to store the 19th century window.

Eventually the window was installed in two sections at different locations in the new building. Initially the congregation placed the angel portion of the window, measuring approximately sixty by ninety inches, in the Brunner Chapel on the ground floor of the religious education wing. Subsequently the window was moved to the new Brunner Chapel on the upper floor of the wing where carved doors of fine-grained teak provide protection for the glass. Cabinetmakers David Warner and William Bailey built the protective cabinet. Carved plaques embellish the door panels with symbols of world beliefs — Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, yin and yang as well as the double circles and flaming chalice of Unitarian Universalism.95

The congregation installed the Founders’ and the Warner windows in the corridor linking the church sanctuary with the educational wing of the church building and, below them, the panel that identified Lydia Sisson and Heywood Conant as the individuals whom the Angel Window memorialized.

Over the years, the congregation assembled an art collection that began with a gift by member and renowned illustrator, N. C. Wyeth. At Christmas 1937, he presented to the church Sunday school a painting entitled “Jesus and Child.”96 It depicts a bearded and haloed Jesus holding a young child who embraces Jesus around the neck.

To honor the church’s centennial, Delaware artist and church member Carolyn Blish created a mobile of metal and shards of glass salvaged after the West Street church burned. In addition to enhancing the church’s fabric with Charles C. Parks’ paneled doors, the congregation also acquired Parks’ statue, “Decision,” in 1971. The tall, slim sculpture shows a young African American man, holding in one hand a pair of doves and in the other a hawk.

If one considers the congregation’s buildings and its artistic embellishments, it is possible to see changes in taste and in belief, beginning with a mid-19th century appetite for literal Christocentric articulations of faith and belief and transitioning to a subsequent embrace of secular humanism.

Laying A Firm Foundation
The founding generation of Wilmington Unitarians launched a number of enduring programs to serve the church family. Those first members and the ones who came immediately after them developed programs and, more importantly, established commitments that laid the foundation and set the rhythms by which the church continues to flourish many decades later.

In 1866, the trustees established committees responsible for “benevolent action,” music, religious education, youth, hospitality, finance and property, and church growth. Together the committees were intended to meet the needs of the congregation as a thriving church family.97

The Alliance
The group most thoroughly integrated into the fabric of church life from the start began its institutional life as the Ladies Aid and Sewing Society, but was known simply as the Alliance for most of its existence.
Women’s sewing circles began as soldiers’ aid societies that provided clothing and other supplies to combatants on both sides of the Civil War. Some were community organizations while others developed within church congregations. By the end of the war, charitable work had become the occupation of ladies’ aid societies, church groups, and sewing circles.\(^98\)

The Civil War had barely ended when, in December 1866, the women of the newly-formed First Unitarian Society of Wilmington organized themselves into a group they called the Ladies Aid Society and Sewing Circle. They set aside Wednesdays to meet to “make clothing for the needy children who have been gathered for the Sabbath School.”\(^99\) While dressing poor children might have seemed a worthy endeavor, the women found the recipient children to be “entirely unresponsive and unappreciative” and they turned their attention to children of the congregation and their friends.\(^100\)

Over the next several decades, members of the Alliance regularly held “sewing days” although rather than stitching garments for poor children, they made aprons and other simple items that they then sold to raise money. In 1905, they sewed a stock of goods to sell at a “parlor fair” in late November; in 1906, they elected to forego a fair but take “Christmas orders … to make aprons, doll’s dresses, (and) fancy bags” to sell. At their March 1908 meeting, the women decided to have an all-day sewing meeting “to make aprons to have on hand constantly, and especially for the dance and apron sale to be given April 28th.” In April 1910, the Alliance Apron Committee reported that it had on hand “fifteen aprons in new styles.”\(^101\) The women also used their needlework skills to benefit the Red Cross’s “surgical dressing work,” to aid the needy in France after World War I, and to assist the Visiting Nurses Association.\(^102\)

In 1915, Alliance members shared their needlework skills with local women who might benefit from instruction.\(^103\) On Friday afternoons in February, March and April, seven members of the Alliance opened the Sunday school room to teach “plain sewing, mending and patching and . . . the use of patterns (in) cutting out shirtwaists.” Thirteen women students sewed dresses for themselves and made baby dresses and petticoats. Each afternoon lesson ended with “tea and cake and ‘a social half hour.’” The teachers also supplied each woman with “a well equipped sewing bag.” Taking an interest in their students that extended beyond sewing, the Unitarian women also visited their students’ homes and worked with Home Relief to assist families in need.

In 1885 the group, while still committed to sewing, shortened its name from Ladies Aid Society and Sewing Circle to simply Ladies Aid Society. In 1895 they reorganized again to become the Wilmington Branch of the National Alliance of Unitarian and Other Christian Women, reflecting affiliation with the larger Unitarian organization. Their work, focused on providing financial support for the church’s physical and social wellbeing, remained unchanged.\(^104\) The Alliance, as the group quickly became known, touched many aspects of church life as the ladies met the congregation’s need for food and hospitality, for a well-maintained property, and for someone to keep things running smoothly. As a member reflected in 1935, “The Wil(mington) Ladies Aid Society was born with the church itself in those (sic) pioneer year of 1868. For how would it be possible for a church to exist without the busy, willing hands of the alert minds and devoted hearts of the women.”\(^105\)

In addition to selling aprons and other crafted items, members of the Alliance found other avenues for raising money. They sold baked goods, organized rummage sales and, at least once, held a “Christmas surprise

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box” sale for which each member wrapped a box with a gift inside; the mystery boxes were then sold to members of the congregation. In 1910, the group sponsored a “penny jug” scheme. They gave each member of the church and each Sunday school child a small jug, asking “that money be deposited in them from time to time; at the end of five months these jugs would be broken and the funds thus collected used to re-tint the soiled walls of the Church.” The penny jugs proved a success, yielding $36.60 when they were opened.\(^\text{106}\)

Alliance members also addressed the church’s needs for physical improvements and repairs. Over the years they provided new pew cushions or reupholstered worn ones and more than once they carpeted both the church and the Sunday school room.\(^\text{107}\) In 1910 when the interior of the church needed some refurbishment, the Alliance underwrote the work during the summer when the church was not in use. Mrs. A. D. Warner (Emalea Pusey Warner) reported to Alliance members about the work:

> Alexander with his vacuum cleaner came next and thoroughly cleaned rafters carpets cushions & pulpit. The S.S. carpet was lifted turned both sides were cleaned and the bare floor. Fifteen quarts of dust thus taken were sent to Miss Pusey for flower beds. George Shockley helped many ways stained chairs tables wood work in study and kitchen. The floors were done…Shades were placed at the west window and the galley curtains of silkaline were placed in bookcases. A closet with lock was made for brooms & a few rugs were bought. The pictures were rehung. The walls of kitchen and study were done by a white washer.\(^\text{108}\)

Alliance members added “finishing touches on pictures and ornaments and by Sept. ‘our house was in order.’” The total cost for the work was $273.\(^\text{109}\)

In 1930, Mrs. A. D. Warner, a generous Alliance leader, “made improvements” to the Sunday school room and kitchen; the Alliance in turn painted the kitchen and lavatory and provided a water heater for the church.\(^\text{110}\)

In 1893 when the trustees added a parlor to the church on West Street, the ladies furnished the room. Similarly, when the parlor in the new church on Halstead Road was completed, the Alliance installed furniture and named the room after Mrs. Warner who led the organization for nearly forty years.\(^\text{111}\)

While a portion of the organization’s annual pledge to the church went to repairs that the trustees designated, the Alliance also periodically raised funds specifically to aid in building maintenance. In 1900, for example, the Alliance raised $578 of which $475 went to the church treasury and $67 went “for care of church.” Two years later, they disbursed $360 to the treasurer and $73 for “care of church property.” In 1918 they raised $130 for organ repairs and they regularly had the piano tuned.\(^\text{112}\)

As Alliance members worked on the fabric of the church, they used the services of the church janitor to whom the trustees paid a salary. Several of their financial reports reflected both payments to the janitor for his extra work. In the 1910s, for example, the women paid janitor George Shockley for cleaning the church ceiling, cutting grass, delivering wood to the fireplace, making unspecified repairs, and restocking the kitchen supply of tea and cookies. They purchased for his use a snow shovel, a chain and padlock for the gate, a vacuum cleaner, and cleaning supplies.\(^\text{113}\)

Members regularly provided hospitality on behalf of the congregation. The meals they served at annual meetings reflected early 20th century appetites. In 1912, for example, the ladies prepared “fried oysters, ham, rolls and butter, Waldorf Salad, jelly, olives, pickles, cake, tea, coffee & chocolate.”\(^\text{114}\) The Wilmington Alliance extended a warm welcome and supplied refreshments when the regional Alliance organization, the
Philadelphia League, met in Wilmington. They prepared meals ranging from a light repast of ham and lettuce sandwiches and bouillon to a more substantial creamed halibut, but always served with coffee and cake.  

Ministers occasionally called upon the ladies to organize meals for special meetings. The Rev. William A. Vrooman in particular frequently asked the Alliance to put on suppers, linking the meals with projects in which he was interested. Eager to start a Laymen’s League among the men of the congregation, for example, he arranged for Unitarians with links to the League to come to Wilmington as his guests. In November 1918, Vrooman asked the women to prepare a “social Supper” to which the men of the church would be invited as his guests and at which the guest of honor was to be the Rev. Frederick R. Griffin of Philadelphia, an advocate on behalf of the League. Within six months, Vrooman sought the Alliance’s help with a meeting at which Milton Garvin of Lancaster would speak about forming a Laymen’s League and in January 1920 he invited Carl Wetherell who represented the League on behalf of the AUA.

Members of the Alliance extended a friendly hand to those in need. As early as 1889, the Ladies Aid Society had “an active P. O. Mission” and a Cheerful Letter Committee amongst its activities. The “Post Office Mission” and the “Cheerful Letter Committee” functioned together as a form of “quiet Unitarian evangelism.” Participating Alliance branches mailed a monthly AUA publication, The Cheerful Letter, to individuals requesting information about the denomination and to Unitarians in isolated places so they would feel more connected with the larger Unitarian family. Eventually the Cheerful Letter program included a home study scheme for members and Alliance groups around the country undertook support for “Cheerful Letter” libraries in 27 states.

The Wilmington Alliance routinely sent modest donations to help support the Calhoun Colored School in Calhoun, Alabama. New Englanders Mabel W. Dillingham and Charlotte R. Thorn had taught for several years at Booker T. Washington's alma mater, the Hampton Institute. Washington's description of the need for education in Calhoun moved the two women to leave Hampton and open a school for African-American students in Calhoun in 1891. After Miss Dillingham died in 1894, her brother, the Rev. Pitt Dillingham, a Unitarian minister, succeeded her as principal. Unitarians provided much of the funding for the school, an educational endeavor described in 1902 as “successful in doing a practical and important work.” Such links to the larger world kept Wilmington Alliance members aware of faithful and energetic fellow workers elsewhere pursuing the greater good.

The women were thrifty financial managers, making the funds they raised go as far as possible. In 1910, the Wilmington group hosted “Alliance Day,” when Alliance members from Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington visited as guests. The Wilmington Alliance apparently purchased plates, cups, and saucers for the special luncheon and, after the event was over and their eighty guests had returned home, they sold the excess tableware. Four days after the big gathering, the Alliance’s treasurer reported that the group had spent $15 for china purchased at Woolworth & Company; at subsequent meetings the treasurer reported “receipts from sale of china.” When they decided to buy a vacuum cleaner “to help our faithful janitor,” approval was contingent on the cost of the machine not exceeding $10. Following the 1920 annual meeting, the Alliance treasurer announced that after serving dinner – chicken pie, peas, rolls, celery, cranberries, doughnuts and coffee – to 62 people at fifty cents per person, there was a “surplus” after the bills were paid.

Music

In the sphere of music, volunteers for many years provided leadership and guidance. Early in the church's musical history, for example, Clara Felton Bent, George E. Bent's daughter, “came down from Thurlow, Penna., a distance of twelve miles, every Saturday, for nearly three years, remaining over Sunday, to preside at the organ and assist in the Sunday School; all for love of the Liberal faith.” Clara Bent was a founding member of the church. Born in Massachusetts, she relocated when her father moved the family to Philadelphia to work with his brother-in-law Samuel Morse Felton, president of the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad. The family never lived in Wilmington, although Miss Bent
eventually moved to the city where she taught music. She was remembered for her faithful dedication to the church musical program and as a “devout Unitarian” with “a finely sensitized musical education.”

The first professional to serve the congregation music program apparently was Florence Hirst. The 1884 annual financial report included a $60 annual payment to her for work as church organist. A decade later, Mrs. John P. Wales, a founding member of the church, had taken Miss Hirst’s place. Mrs. Wales and her daughter, Isabelle B. Wales, played prominent roles in the congregation’s musical history.

Isabelle Wales performed in church dramatic and choral productions for 50 years. In 1894, when she was in her mid-twenties, she acted in a “Dramatic Entertainment” offered by the church’s Young People’s Association. She and her sister, Elizabeth, took roles as maids in “Petticoat Perfidy” and “A Game of Bluff.”

Miss Wales’ true gift, however, was musical and as an adult she earned a reputation as an accomplished performer and talented music teacher. As musical director for the church, she shared her expertise with and sharpened the skills of the choir. She also put her talents to use to aid the church financially. Her recitals benefiting the church ranged from Scottish songs and stories to an afternoon of whimsical tunes. Her operetta, “The Lost Necklace,” written for an all-women’s ensemble, garnered excellent reviews in the local press, which declared it a “great success.”

The church regularly and gratefully acknowledged Miss Wales’ talent. In its 1918-1919 report to the Philadelphia League, the Wilmington Alliance wrote that the children provided the entertainment at the 1918 Christmas party “with the ever ready help of Miss Wales, who furnishes our church music and no one can say how much besides of help and good will.”

Religious Education

The third key element in the firm foundation for the on-going life and rhythms of the church was religious education. Here too volunteers played an essential role. Founding member Augusta Sisson Conant headed the Sunday school program from its inception. She was widowed at the age of twenty-seven when her husband, Horace A. Conant, an Army officer, died while on duty in Washington, D.C. in 1862. She moved to her parents’ home in New Jersey and, after her father’s death, relocated again, when her mother moved to Wilmington. She found her calling within the church as superintendent of the Sunday school, a post she held for the next 28 years.

Just as Emalea Pusey Warner guided the Woman's Alliance for many years and Isabelle B. Wales helped develop the church music program, Mrs. Conant devoted herself to establishing a meaningful educational program for the Unitarian children. After she died in late 1894, The Christian Register remarked “The Sunday-school of the church owes its existence and its continuance almost entirely to her self-sacrificing devotion.” Mrs. Conant’s faithful service was sufficiently noteworthy that following her death, the minister scolded the congregation for relying too much on her and for not taking an active interest in the children and their education in liberal religion. By the church’s annual meeting in 1895, the Sunday school had a regular pianist, Miss Elizabeth Wales, and a song leader, Mr. Andrews Allen, but church members were enjoined to play a part in the Sunday school.

Over the years, the educational program faced certain challenges and on at least three occasions attracted AUA attention, although it was not always clear why. In 1913, the Rev. William I. Lawrance, secretary of the AUA Department of Education, visited Wilmington where he met with Sunday school teachers “and other workers” to discuss the church’s situation. He expressed no doubt about the “earnest devotion” of the Wilmington church members, while acknowledging that the congregation’s lack of a minister was a problem. In the 1920s, the AUA sent Miss D. Louise Henderson to Wilmington. Based in Chicago as the “secretary of the Midwestern Area” of the AUA Department of Education, she went to Wilmington to “reorganize the Sunday-school.” Her job was developing religious education programs and her solution for Wilmington was to bring in Mrs. Mary D. Bradford, “an experienced educator,” to run the Sunday school. Two decades later
another AUA “authority on the education of children,” Mrs. Sophia L. Fahs, spent a weekend meeting with the Religious Education Committee and Sunday school teachers.129

Whether these visits were warranted is unclear, but it is apparent that teachers over the years provided children in the religious education program certain essential lessons. The most visible and perhaps the most important and enduring lesson was the lesson of generosity.

Only days after they were organized as “The Little Helpers” in 1891, the Sunday school children staged a “lawn party” as a fundraising event held on the lawn of Emalea Pusey Warner’s home on Delaware Avenue. The youngsters charged five cents admission with proceeds to benefit “The Ice-Water Fountain,” which was probably one of the fountain installations undertaken by the Wilmington Fountain Society to provide safe drinking water around the city.130

Two years later, the children presented “Brownie Scenes and George Washington Pinafore” in the church parlor. They charged adults twenty-five cents admission and children fifteen cents; their publicity did not specify who would benefit from their efforts. In 1894, the children’s entertainment efforts again provided them with funds that they could give away; they disbursed $5 to assist “an aged Colored woman” and had made donations to the organ fund and to the church.131

At Christmas in 1894, the children celebrated the holiday by “extending hospitality” to children from the “Lend a Hand” and “East Brandywine” kindergartens. When the Woman’s Alliance proposed their “penny jug” project in 1910, the children added their pennies to the $36.60 collected. For Christmas 1933, the youngsters used part of the money they raised from a bake sale to pay for their own Christmas party, but they also voted to use a portion of their funds “or the boy in whom the Prisoner’s (sic) Aid Society is interested.”132 Church records to not provide the boy’s name, but the children designated him “Jimmie.”

In April 1934, the Unitarian Sunday school classes invited students from the Friends First Day School to visit and participate in a program on slavery and the abolitionist movement. The day’s activities included Unitarian Helen S. Garrett talking about her grandfather, Thomas Garrett, renowned for his work with the Underground Railroad.133

The generosity that the Unitarian youngsters learned extended beyond Wilmington. In 1892 they put together a large box of Christmas gifts that they sent to Crow Indian children at “Montana Ranch,” the Montana Industrial School for Indians that the AUA established in 1886.134 In the early 1930s, the children collected small toys and clothing for the Caney Creek Settlement School in Kentucky, an institution that Unitarian Alice Geddes Lloyd established in 1916.135 At Christmas 1944, the Sunday school children again demonstrated thoughtful generosity when they collected gifts for Japanese children held in internment camps in Arizona.136

Other organizations, same lessons

The church had a number of other organizations for particular segments within the congregation. The 1866 constitution under which the church was organized included among its committees one devoted to “Sabbath School and Youth,” although it was not until May of 1891 that a group for youth, the Young People's Association, formed “to promote sociability and the welfare of the church.”137 The Wilmington young people eventually associated with the Young People's Religious Union, which the AUA established in 1896 “for social activities and worship.”138 When the Unitarian youth organization and the Universalist young people merged their organizations in 1953, the Wilmington youngsters became part of the combined group, Liberal Religious Youth.139

The American Unitarian Association organized the Laymen's League in 1909 “to bring the men of the separate churches into closer acquaintance, co-operation, and fellowship.”140 The Rev. Vrooman became Wilmington’s minister in 1917 and his arrival coincided roughly with a push by Unitarian leaders to increase church membership by using the Laymen’s League as a mechanism for growth. Embracing the idea of building a men’s group in his church, Vrooman promoted the League through speakers already actively involved. Drawn both from area Unitarian churches and from AUA headquarters, these guests provided information
about forming a Wilmington group and about “the remarkable constructive work” of the organization.\textsuperscript{141} The League provided opportunities for men of the congregation to offer service to the church and the community.

Other groups offered church members a chance to socialize and to connect with the church family. The Unity Club formed in 1881 “to promote the individual, social and public good of its members and of the community.” At its weekly meetings, members heard lectures and took part in discussions.\textsuperscript{142} AUA provided guidance through its National Bureau of Unity Clubs and offered recommendations for programs that would enhance “the intellectual, social and ethical culture of its members and the community at large.”\textsuperscript{143} The club created a “helpers” group to raise funds and extend limited philanthropy to the community. The Monday Night Club and the Fortnightly Club offered similar opportunities for adult members to spend time together.

Whether they flourished over the years or were short-lived, such organizations contributed to the strength of the church that now is celebrating its 150\textsuperscript{th} anniversary. The segments within the church family, from the Woman’s Alliance to the music program to the religious education program to other smaller groups that came and went, reinforced the fundamental impulses that inform the church’s programs today – that all are members of the same family and that all are called to treat one another with respect and love and generosity. The details may change; the basics remain unchanged.
In 1966 and 1991, the church marked its 100th and 125th anniversaries with published histories. Section Two is a condensed version of those earlier histories merged into one and tells the story of the church’s first 125 years.

Unitarians, denying the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, trace their roots to the thinkers of the Protestant Reformation. One of the founders of English Unitarianism, scientist Joseph Priestley, brought the Unitarian faith and philosophy to America, first to New England’s Congregationalism.

We, here in Wilmington, came into existence thanks to a group of liberal Christians who conversed about religion and how their understanding of faith could influence their lives. Those conversations led the group to establish the First Unitarian Society of Wilmington.

The congregation’s first document, dated February 1866, stated: “The undersigned propose to associate themselves for the purpose of forming and sustaining in the City of Wilmington, a Society of the Unitarian Faith, and to take the earliest practicable measures therefor.”

The group met in the Scientific Hall of the Wilmington Institute, which also housed a subscription library, downtown. With the help of the American Unitarian Association and several churches near by, this society grew steadily, prompting the congregation to build a church in 1867 on West Street near Eighth. With a wrought iron cross on the steeple and the sign “First Unitarian Church,” the red brick building was completed in 1868.

The Baltimore Church presented two silver communion chalices as a special gift. Later the Women’s Alliance converted them into tall coffee pots we are still gratefully using. The American Unitarian Association gifted us a large Bible, still in our possession.

Early on, women played a big role in the church, also worked as Trustees, which was unusual at that time but continued to be the case for our church.

Several ministers helped the congregation to deepen its faith, educate the children, and become a caring force in the community through “Faith in Action.” The Rev. Fielder Israel became the first installed minister on October 7, 1866. He was a popular and respected figure. Some of the Rev. Israel’s admirers preferred, indeed, to be called “Israelites” rather than Unitarians. In 1868 the Unitarian Church in Taunton, Massachusetts, sought to acquire his services, but was informed that the Rev. Israel’s removal from this city would be “sadly disastrous, if not utterly ruinous to the cause of liberal Christianity in this city and neighborhood.” Despite all this, the congregation's inability to meet his salary led the Rev. Israel to resign a year later.

The Rev. William Thorne became our minister in March 1871; he and the church parted ways by mutual agreement a year later. Although there was a financial depression at the time and the church was having money problems, the Rev. Fielder Israel was invited to return. He accepted and remained until December 1876.

A year elapsed before the Rev. J.M.W. Pratt started his ministry here in 1878. Once again finances (or lack of them) intervened, and the Rev. Pratt left in 1880. In 1881 our society offered the Rev. Henry R. Wilson, a salary of $800 a year, although the Rev. Israel received a beginning salary of $2000. Both parties finally agreed on $1,000 annually.
The Rev. Wilson remained until 1888. The Rev. William H. Johnson served from 1889 to 1893. His tenure was also beset with financial difficulties, made more challenging by the addition of a religious education wing to the church. The period of 1894 to 1908 showed greater stability. The Rev. Alexander T. Bowser served during these fourteen years before leaving for Atlanta. From 1908 to 1912 the Rev. C.A. Henderson served as minister. The salary had finally climbed back to $2,000, but not for long. The Rev. F.A. Hinckley, who was engaged in 1912, started at $15 a Sunday, received $1,400 a year in 1913, and at the time of his death in 1917 was paid $20 a Sunday. A strong sentiment, in favor of disbanding the Society after the death of the 72-year-old minister prevailed for a while. Once again, a few of the strong minded die-hards insisted on not giving up. Thus, the Rev. William A. Vrooman joined us and remained for nineteen years.

The Rev. Vrooman came to Wilmington from Canada. He promoted the growth of the church by taking part in many activities, both in the church and in the community. The Rev. Vrooman furnished local newspapers with abstracts of his sermons, gave public talks, and published pamphlets. He actively worked with the founders of the Prisoners’ Aid Society, an organization that originated within our church. In 1920 the Rev. Vrooman became its Executive Secretary, a post he held for many years. In addition, he conducted services in Arden without compensation and each Sunday during the depression years (1929-1937) delivered an evening sermon in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

At the annual meeting on January 27, 1922, the minister reported that we had sixty-eight resident and thirteen non-resident members. A trustee reported average church attendance ranging from thirty in the 1918-19 church year to forty-eight in 1919-1920, fifty-two in 1920-21, and fifty-seven in 1921-22.

Figures such as these explain why on many occasions the church found itself in financial difficulties. Legend has it that, when the Parish Hall was added to the rear of the church, Mrs. Stone arranged for the installation of a window in the alcove behind the pulpit platform. So great was her drive that the manufacturing and installation of the window took place before the congregation became aware of what was going on. Considerable discussion followed, and, at a later meeting, the congregation accepted the suggestion to make it a Memorial Window (the “Angel Window”) to honor members Lydia B. Sisson and Heywood Conant. Presently, that Angel Window resides in our Brunner chapel. We now walk by the lower part of that window every time we come through the hallway into the front office. Mrs. Warner is remembered in gratitude, for having helped to sustain this church. Our Warner Room carries her name.

The hand-to-mouth existence of the church becomes obvious when one considers that the balance on hand for the year 1923 stood at $27.28 and was considered to be a “very healthy financial condition”. The churchwomen found this so encouraging that in 1924 they redecorated the church and invested in new carpeting.

The minutes of the trustees’ meeting on September 18, 1925 note that the Rev. Vrooman finished writing the book, “Progressive Christianity.” The “conservative old English firm of MacMillan & Co.” accepted it for publication. The author related some of the difficulties he had overcome with the publisher in regard to the part played by Unitarians in the history of the march of liberalism.

At their meeting on November 6, 1925, the trustees learned that one of the church members had offered to finance the rental of a house neighboring the church for the minister’s study, thus relieving the congestion in the parish hall. The trustees accepted the offer “with pleasure and gratitude.”

It is interesting to learn that a donation of $179 was sent to the American Unitarian Association (AUA) in 1926; later that year we had no funds available to meet the bill of $600 for repairs to the storm-damaged slate roof. So we borrowed this amount from the AUA.

The Women’s Alliance reported at the annual meeting on January 14, 1927, that they spent time sewing for the Visiting Nurses Association and made a contribution of $50 to the Swansboro School in North Carolina. Enrollment in the Wilmington Sunday school numbered thirty children, with an average of twenty-four attending. Church membership for 1926 climbed to 111. The Rev. Vrooman’s book, “Progressive Christianity,” sold well. The Laymen’s League backed the purchase of 1,000 copies; 160 of them went into Wilmington.
On September 19, 1929, the trustees asked their president to send a letter of appreciation to Mrs. A.D. Warner for her “unfailing help and interest in the welfare of the society in the past and this provision for the future (contribution to establish the A.D. Warner Memorial Fund) as an inspiration and example to the members of the society.”

In May 1930, the church formed a Boy Scout troop. Dr. Crayton K. Black became the elected scoutmaster. After winning honors in scouting, the troop moved to Mt. Pleasant School in 1945. Our people helped organize the Delaware Birth Control League (now the Delaware League for Planned Parenthood) in April 1931.

Later in 1931, the Rev. Vrooman reported the organization of a Girl Scout troop, with Mrs. Roger Stone as leader. Due to professional duties, Mrs. Stone resigned as leader in 1936, and the troop then merged with that of Brandywine Methodist Church.

The 1935 Directory includes an essay by the Rev. Vrooman entitled “What Do Unitarians Believe?” in which he writes

Unitarians believe that every increase of knowledge should be followed by the abandonment of old errors in religious thought. The activity of demons and miraculous inventions of God in violation of the uniform laws of Nature, no longer seems credible. The supernatural infallibility of the Bible has been disproved by a critical study of its contents. The Fall of Adam takes its place among ancient myths after the evolution and great antiquity of man has been discovered. The dogmas of the Trinity and the Deity of Jesus are seen to be products of philosophical speculation in antiquity. The doom of Endless Hell has become irreconcilable with the faith in the justice and humanity of God. Many of the traditional beliefs about God have been rendered obsolete by the scientific exploration of the universe. The Blood Atonement of the innocent for the guilty in order to gain divine mercy affronts our sense of moral justice.

Those not familiar with the Unitarian movement may be interested in the following extract from an address by one of the most noted ministers in the west, the Rev. John H. Dietrich, Minneapolis

First there have been five Presidents of the United States – John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, Millard Fillmore, and William Howard Taft; And in connection with them an army of great statesmen such as John C. Calhoun, Hannibal Hamlin, Daniel Webster, Thomas Pickering, Edward Everett, Charles Summer, Fisher Ames, John Andrew and a host of others; in addition there have been three Unitarian Chief Justices of the Federal Supreme Court – John Marshall, Joseph Story, and Mr. Taft. Many of the great poets and literary characters of this country have been Unitarians – Bryant, Longfellow, Lowell, Whitier, Holmes, Emerson, Bayard Taylor, George W. Curtis, Helen Hunt, Thomas Wentworth Higgenson, Edward Everett Hale, Bret Harte, Richard Stodder, E.C. Stedman, Thomas Baily Aldrich Thoreau, Luisa M. Alcott and many others. Leading historians – Bancroft, Motley, Prescott, Sparks, Palfrey, Parkman and Fiske were Unitarians. So were the educators Horace Mann, Peter Cooper, Ezra Cornell, David Starr Jordan and many presidents of Harvard University from 1810 to the present day; and the noted presidents of dozens of other universities in this land. Great scientists Agassiz, Pierce, Bowditch and Draper were Unitarians. Eminent women Unitarians include Margaret Fuller, Lydia Child, Lucretia Mott, Helen Hunt Jackson, Mrs. Livermore, Dorothea Dix, Julia Ward Howe, Charlotte Cushman, Maria Mitchell, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony. And among the few supremely great preachers of America – Channing and Parker, Starr King and Robert Collyer . . . I have spoken of the kind of men and women who have been connected with the Unitarian movement, because almost every week someone expresses surprise to me to find that a certain distinguished name in American history was Unitarian.

The Rev. Vrooman announced at the trustee’s meeting, June 14, 1935, that Governor C. Douglass Buck of Delaware had appointed him to represent the state at the International Penal and Penitentiary Congress in Berlin, Germany, during the summer. While in Europe, the Rev. Vrooman toured Russia. On his return, in a
church lecture, he predicted that Russia would become a great world power, an opinion that was generally derided at the time.

At the annual meeting on January 17, 1936, Mrs. Warner described the church's story over the years as “a beautiful record.” The congregation presented Mrs. Vrooman with a handsome plant and gave to both the Rev. and Mrs. Vrooman a written “Appreciation from the Trustees and congregation.”

At this meeting, the Rev. Vrooman tendered his letter of resignation and expressed his indebtedness both to Mrs. Warner, whom he characterized as mother of our church, and to all who had dedicated themselves to creating the congregation. The Rev. Vrooman’s letter of resignation also offered a pessimistic view for the future of Unitarianism in Wilmington. However, the ministries of the Rev. Delos W. O’Brien and the Rev. John G. MacKinnon yielded impressive growth of membership and the building of our new church.

Over the years, the church received several fine gifts. Renowned artist and church member N.C. Wyeth presented the church school with an oil painting entitled “Christ and Child.” Mr. Edmund G. Robinson gave money to purchase a new church organ in memory of his mother, Mrs. Elizabeth G. Robinson; Mr. and Mrs. George M. Norman presented a combination radio and phonograph to the church; Mr. Phillip Karl, provided a sound projector to the church school; a generous bequest came from the estate of Mr. Leslie P. Mahoney; a large collection of books arrived from the former minister, the Rev. Vrooman. Mrs. Edith Sheppard’s generosity made it possible to install a much-needed lighting system in the church, a gift given in memory of her late husband, Ernest M. Sheppard.

Mrs. Sheppard also gave two silver sugar bowls and creamers with trays in her husband’s memory and Mr. Arthur Weygandt provided the church with the two large trays in memory of his wife, Ruth.

One Sunday in January 1938, Mr. N.C. Wyeth and his daughter, Ann Wyeth McCoy, presented an evening of artistic entertainment. Mr. Wyeth exhibited and discussed a few of his recent paintings and Mrs. McCoy played several of her own compositions on the piano. Later in 1938, Mr. Wyeth created a picture for the front cover of our church calendar and dedicated the picture and die to the church.

When the Rev. O’Brien assumed the pastorate in 1937, the country was on its way to recovery from the Great Depression. Increased church membership and Sunday school enrollment marked returning prosperity. It soon became apparent that the church needed larger facilities, especially for the Sunday school. In 1941, the congregation purchased the property at 800 Washington Street. This house plus a second house at 804 Washington purchased in 1952 adjoined the rear of the West Street church. They housed a church office and Sunday school classes. Church leaders named the house at 800 Washington Street the “Channing Building” and that at 804 Washington Street the “Jefferson Building.” In the latter part of 1946, the church acquired a parsonage for its minister.

During World War II, twelve of our members served in the armed services and young congregants, twenty-nine-year-old Alfred D. Warner III and twenty-five-year-old Philip W. Chillas, Jr., lost their lives.

Miss Isabelle Wales resigned as music director on September 9, 1945, and Miss Sarah Schwatlo, long-time organist at the church, agreed to take the post.

After the Rev. O’Brien resigned in March 1946, to take the job of Regional Director for AUA on the West Coast, the congregation invited the Rev. John G. MacKinnon of Richmond, Virginia, to become the next minister, officially installing him as minister on August 1, 1946. The Rev. MacKinnon proved an inspired and dedicated leader. Shortly after assuming his position, he began an annual series of philosophical lectures. These lectures happened on Sunday evenings and became so popular that the trustees became alarmed when they learned that more people attended those lectures than Sunday morning worship services.

The Social Action League, at a meeting on May 9, 1949, announced its plans for the Displaced Persons Committee to bring two doctors and two small children to this country. However, this plan never materialized.

Early in 1950, the Rev. MacKinnon discussed at the annual meeting the proposed union of the Unitarian and Universalist denominations. Merger votes during congregational meetings on May 8, 1953 and again on April 5, 1959 failed to pass. After some minor adjustments, however, a favorable vote happened October 18, 1959. On February 28, 1960, Mr. Frank L. MacArtur, chair of the Denominational Affairs Committee, moved
that “The First Unitarian Society of Wilmington approves the Definite Plan to consolidate the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America as approved by the delegates to the Joint Biennial Conference in Syracuse, New York, on October 21, 1959, and set forth by the Joint Merger Commission.” The vote was 66 ayes and 25 nays.

In his sermon on March 9, 1952, the Rev. MacKinnon marked a church anniversary:

Seventeen people, eighty-five years ago, dedicated this much of life and labor of love. They created a church – an institution, not perhaps immortal, but stretching through generations of human lives. People commit themselves to it, give this much of life to it, and pass on. Save for a few, the family names pass on. But the ideal remains. They erected a symbol and those who came after them kept it bright and shining. To this symbol all men and women who are concerned with the freedom of the human spirit can come. In its light human spirits can seek the Truth and grow in nobility of stature. The dream of the seventeen founders has been fulfilled; yet only in part, for the future still lies ahead.

By the time of the church’s 85th anniversary, membership had increased to 314 and the Sunday school counted 135 children. However, maintenance of the old church, as well as the buildings on Washington Street, became increasingly difficult. As early as 1936 and again in 1939, termites attacked the timbers of the nearly seventy-year-old building. This and pressing need for more space to accommodate the expanding range of church activities, finally led the membership to the decision in 1955 to build a new church.

At the same time, a new congregation was forming in Newark. Newark area members of the Wilmington church who had been meeting for dinner-discussion groups established a branch church and church school in Newark in October 1955. Twenty-four members moved from the Wilmington church to the Newark congregation, which used the Academy Building and Odd Fellows Hall for services and church school.

The Sharpley church’s entry doors originally hung on the West Street building. Mrs. Emalea Warner Steel Trentman, granddaughter of Mrs. Alfred D. Warner, unveiled them in a ceremony on March 28, 1954. The Rev. Dale DeWitt, director for AUA’s Middle Atlantic Region, addressed the gathering and the dedication service acknowledged the gifts that the Warner family had bestowed on the church:

Over the past few years Mr. Irving Warner has made gifts to the Board of Trustees for the beautification of our church. Our Board decided to use these gifts to install specially designed doors at the main entrance. The Board has further voted that these doors shall be a memorial to Mr. and Mrs. Alfred D. Warner [Emalea Pusey Warner] who were actively engaged in the work of the church for more than half of its lifetime.

In general, the design of the memorial doors follows the tradition of great church doors of the past . . . The sculptured panels and decorative moldings, the handles and lock, indeed all metal on the door is made of a modern material – aluminum – cast and carefully worked to its present permanent patina . . . The doors themselves consist of black walnut. The walnut arch panel above the doors is decorated with a sculptured floral motif, and the entire doorway is banded with a sculptured molding.

The subjects of the sculptured panels confirm a deep meaning for Unitarians. One pair of panels and a quotation symbolize Thomas Jefferson; the other William Ellery Channing. The top panels of each door show the two men in characteristic poses – Jefferson writing and Channing preaching. The lower panels symbolize the clear thinking and warm humanity of the two men – qualities for which we honor them. Jefferson is shown submitting to vaccination in the days when this was considered radical and dangerous, and Channing is portrayed helping a slave. Between the upper and lower panels, forming a striking horizontal band across both doors, we read quotations from each man.

Following the decision in 1955 to build a new church, the Rev. MacKinnon assumed leadership on the project, launched in the fall of 1957 with a financial campaign that aimed to raise $400,000. A building
committee studied and recommended sites, nominated the Wilmington architectural firm of Whiteside, Moeckel & Carbonell of Wilmington, and summarized the proposed elements of the new building. The congregation selected the Sharpley site in 1958; the architects’ completed their designs, and church leaders approved. The minister broke ground on April 19, 1959 and the W. D. Haddock Construction Company began erecting the new church at the northwest corner of a three-acre site in Sharpley, a parcel of land on Halsted Road close to Concord Pike.

The architects described the building’s design as two interlocking triangles with the entrance at the intersection of the linked triangles. The concept that informed the design was the pursuit of understanding and fellowship closely related to services of devotion. People enter at the lowest point of the structure and experience the soaring feeling as they move from entry into the auditorium and toward the chancel at the front of the space. In such a space, they realize their smallness in the presence of things eternal and yet recognize their integral part in eternity. The administrative offices, church school, and church enclose on three sides around a court, an arrangement that represents work, social life, and spiritual life.

The church auditorium seats 300, with provision for any overflow in the parish hall that opens off the rear. The congregation worshipped in the new church for the first time on March 13, 1960. The final cost of the project was $480,000 and treasurer, William Bradford, reported that the church had a $155,000 mortgage on the new building, payable in twenty years.

On the evening that they occupied their new church for the first time, however, the members learned that on May 24, 1959, the Rev. MacKinnon had resigned to become minister of All Souls Unitarian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. They accepted his resignation with deep regret. The phenomenal growth, both in number and influence, can be directly attributed to Mr. MacKinnon’s devotion, and the Sharpley church will ever serve as his monument.

Church leaders selected June 5, 1960, as Dedication Day for the new church, happily celebrating a great achievement. The new church filled to overflowing. Former minister, the Rev. MacKinnon came to deliver the invocation and spoke on “The Meaning of this Occasion.” Edward Hermann, the president of the Unitarian Fellowship, Newark, brought greetings from the fellowships we had helped to found. The Rev. Dale DeWitt led the meditation. The Rev. Dr. Dana M. Greely, president of the American Unitarian Association, preached the dedication sermon. The dedication ceremony followed and the congregation offered a response that lay members of the church had written and that they led. The Rev. DeWitt pronounced the benediction.

At the time the church had no minister and in February 1960, after considering several candidates for the pulpit, the church invited the Rev. Dr. Charles W. Phillips of Omaha, Nebraska to become minister. Dr. Phillips’s ministry proved difficult. He resigned in May 1962 because of “fundamental disagreement with the Board of Trustees.”

For several months, guest speakers filled the pulpit. Finally, in November 1962, the congregation elected the Rev. Dr. Robert M. Doss to its pastorate by vote of 145 to one. The Rev. Doss came to the church after a wide and varied career. Upon graduating from the University of Richmond with a B.A. degree in psychology, Mr. Doss prepared for the Baptist ministry at the Colgate Rochester Divinity School. Later he changed his mind and worked as a field manager for the Ford Motor Company in a district sales office. Still dissatisfied, Mr. Doss enrolled at the Starr King School for the Ministry in 1957 to study for the Unitarian ministry, graduating in 1959. While attending the Starr King School, Mr. Doss served as student minister in San Francisco and also as intern chaplain at San Quentin Prison. Upon graduation he became the first minister of the Unitarian Church in Rockville, Maryland. The Rev. Doss came to Wilmington in the spring of 1963. He and his wife Peggy arrived with two children, Kathy, eleven years old, and Kenneth, a year and a half old.

The Rev. Doss was greatly beloved by the congregation, which had confidence in him to carry on its great tradition.

To Donald L. Wassman went the distinction of being the only member of our church to enter the denominational ministry in the twentieth century. The Rev. J.M.W. Pratt was ordained in the First Unitarian Church Wilmington in 1878 and nearly a century later Mr. Wassman became the second man to enter the
ministry under the care of the First Unitarian Church. Though married and with a family, he had resigned his position with the Du Pont Company in September, 1961 and entered the Crane Theological School of Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts. He undertook this course at a personal sacrifice and the congregation voted to give Mr. Wassman financial assistance. At an inspiring service Mr. Wassman was ordained on February 16, 1964, with the Rev. Dr. Robert M. Doss officiating. The Rev. Wassman’s first pastoral assignment was as minister of the Unitarian-Universalist Church in Sharon, Massachusetts.

A Centennial Year was both a time for looking back and a time for looking ahead. The Women’s Alliance looked back with interest on its history and with pride in the supporting role it has played in the life of the First Unitarian Society of Wilmington. The Alliance history was almost as old as the church’s history. Its founders stood shoulder to shoulder with the church founders. On December 5, 1866, the first organization of Unitarian women in Wilmington was formed. At a meeting a year later, the group named themselves the Ladies Aid and Sewing Society. On January 19, 1885, they shortened the name to Ladies Aid Society, a label that stuck for a decade, until January 28, 1895, when they reorganized and became the Wilmington Branch of the National Alliance of Unitarian and Other Liberal Christian Women, later called the National Women’s Alliance.

The Alliance’s stated goal was “to strengthen and support Unitarianism through the local church,” a policy to which they adhered in succeeding generations. Through varied and creative fund-raising projects, the women raised money to buy new equipment, to remodel and decorate, to maintain equipment, and to enrich the programs of the church. The Alliance pointed with particular pride to its annual week at Winterthur when its members cook and serve luncheons to visitors at the gardens. Most of the money earned from this work and from its annual Pancake Day went back to the church; a small portion supported the denomination and its activities.

The members used their resources to the benefit of the church from its earliest years on West Street. They purchased carpets and pew cushions for the first church, underwrote its new heating system, and funded remodeling and re-equipping its kitchen. The Alliance created the Warner Room in the new church and maintained the church’s kitchen. Mrs. Charles Tripp gave the Alliance $1500, a great help! Service, the goal of Alliance members, was carried forward at its monthly luncheons, meaningful to so many; the Alliance rose was taken to its members in times of illness and distress, and in times of joy when a family welcomed a new member.

Many Alliance members, who served area groups at the city, county, and state levels, shared Unitarianism with the larger community. Such participation in non-church endeavors allowed members to expand their horizons and became a church outreach initiative.

The Alliance saluted the pioneers for their initial work, for the direction they gave it, and for the inspiration of their faith. It looked ahead with confidence, knowing that its membership was worthy of its long and rich heritage. Above all, the Women’s Alliance rejoiced in the hundred-year record of the church, and assured the congregation that it would continue to be a strong participant in the church community.

The Religious Education (RE) Committee, appointed by the trustees, was responsible for operating the church school and a director of education oversaw the school’s operation. The church school’s objective was to guide children in the development of faith-based values based primarily on their experiences within the church community. The study courses were arranged by the RE Committee, the director, and the teachers, based upon our denomination’s Department of Education resource materials.

In addition to the regular Sunday morning school and worship programs for children, there were special services for holiday celebrations held in the church auditorium, several all-family church services throughout the year, and “family and children’s” parties. The congregation established a Liberal Religious Youth group for senior high school students and initiated a similar program for the junior high group.

Mrs. Ernest W. Thorn served as director of religious education. Her experience and training made her well qualified for the position. She held a master’s degree in education, a bachelor’s degree in the humanities, and
was a member and past president of the Liberal Religious Education Director’s Association, which drew members from the United States and Canada.

That school enrollment tripled between 1950 and 1991 testified to the success of the school’s program. As a result of such prodigious growth the classrooms proved insufficient to meet demand and it was necessary to have several of the classes held in a neighboring building.

The Laymen’s League, an association of church members, was principally a men’s group. Its main purpose was to offer interesting, informative programs and to provide an opportunity for entertainment and fellowship. Like the members of the Women’s Alliance, the men were vitally interested in the expansion of the church and solidly behind every progressive innovation. The group met on the second Wednesday of each month during the school year. Members shared a hearty dinner and then a program. Although open to all members of the congregation, men in particular were encouraged to join.

The Fortnightly Club was an organization of young adults, both married and single. Members enjoyed monthly meetings that stimulated intellectual growth and encouraged social contact. The club had approximately 35 members, most of whom attended Sunday evening dinner meetings. During the course of the year, the group visited other churches and planned theater parties and other activities. Non-church members were welcome and many came to Unitarianism through Fortnightly.

The Liberal Religious Youth group had a long history as an independent organization for high school students from the Unitarian and Universalist churches. Several years before the Unitarian and Universalist denominations combined to form the Unitarian Universalist Association, LRY groups in both denominations merged their organizations. The LRY members governed their own organization, with adult church members acting only as advisors. The group, which met each Sunday of the church year, often numbered as many as 50 LRYers. The LRY afforded the young adults of the church an opportunity to pursue their own areas of interest and they enjoyed thought-provoking programs that often promoted lively discussions. Through the larger Unitarian Universalist LRY organization, members had the opportunity to meet with other LRYers in the region and, at the national conference, LRYers from more distant congregations.

Various service committees also performed duties essential to the welfare and operation of the church and Dinner-Discussion groups combined serious study of art, literature, and politics with the conviviality of shared meals.

We grew from an original membership of seventeen in February 1866 to 666 in 1991, with a church school enrollment of 556 and a toddler’s room contingent of thirty-six.

Our great spurt began with the ministry of the Rev. John G. MacKinnon, and accelerated with completion of our new building, and flourished with the ministry of the Rev. Dr. Robert M. Doss. Our joy in this growth was not diminished by the accompanying problems, such as insufficient seating capacity in the auditorium on special occasions and overcrowded church schoolrooms. As in the past, we resolved to address and overcome our problems.
SECTION THREE

The Last 25 Years

To bring the story fully to the 150th anniversary, Section Three records the history of the past 25 years of the First U story, from 1991 to 2016.

The last 25 years

As we celebrate our 150th anniversary, let us open with the words of the Rev. Dr. Robert M. Doss, commemorating our 125 years of existence:

Now we have come of age. The responsibility is with us to stay vital and grow wise in being and action. While we carry on the work of a free faith, making its principles live, it is most probably the continued building of community that challenges us most. Theologies come and go. Ideas change. Religious thought and feeling evolve into new expression. Through it all we strive for, and realize in part, authentic human community.

To those who may read of us one hundred years hence, we say: We cannot send to you our laughter, our fellowship, our learning through pain or our sense of belonging in this cherished religious community. We hope to be the stream of life that passes on to you that which began here one hundred years before our time. Our desire is that it be enhanced further because we lived part of it. You will live your part by opening your minds and hearts to the living fellowship that is your own present fact. We send to you friends a greeting across the years out of the fullness of our celebration. May you know something of the gladness of our day in your own experience.

Indeed, our 150th birthday gives us reason to celebrate our church existence gratefully. These words the Rev. Doss gave us to sing, to state and remember, to inspire us in our efforts to keep building and enriching our spiritual home for us right now and for future generations:

For all who see God, may God be with you.
For all who embrace life, may life return your affection.
For all who seek a right path, may a way be found,
And the courage to take it, step by step.

These last twenty-five years closed chapters and opened new ones; let us say “farewell,” “greetings” and “welcome” to congregants as well as staff. We built on a strong foundation and constantly attempted to deepen our faith-based convictions. The following became our written guidelines on which to build and with which to work:

The Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism:

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

• The inherent worth and dignity of every person
• Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations
The Last 25 Years

- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in congregations
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

**We work to embody**
- Love and Compassion
- Growth and Discovery
- Freedom and Justice
- Wonder and Joy

**We formed our new mission and recite it together every Sunday:**
First Unitarian Church of Wilmington is a beloved community that nourishes minds and spirits, fights injustice, and transforms the world through loving actions.

**We begin each service with words of welcome:**
We are a welcoming congregation, no matter your creed, no matter your race, no matter whom you love, no matter your financial situation, all are welcome here!

Being able to accomplish these goals, we have to ensure that we are stable in every respect as an institution. Despite some ups and downs through the years, we have changed ways of operating, but have evolved! We have come full circle from a small group of founders to a larger ministerial church in which our minister, the Rev. Dr. Robert Doss, needed an associate, the Rev. William Gardner. We were dependent on them and grew until we entered two transitional periods of mourning when, first the Rev. Gardner retired in 1978 after 12 years with us, and when the Rev. Doss retired in 1994 after 31 years.

With the help of our Interim Minister, the Rev. Janet Newman and the Rev. Kathie Thomas from our midst who at that time was Minister of Religious Education, we went through a period with renewal questions that culminated in calling the Rev. Dr. Patrick O'Neill in 1996 as our Senior Minister. The Rev. Barbara Hoag in 2003 joined us as the Associate Minister. Our Assistant Ministers under the Rev. O'Neill were the Rev. Paul Hull from 1995-1996, the Rev. Paul Boothby, who, in addition was overseeing RE from 1997-2000, the Rev. Fern Stanley 2001-2002. That same year the Rev. Diana Heath served as Interim Associate.

Membership fluctuated. Enthusiasm and spiritual needs grew. Yet, with the economic times the country faced, it became harder to recruit volunteers who had to answer to their own professional and family obligations. In order for the church to function on all levels, the spiritual, the care giving and business level, the Board of Trustees established a Policy Governance Taskforce in 2002 to follow the example of other larger churches. In the following years Policy Governance became the modus operandi, primarily thanks to the tireless work and persistence of President Nancy Pinson as well as Helen Foss, who led a special task force which explored the pros and cons of the new style for our congregation who had grown from the original 61 found members, with fluctuations, to about 450. Thus, some job descriptions were changed and new staff positions created. After the Rev. O'Neill resigned in 2007, with the tutelage of interim minister, the Rev. Robert Latham, the Board created an Executive Committee that would “run the church business-wise” and report to the Board, while the Board focused more on establishing policies with specific means to reach projected ends or goals. Example:

**Ends in 2011:**
• A vibrant community of religious learning.
• A community of spiritual seekers.
• A welcoming and caring community.
• A community for people with passion for social justice and the environment.
• A community dedicated to the growth of Unitarian Universalism.

These goals were pursued before, but not as clearly stated. Neither were the means or ways of how to reach them.

The Executive Committee (ET) consisted of the senior minister, the associate minister, the church administrator and two lay people from the congregation. As everything else in a living institution, this combination is a work in progress. In 2016, only one congregational representative serves on the ET and, since we are presently a one-minister church, our developmental minister, the Rev. Roberta Finkelstein, has a position on the ET. Each member of the ET has his or her specific portfolio within which guidance and working relations to the various church groups and their work can be established. These practical and operational changes caused some anxieties and uncertainties. During the year before the Rev. Robert Latham joined us, the Rev. Heather Hansen helped us to pursue our faith, as did the Rev. Arlene Sutherland the year after the Rev. Latham left. These three interim ministers deserve our gratitude in preparing us to call the Rev. Dr. Joshua Snyder to our pulpit in 2009 as our senior minister.

While, of course, the need for professional ministers to head the church remains, we continue to learn about the value of shared ministry. Again: we could build on a strong net Sally Hamburger had woven over several years as our program facilitator. The Rev. O’Neill initiated, that from 1998-2002, Karen Lindley joined the staff as our first director of ministry development. In that position she taught congregants that all committee work, if done correctly, is ministry to each other. Understanding this, we ease the load for our ministers as well as also help to create an active church community, which does more than dutifully volunteering. This change is called a development from a pastoral church to a program church. Together with, then interim assistant minister, the Rev. Stanley, Karen developed group covenants for the various church groups and committees. She also transitioned the position and responsibilities from church administrator – held from 1979-2002 by Peggy Rawheiser, then held by Gina Small from 2002-2004, Patti Emmons from 2004-2007 and since 2007, business administrator Marina VanRenssen.

Despite the difficulties of managing professional and family lives, adding the service of sharing the ministry seems to enrich the lives of many congregants. Here are some examples of involvement:

**Worship**

Beyond feeling invited, beyond getting involved with group activities, congregants need to be fed spiritually. That is the reason they became church members to begin with. A big staple of this food is worship on Sunday mornings, during ceremonies celebrating life’s occurrences, and also within Adult and Youth Religious Exploration (formerly Education). Yes, we are most grateful to our ministers. They lead and take the responsibility in providing the right atmosphere seriously with their sermon preaching as well as content for a “real” worship. Our Worship Arts Committee has helped for years with the aesthetics of it by decorating the sanctuary with flowers and fitting items. These committee members also sometimes join other congregants to create services or participate by writing, reading, acting their messages.

No worship service is complete without the important part music plays. We are very fortunate to have Scott Ward, who joined us in 1991 as music director, following long time music director Margaret Love. Because Scott not only plays the organ and the piano and sings, his choir and soloists let us participate, listen, and return home satisfied, year in year out. And, since 1977, we still enjoy our marvelous Rieger tracker organ, during worship as well as during great concerts. Beyond all the gifts with which Scott enriches us, he also tends to people who need additional care. He attended seminar courses to receive extra credentials and in
1998 became more than a special music director. He was made honorary minister of music who, after more education, is now a certified chaplain.

Over the years, members of the congregation at large as well as from the Worship Arts Committee delivered sermons or created whole worship services during the summer months. That has changed more recently, as ministers from UU churches in the area were invited to preach, often also to exchange pulpits with our ministers. This practice increased the feeling of belonging to a community beyond our own church walls.

Religious education for our youth as well as the adults is also a very important part of our congregation’s spiritual growth. For the children and youth we have had several directors of religious education. Emily Thorn, an education professional, was director from 1955-1975. She never lacked for Sunday school teachers, since her rule was that “you serve in the RE Wing two years for every child you bring.” The curriculum was excellent and the parents followed her rule, but this regime split the church a bit into two congregations, one in the sanctuary, the other in the RE Wing. With the Rev. Kathie Thomas serving as RE director from 1991-1996, a “unification” began. Children started to spend the beginning of every service in the Sanctuary, as they still do. The Rev. Paul Boothby took over the RE role for children and youth from 1996 -1999, Jude Henzy from 1999-2004, Georgianne Shehy from 2004-2007. In 2007 Catherine Williamson became the new RE director. She established a program for exploring. Thus this educational part in our congregation is now called Religious Exploration. It is well attended, drawing younger members who want to offer this exploring aspect to their children, up to the end of high school.

Our whole Religious Exploration program, with the active involvement of church volunteers, developed over the years into three parts:

- The Children’s Exploration (CYRE) with various stages according to age, covering childcare, K through 3\textsuperscript{rd} grade, grades 4, 5, 6 including OWL (Our Whole Lives), 7& 8 which also include OWL which is an age appropriate human sexuality program in their learning experience.
- Youth Religious Exploration – Youth-Adult Team (YAT) for High School youth who are involved in helping to direct what direction they wish to go in their learning.
- Adult Religious Education (ARE) – Each group has a curriculum. The ARE programs take place Sunday mornings before the church service, offering lectures and discussions on many subjects. In addition to worship and education, we have and continue to build on our heritage and our Faith based obligations.

\textbf{Two Ordinations from our midst:}
Kathie Davis Thomas and Paula Annone Maiorano completed their requirements and gained full confidence of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee. They were ordained in the spring of 1995 in our church as new ministers. Betty Stapleford began her studies for the ministry also, with the church’s sponsorship.

\textbf{Pastoral Care or Caring Committee}
This is a large area within our community, committed to help with filling special needs within the congregation. These good Samaritans got help from the assistant or intern ministers, like Ralph Tyksinsky and Lilli Nye. During the years of 1999 to 2002 the Rev. Dale Lantz also helped. He had been a congregant for many years and became our affiliated community minister for that period. Later, this Pastoral Care Committee was renamed Caring Committee. Dedicated lay people wanted to continue helping congregants in need wherever they could, but resisted the word “pastoral.”

The Rev. Barbara Gadon took great efforts to strengthen this committee to support those members who would bring food to fellow parishioners in need of it, provide rides if necessary, and she trained others how to listen and be a presence. After the Rev. Gadon left in 2010, the Rev. Alison Hyder, assistant interim minister from 2011 to 2012 and the Rev. Michelle Collins, assistant minister from 2013 to 2015, continued to help us
with this important work. In a large congregation, one minister, or even two ministers, there is not enough time for the clergy alone to meet every need. Caring for fellow members increases the feeling of community; and, if dwindling numbers of membership should occur, financial support could also decrease and the church would have to change its staffing. In a different area than usually associated with, it is “long range planning” that the care needed and given can be assured in the future. This committee has grown a lot during the twenty-five years passed, in it importance and qualifications.

Other groups either continued or were newly formed with the purpose of building and strengthening us within our walls as well as reaching out into the larger community. Over the years titles have slightly changed. They now fall into these categories:

**Congregational Services:**
- Book Corner offers books for sale that are thought to be of specific interest to members of our congregation. The profit is used to buy books for our library or for other needs of an educational nature.
- Greeters and Ushers welcome worshipers as they arrive and assist them in any way appropriate on Sunday morning.
- Library has a large collection of books that may be borrowed by members and friends of the congregation. The books are ones that would be of an interest to people who want to learn more about our religion and thought.
- Membership assists in attracting new members and integrating them into the church life. Classes are offered for new attendees to learn more about our religion and our church.
- Service Video Taping makes tapes of our services and programs available for those who might wish to have such tapes and for permanent record.
- Sunday Office Volunteer Services greet anyone who comes to the office with questions or needs on Sunday morning whether it be long time members or new comers.
- Spiritual and Religious Quests offer various group meetings or courses for members of the congregation who are interested in spirituality or thought provoking opportunities.
- Adult RE schedules Sunday morning courses or programs that help members of the congregation to further their knowledge of our religion or their own religious ideas.
- Children’s RE Task Force works with the Religious Education Director in making the children's experience in the Church School as meaningful as possible. It works to include the parents and to be supportive in all aspects of the program.

**Fellowship and Service:**

**Alliance.** A group of the leading women in the congregation had been meeting informally for a year. On December 5, 1866 they officially organized under the name “Ladies’ Aid & Sewing Circle.” They were eager to help to clothe the unfortunate children of the community. On January 5, 1885 the name was shortened to “Ladies’ Aide Society.” On January 28, 1895 they had enough members to be able to organize as the Wilmington Branch of the National Women’s Alliance. In recent times the name has been “The Alliance.”

Over the years they raised money for worthy causes. Their goal was to strengthen the principles of the Unitarian religion through the local church. They repaired clothing, made new garments with their focus still being for children. They were community leaders in Delaware especially in education.

Their fund raising projects have dated from the “Pink & Blue Sociable” of the 1880’s to the “Fall Festival” in recent years with a pancake breakfast and sales of crafts, books, baked goods and white elephants. The money they raised was to enrich the church programs through purchase of equipment, remodel and
redecorate. They had a “Crafts Group” which made handmade items to be sold at the church fund raising events.

Their focus was strongly focused toward the Warner Room and the kitchen. The original plans for the current building had not included a “parlor” so it was only because the Alliance lobbied for that change in the plans that it was included in the new building. They bought one “stop” on the new organ.

Their monthly meetings consisted of a lunch prepared by members of the group and a program, often an outside speaker. The lunch became more important as more and more of the members became single women living alone so the filling lunch was their large meal for the day.

An Alliance Rose was given to a member who had a sadness or a joy in their family. The outgoing president each year was given a rose lapel pin. For many years members of the Alliance prepared the flowers to go on in the sanctuary and later paid for flowers to be furnished.

The Warner Room was named for Emalea Warner who was a member of the Alliance and a leader in the community. Furnishings for the room and all equipment for the kitchen were paid for with money that the Alliance raised. Their other gifts were focused on projects that were outside of the general church budget so as to enhance the programs where possible.

When the Emmanuel Dining Room asked for churches to furnish a cooked meal once a month for the needy and homeless who ate at that dining room, the Alliance members were quick to volunteer for this community need. The food was prepared in the church kitchen and transported to the facility where it would be cooked and served. On the day this food was to be served, a group of Alliance members and other members of the congregation served the food at the Emmanuel Dining Room.

As the complexion of the congregation changed, the Alliance gradually outgrew its position in the church and has now ceased to exist.

**Beefeaters/Supper Club.** This first was the Laymen's League, a monthly dinner meeting of many men of the church. After some years they decided they wanted to include women in their group so the name was changed to Beefeaters since the menu each month was a roast beef dinner. Volunteers cooked the dinner in the church kitchen. For many years Charlie Berr was the faithful cook. There was always a waiting list of people wanting to reserve a seat for the dinners. Later there were requests for a vegetarian dinner so the name was changed again to Supper Club when a vegetarian lasagna entree was offered as a choice. Since most of the members were older people, their numbers slowly diminished and so few were left who were willing to do the cooking, the group voted to disband.

**Building and Grounds.** These volunteers help the staff in maintaining the building and grounds though no expert skill is required. They assess needs that may require professional or expert help.

**Long Range Planning.** They make the best estimate possible as to the future needs of the church whether the programs or the physical plant.

**Brown Bag Lunch Fellowship Groups.** The participants organize these groups, which meet once a month on various days. This gives members a chance to form connections and friendships with other members of the church.

**Connection Circle Groups.** The groups meet at various times and days. Each has a theme that focuses group discussions.

**Worship Arts Committee.** Members of the committee have an interest or skill to offer to enhance the worship experience through art, flowers, music or other skills.
Choir and Music Programs. The church music programs offers members an opportunity to assist in arrangements for programs that involve music.

Denominational Interdependence:
DVAC—Delaware Valley Area Council of Unitarian Universalist Congregations gives us a chance to interact with other UU Congregations in our area and form a larger community.

Partner Church in Transylvania gives us an opportunity to learn about liberal churches in other parts of the world.

UU Growth Committee is active in helping new congregations in our area to become active and thriving and successful. They are given financial help as well as suggestions and advice.

UU Service Committee is active in worldwide projects to help others who are in need of assistance in many ways.

Justice and Inclusivity:
Emmanuel Dining Room for which a group of our members prepare meals for hungry people in the inner city twice a month. Members of our church assist in serving the meals that they have prepared.

Green Sanctuary is a chance for our members to be involved in programs to preserve and save our environment.

Social Justice Work Groups, Social Action has been an active interest of this congregation and gives them an opportunity to be involved in several outreach programs.

ILYA – Independent Living for Young Adults who have aged out of the foster care system. Our members befriend them and help in any of their needs where possible.

Warehouse Project was a very successful community outreach that helped get used building materials to people who needed them. Other community agencies are now filling this need.

Exploration of Justice and Inclusivity has been involved in opportunities to promote equality in our community.

Lesbian and Gay Concerns directed the program and activities for our church to fulfill all the requirements for being a “Welcoming Congregation.”

Stewardship
Of course, these many activities that show the growth since the birth of our church would not be possible without the stewardship of our resources. All our treasurers, most recently long-serving Paul Pinson and Steve Cohen, deserve much gratitude. So do the many congregants being involved in working for the capital campaign, the Annual Operating Budget Pledge Campaign; others who work on the Expansion Task Force, on Gifts and Bequests and the Finance Committee also played and continue to play an important role in making sure our financial situation stays stable.

Membership numbers fluctuated. When budget concerns arose, some staff positions had to be reduced. In 2013 the Board formed a Strategic Planning Committee. After gathering much data from other denominations and thriving churches as well as input from our staff and congregants, a plan evolved that
“supports the mission of our church and addresses three critical issues for its future: to grow the congregation, strengthen volunteerism, and leverage our assets to enhance our buildings and grounds.” (From President Jeff Lott’s 2013/2014 Annual Report.)

**The new ends became:**

- At First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Delaware, people of all ages feel safe, accepted, and loved – and empowered to be our authentic selves.
- At First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Delaware, people of all ages gain new perspectives and grow as informed, spiritual human beings.
- At First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Delaware, people of all ages act on our shared values and Unitarian Universalist identity to fight for a more just world.
- At First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Delaware, people of all ages experience wonder, inspiration, fulfillment and joy.

**Expansion Task Force**

**Facilities Expansion Taskforce.** In 1992 a Facilities Expansion Taskforce started to research and develop a plan for expanding our facilities within the current site, in order to satisfy the need for more space for the congregation as well as for the staff. After much thoughtful conversation the congregation voted to expand our education facilities. Thus, on September 7, 1997 the renovated existing space and the new Education Wing with the Brunner Chapel were dedicated in a ceremony, commemorating long time members Edith and Alex Brunner. The Educational Enrichment Center, (EEC), a day care center, a tenant organization occupying our rooms in the education wing during the week since 1979, was also happy with the changes.

**Expansion Options Taskforce.** In 2001 a new Expansion Options Taskforce raised the philosophical query “what is our church called to be?” The taskforce involved the congregation in conversation about the question, considered options, and, subsequently, obtained various cost information. One option was to purchase the property of the New Castle County Library, bordering our church property, since it was up for sale. The congregation voted to buy the property in 2002, but not to use the building. This purchase was made possible by a gift of $1,000,000 from member Phyllis Wynn. The library building was subsequently razed. Not enough money was available to build a larger sanctuary and the congregation instead opted for renovations. This is an ongoing process.

And now, in 2016, we are celebrating our 150th anniversary! We continue to be busy with plans for the future while actively maintaining our property, caring for our congregation, reaching out to other communities, including other denominational communities, being grateful for what was, is, and looking forward to what lies ahead.
APPENDIX A: FOUNDING MEMBERS

The following 61 individuals signed the Constitution and Bylaws on 24 June 1866, thus establishing the First Unitarian Society of Wilmington, Delaware.

Annie Morse Bent
Charles Pynson Bent
Clara Felton Bent
George Elbridge Bent
John F. Bent
Martha Conway Felton Bent
Mary Blake Bent
Sarah Elizabeth Drayton Bent
John Cameron
J. W. Clifford
Augusta Sisson Conant
John Heywood Conant
William Cressdale
Thomas Y. de Normandie
Sylvia Dunbar Drayton
Melzar Dunbar, Jr.
William E. Everett
Anna Morse Felton
Eleanor Stetson Felton (Nelly)
Harriet Parker Felton (Hattie)
Mary Stearns Felton
Samuel Morse Felton
Edwin S. Flint
Edith Pusey Flint
Isaac S. Flint
Mary Elizabeth Flint
Rachel Pusey Flint
Samuel D. Forbes
William G. Gibbons
Nathaniel W. Gookin
William Heston

Elizabeth B. Hilles
Isaac Hinckley
William H. Jamar
Henry Lea
Louise J. Lea
George W. Perry
Anne Kersey Pusey
Ella Kersey Pusey
Emalea Pusey
Hanna Mendenhall Pusey
Lea Pusey
Cyrus Pyle
William G. Reynolds
Alfred F. Sears
Augusta Bassett Sears
Edmund Quincy Sewall, Jr.
George Ward Sewall
Mary D. Shaw
Sarah D. Shaw
Lydia Ball Davis Sisson
Mary Davis Sisson
George W. Stone
Beulah Preston Thomas
Charles F. Thomas
William W. Thomas
Emma M. Edwards Wainwright
John Wainwright
Ellen M. Wood Wales
John T. Woodward
Lizzie Woodward
APPENDIX B: CLERGY

The following 17 members of the clergy served the congregation during its 150-year history, either as ministers to the First Unitarian Society of Wilmington or as ministers to the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington.

1866-1869  Fielder Israel
1871-1872  William Henry Thorne
1872-1876  Fielder Israel
1878-1880  John Mason Williams Pratt
1881-1888  Henry R. Wilson
1889-1893  William Henry Johnson
1894-1907  Alexander Thomas Bowser
1908-1912  Cicero Adolphus Henderson
1913-1917  Frederic Allen Hinckley
1918-1936  William Albert Vrooman
1937-1946  Delos William O'Brian
1946-1959  John Godfrey MacKinnon
1963-1994  Robert Mabry Doss
1997-2006  Patrick Thomas Aquinas O'Neill
2008-2015  Joshua Snyder
2015-      Roberta Finkelstein
APPENDIX C: ARCHITECTURAL TIMELINE

The following provides a summary of the buildings where the First Unitarian Society, subsequently the First Unitarian Church, has gathered for worship and education.

1866-67
Scientific Hall of the Wilmington Institute at 8th and Market streets in 1866-1867 in Wilmington, the first meeting place of the new congregation.

1868
The congregation moved into the newly constructed West and Eighth Street church building in 1868. It was red brick Norman Gothic design from plans donated by the firm of Ware and Van Brunt. It had accents of black brick and a wrought iron cross on the roof.

1889
The congregation added a parish hall and classroom at the rear of the original building in 1889.

1941
The congregation purchased the house at 800 Washington Street and named it the Channing Building.

1952
Church leaders purchased 804 Washington Street and named it the Jefferson Building.

1960
The church moved to the new building on Whitby Drive and Halstead Road in Sharpley. It is a modern design by Whiteside, Moeckel and Carbonell.

1977-84
The staff used a trailer for temporary office space from 1977 to 1984.

1984
The congregation expanded the office wing to replace the trailer in 1984.

1996-97
The congregation added classroom space in the education wing in 1996 and dedicated the addition on September 7, 1997. They dedicated the Brunner Chapel, named for Alex and Edith Brunner, the same day.

2002
The church purchased the former site of the Concord Pike Library an acquisition made possible by a memorial gift of $1,000,000 from Phyllis Wynn, a long-time member.
APPENDIX D:
FIRST UNITARIAN SOCIETY ART COLLECTION

Over the years, the congregation has acquired a number of art objects beginning in 1868 with gifts that marked the start of the church’s life in its new home on West Street in Wilmington.

1868
Two silver chalices were a gift from the Baltimore Unitarian Church on March 5, 1868. The Alliance later paid to have them converted so they could be used for pouring coffee on special occasions.

The pulpit bible was a gift from the American Unitarian Association on March 5, 1868.

1893
The Angel Window. See Appendix E.

The Sisson Conant window in the West Street church was installed below and as a part of the Angel window. It was in honor of Lydia B. Sisson and her nephew, Heywood Conant. This art was contributed to the church by their family. This part of the window is now in the hallway outside the church office.

1926
The Carriage Lamp was a gift by Mrs. Alfred D. Warner following her visit to the Middle East.

1937
Artist N. C. Wyeth gave the "Jesus and Child" painting to the Sunday School.

1939
Artist N. C. Wyeth presented a sketch of the West Street Church. The drawing has been used in many church publications.

1954
The congregation dedicated the Memorial Doors at the main church entrance. Sculptor Charles C. Parks sculpted the panels in aluminum with quotations from William Ellery Channing and Thomas Jefferson. Irving Warner, son of Alfred D. Warner and Emalea Pusey Warner, gave them in memory of his parents.

In the West Street Church there was a decorative casting by Charles C. Parks over the front door. This has been displayed in different places in the Whitby Drive Church.

1966
A mobile designed by Carolyn Blish is titled “Centennial.” It was made from shards of stained glass, which Betty Stone salvaged after the West Street building burned.

1971
A statue by Charles C. Parks, entitled "Decision," is of an African-American youth holding a hawk and a dove.

1977
The multi-level Rieger tracker organ was manufactured in Austria and installed, requiring major modifications to the sanctuary. It was paid for by contributions from members.

The hand bells were given by Blain McKusick in memory of his wife, Dr. Marjorie McKusick.

1992
Flaming chalice by Brad Vanneman in the front foyer given by the Alliance in memory of Ruth Underwood and Dorothy Hayden.

Flaming chalice quilt was designed and constructed by Nancy Stanford Davis with signatures of members of the congregation on each petal of the flame.

1989
The sun dial by Brad Vanneman is in memory of Ken Kaylor and given by Lois and Kevin Kaylor. Installed on an exterior wall facing the parking lot, it was dedicated September 10, 1989.

1990s
Three wood carvings by Glen Barbaras, done as a labor of love for the church.
- "Elements" Birth, Fire, Water and Air made from a block of black walnut donated by a church member. It has been used as a pedestal for the chalice at the front of the sanctuary.
- "Flame" made from a piece of pine and a piece of driftwood donated by a church member. It is displayed in the Parish Hall
- Decaying cedar post which just emerged like renewed life. The church library commissioned this piece. It is open, reaching, searching, asking why. It is now displayed in the front foyer.

2006
Statue of a seated gentleman in Courtyard. See Appendix F.
APPENDIX E: ANGEL WINDOW

Our Angel Window was made by Frances (Fannie) Darby Sweeny (1855-1920), proprietor of the Decorative Glass Company in Philadelphia. She was a Wilmington native, who was an alumna of and taught at the Philadelphia Museum and School of Industrial Art, which became part of the University of the Arts. Sweeny's works are often mistaken for Tiffany, yet she was an established artist before Tiffany was well known.

Angels similar to ours, when used in Christian churches, usually represent the angel of Matthew 28:2. "And behold there was a great earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb and sat on it." We may symbolize rebirth in the interconnected web of all existence. Either way, our Angel window is an exquisite work of art.

The window was installed on an interior wall in the West Street Church but was not moved to the new church on Whitby Drive. The new church was designed without religious symbols, and the angel was thought to be too religious.

The bottom part of the window is a memorial to Lydia B Sisson and her nephew, Heywood Conan, which was moved. It is installed in the hallway near the church office. The Sisson-Conant family gave the entire window to the church.

When the move was made to the new church, the window was then dismantled, crated, and stored it in a barn owned by Dr. Victor Washburn’s daughter, Ruth Laird, near Osceola, NY. Nearly a century later, when there was discussion about whatever happened to it, Barbara Washburn, daughter-in-law of Dr. Victor Washburn, said she knew where it was. Elliott Washburn, son of Dr. Victor Washburn and his son-in-law, Phil Krape, transported the crated window in a yellow station wagon, and the angel returned to Wilmington.

The window was restored and installed in the Youth Center of the Whitby Drive church. David Warner of Arden, and David Bailey, a partner, crafted a beautiful teak wood cabinet with doors containing carved wood symbols of all the world religions on the inside. They could be closed to protect the window or opened when people using the room wished to have it shown. When Brunner Chapel was added to the church annex, the window was moved there where it now may be used as part of a worship center. The plaque on the window cabinet states, “Originally dedicated December 30, 1893 in memory of Lydia B. Sisson and Heywood Conant. Rededicated June 7, 1981 as a gift of the Laird/Washburn family in memory of Dr. Victor Duke Washburn, church member 1909-1966 who rescued and preserved the window. The cabinet was commissioned by Carolyn Bridgham Ricard.”
APPENDIX F: COURTYARD

The Bradford garden, which is to the right of the church entrance in the courtyard, was given by Jean Bradford and her family in memory of her husband, William Bradford.

The Salzburg garden was a Stephen Keuhlmann design given by Paul Salzburg in memory of his wife, Grace. He also gave an endowment for its care.

The split leaf Japanese red maple, to the left of the walkway, was given by the Rev. Dr. Robert M. Doss in memory of his mother.

In 1987 the courtyard was designated a memorial garden, where ashes of deceased members may be scattered. Floyd Benner constructed a board to be put inside the exterior doors; the board bears plaques with names and dates of persons whose ashes are put there. His wife Noel Benner was the first person named.

A life sized bronze sculpture by Charles C. Parks in our memorial garden was a gift from the artist. Entitled “Meditation,” it was dedicated on October 15, 2006.

The courtyard has been used for weddings, receptions and summer coffee hours.

Through the breezeway and out the other door is the Arthur Calvin memorial garden. It contains a fishpond and low maintenance plantings.
APPENDIX G:  
FIRST UNITARIAN LEADERSHIP 
IN DENOMINATIONAL EXPANSION AND GROWTH

First Unitarian has from its inception been active in promoting growth of this liberal religion. In 1996, the congregation voted to devote 1 percent of the pledge income of the church’s capital campaign to sponsoring growth in this area. Under this plan the first grant was given to Southern Delaware. In 1997 the church voted to have a line item in the operating budget of 1.5 percent of pledged income for growth and a Growth Committee was appointed. Members of the Growth Committee and other members have visited the new congregations often and were available for advice and make suggestions at any time. Some of these congregations also received grants from Chalice Lighters to which members of First Unitarian contribute.

HARRISBURG
During the depression every Sunday afternoon the Rev. W. A. Vrooman took the train to Harrisburg to conduct a service. He also held evening services in Arden later.

WEST CHESTER
The Unitarian Congregation of West Chester started from dinner discussion groups that evolved into West Chester Fellowship. The Fellowship was formed March 28, 1954 with 21 members and with the Rev. John G. MacKinnon conducting their first service. In 1955 they had added children’s Religious Education classes. In 1962 they purchased a house at 501 N. Franklin Street for $19,000 for a meeting place that was known as Unitarian House. July 20, 1995 they purchased the New Century Club on High Street in West Chester for $225,000. In following years they became a Welcoming Congregation and expanded their Adult Education.

DELAWARE COUNTY
The Unitarian Church in Springfield, Pennsylvania was given an interest free loan in 1954.

NEWARK
A dinner discussion group from the Newark area decided to gather for worship and formed a satellite church in 1955 and later decided to form Newark Fellowship as a separate congregation with their own building in 1963.

MILL CREEK
The Mill Creek Society formed in 1988 with the First Unitarian Church being the coventing church. First Unitarian gave them $3,000 as seed money. About 20 members from Wilmington congregation agreed to attend the Millcreek services to begin the new congregation. They had 51 charter members on February 26, 1989. Between 2000 and 2012 the Wilmington Congregation has given financial support to the Society.

SOUTH JERSEY SHORE
The growth consultant for the Joseph Priestley District found that First Unitarian of Wilmington was willing to be one of the sponsors for the new congregation, the South Jersey Shore Unitarian Universalist Congregation. Members from First Unitarian have met frequently with the new congregation over the years to give both practical as well as financial support of $29,800 between 1999 and 2012.

SOUTHERN DELAWARE SOCIETY
After several people contacted the UUA about wanting to know how to organize a new congregation, they were enrolled in the Rapid Start Congregation program. They started meeting in 1997 in the Boys and Girls Club in Milford, Delaware. First Unitarian Church made their first Grant for Growth of $15,000 in 1999 for the Southern Delaware Society to get off to a start. Members of First Unitarian Growth Committee met frequently with the leaders of the Southern Delaware group to help in any way possible. In 1999 the Rev. Paul Hull served as interim minister. The Rev. Keith Goheen was appointed as minister. Following his tenure the Rev. D. Michael Smith was installed as minister and after long years of service he retired. The Rev. Paula Maiorano began serving as interim minister in 2015. First Unitarian has contributed a total of more than $25,600 to the congregation.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS OF CENTRAL DELAWARE
The Unitarian Universalists of Central Delaware began with strong leadership of a few members of First Unitarian who lived in the Dover area. They held their first worship service April 6, 2008. Their charter Sunday was November 8, 2008. To date First Unitarian Church has contributed $25,600 to this new congregation. Many visits have been made by Wilmington members to guide in any way possible and help this to become a thriving congregation. They have a very comfortable relationship with a local synagogue to use their facilities on Sunday for services.
NOTES

1Tempting as it is to credit Joseph Priestley with bringing Unitarianism to America, by the time he arrived in 1794, the existing congregational churches of New England were well on their way toward a Unitarian approach to faith. Priestley made eastern Pennsylvania his home and helped establish Unitarian churches in the Philadelphia area.


3Harris, “Unitarian Universalist Origins: Our Historic Faith.”

4Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Eighth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1860, (Washington DC: GPO, 1861); Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1870, (Washington DC: GPO, 1871).

5The Wilmington Directory, for 1865-66 Containing the Names of Inhabitants, a Business Directory, State and City Record and an Appendix, compiled by Andrew Boyd (Wilmington DE: Boughman, Thomas & Co., 1865), 66-68.

6First Unitarian Church, 1866-1991, 125 Years, First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Delaware, (herein after Church History 1866-1991), 3.

7Minute Book, February 1866 letter, First Unitarian Church archives.

8Untitled notebook on the founding and constitution of the First Unitarian Society of Wilmington and on the 1868 dedication of the first church building, First Unitarian Church archives.

9Although the names of all the individuals who signed the document are clearly identifiable, little additional information is available about seven of them, so a complete demographic analysis of the entire group is not possible. Of the fifty-five remaining, twenty-six were from Massachusetts and New Hampshire and another twenty-six were from Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. Of the remaining three, two were from Kentucky, drawn to Wilmington by family ties, and one was from New York, a man who came for business reasons.


12Collections of the New-Hampshire Historical Society, Volume V (Concord NH: Asa McFarland Printer, 1837), 116. Eventually he gave up his pastoral ministry to become editor of The Unitarian Advocate, published in Boston.


18United States Patent No. 126,327, 30 April 1872.

19Sunday Morning Star (newspaper, Wilmington), 10 October 1886, 1.

20In addition, in 1871 Felton’s daughter Mary Stearns Felton married Luther Stedman Bent, a cousin of Charles and George Bent.

21Allen Herbert Bent, The Bent Family in America: Being Mainly a Genealogy of the Descendants of John Bent Who Settled in Sudbury, Mass., in 1638 (Boston: David Clapp & Son, 1900), 146; History of the Harvard Church in Charlestown, 1815-1879 With Services at the Ordination of Mr. Pitt Dillingham, October 4, 1876 (Boston: Harvard-Church Society, 1879), 242; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Seventh Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1850, (Washington DC: GPO, 1851); Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Eighth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1860, (Washington DC: GPO, 1861); Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1870, (Washington DC: GPO, 1871); Frederick Odell Conant, A history and genealogy of the Conant family in England and America (Portland ME: Privately Printed, 1887), 526.

22Minute Book, Board of Trustees meeting notes, 15 January 1890.

23The Institute was home to a subscription library beginning in the eighteenth century; in 1865, it cost $1 to become a member and the annual subscription was $4. The Wilmington Directory for 1865-66 (Wilmington: Boughman, Thomas & Co., 1865), 59.

24The signatories to the 9 July 1866 document were Charles P. Bent, Thomas Y. de Normandie, E. Q. Sewall, Jr., Isaac S. Flint, and William W. Thomas. Untitled notebook on the founding and constitution of the First Unitarian Society of Wilmington and on the 1868 dedication of the first church building, First Unitarian Church archives.

25See Appendix B for a chronological list of ministers who served the congregation in the first 125 years.

26Minute Book, First Unitarian Church Archives, Board of Trustees meeting notes, 14 September 1867.

Minute Book, letter, 23 September 1868, from the trustees of the Wilmington church to the trustees of the Taunton, Massachusetts Unitarian church.

Minute Book, Board of Trustees minutes, 23 October 1869.

Minute Book, Board of Trustees minutes, 3 September 1876.


Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of Colored People, from The Christian Register, 26 May 1910, 582.

Reports Read At the 25th Anniversary of the Dedication of the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Del., Sunday, March 5th, 1893 (Wilmington: C. F. Thomas & Co., 1893). See also Carol E. Hoffecker, Wilmington, Delaware: Portrait of an Industrial City, 1830-1910 (Richmond VA: The University of Virginia Press for the Eleutherian Mills-Hagley Foundation, 1974), 126.

Boston Weekly Journal, 10 January 1889.


Ibid.


The Christian Register, 26 May 1910, 582.


A decade after Vrooman assumed his post in Wilmington, he again played a part in getting a Unitarian congregation organized and flourishing. From 1928 until 1940, he traveled weekly to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania where he served as part-time minister. The Unitarian Church of Harrisburg relied so heavily on Vrooman that they put his picture on the cover of the congregation's 1933 church directory and identified him as the church minister. In Vrooman's obituary, the Harrisburg newspaper described him as “former city pastor.” Evening News (newspaper, Harrisburg PA), 18 February 1949, 2.

The Christian Register, 5 September 1912, 662.

Minute Book, letter, 23 September 1868.


Sunday Morning Star, 4 March 1945, 5.


Union Theological Seminary: William H. Thorne; Episcopal Theological Seminary at the University of Virginia, William H. Johnson; University of Manitoba, William A. Vrooman; Boston University Theological Seminary, Delos W. O'Brien; University of Chicago, Charles W. Phillips.

Meadville: Henry P. Wilson, John G. MacKinnon. Robert M. Doss, who has a master of divinity degree from Starr King School and doctor of divinity from Meadville, now Meadville Lombard Divinity School.


Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Tenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1880, (Washington DC: GPO, 1881). From Stone's autobiographical sketch in the Santa Cruz Surf newspaper, he appears to have had a variety of jobs including law, insurance, and work as a national bank examiner.

Santa Cruz Surf (newspaper, Santa Cruz CA), 11 April 1911, Stone autobiographical sketch.


Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, Held at Longwood, Chester County, 1875. (Philadelphia: John Craig & Son, Book and Job Printers, 1875) Meeting held 10 June 1875.
Roots and Branches Continuity and Change

58 Author List of the New Hampshire State Library, June 1, 1902 (Manchester NH: John B. Clarke Company, 1904), 116.
59 Sketches in City Churches, Reprinted from The Evening Telegram, with the Original Illustrations edited by John Ross Robertson (Toronto; J. Ross Robertson, 1886), 127-128.
60 Membership Book, 1890-1916, First Unitarian Church Archives, Box 3.
63 Membership Book, 1890-1916, First Unitarian Church Archives, Box 3. In Church Directory 1933, this is changed to a “Unitarian Confession of Faith.”
64 Sunday Morning Star, 4 October 1936, 13.
66 Ibid.
67 Deed Record H-8-484, 1 December 1866. At various times that parcel was identified as 803 North West, 805 North West, and 807 North West as buildings were modified around the church building, necessitating renumbering. The 1886 city directory, for example, assigns 803 to the church; in 1901, Baist's Property Atlas of the City of Wilmington, Delaware (Philadelphia: G. W. Baist, 1901), records the church at 805; the 1927 Insurance Maps of Wilmington, Delaware, Volume One (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1927) shows the church at 807. Interestingly, three years later, the First Universalist Society of Wilmington purchased a lot about four blocks away, on Seventh Street near Market. Deed Record X-8-265, 5 March 1869.
68 Wilmington Commercial (newspaper, Wilmington), undated article in Minute Book, September 1867. Founding member William G. Gibbons owned the West Street property immediately to the north of the congregation's lot.
71 Biographical sketch published online by MIT. http://web.mit.edu/museum/ware/ware_bio.html.
72 Leo W. Collins, This is Our Church, The Seven Societies of the First Church in Boston, 1630-2005 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2005), 83.
75 Minute Book, newspaper account of church dedication, 5 March 1868.
76 Dennis DeWitt, Roger Reed, and Greer Hardwick, The Pill Hill Local Historic District: The Story of a Neighborhood (Brookline MA: Brookline Historic Preservation Commission, 2009), no pagination.
77 Minute Book, newspaper clipping giving an account of the church dedication, 5 March 1868.
78 Heywood Conant’s death certificate indicates that the disease he suffered was “nephritis” (kidney failure) and the cause of death was “inter cranial hemor” (brain hemorrhage) but the newspaper account of his final days suggests that he was suffering from some sort of neurological disorder that caused paralysis and exhaustion, perhaps a series of debilitating strokes. See Sunday Morning Star, 7 July 1889, 1.
79 Sunday Morning Star, 31 December 1893, 1; Minute Book, church annual meeting notes, 1894.
80 The Churchman – An Illustrated Weekly News Magazine, 2 October 1897, 6.
81 University of the Arts online archives, “Notable Alumni.”
84 Sunday Morning Star, 31 December 1893, 1.
85 Every Evening (newspaper, Wilmington), 26 January 1925, 2. The descendants of the founders were “Mrs. and Mrs. Frederick E. Stone, Victor B. Thomas, Miss Edna V. Thomas, the Misses Bent, Isabelle B. Wales, and Mrs. A. D. Warner.”
86 It is unclear whether the addition dated from 1889 or from 1893. An AUA annual report from 1889 records that the Wilmington congregation had added “an annex” with “a handsome and spacious parlor, a kitchen, and a beautiful and well-lighted minister’s study.” However, the annual meeting notes for 1893 allude to certain church programs being delayed “owing to the building of the new church parlor.” Sixty-Fourth Anniversary of the American Unitarian Association with the Annual Report of the Board of Directors (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1889); Minute Book, church annual meeting notes, 18 January 1893.
87 Journal-Every Evening (newspaper, Wilmington), 6 August 1941, 1.
Minute Book, trustee meeting notes for meetings from early 1954 through 1957.

Minute Book, trustee meeting notes, 9 October 1956. This appears to be the first official mention of building a new church.

Minute Book, special congregational meeting notes, 13 February 1958.


Minute Book, special congregational meeting notes, 25 March 1959. Not every member of the building committee was happy with the proposed church; at least one resigned, saying he did not like modern architecture.

Morning News (newspaper, Wilmington), 15 October 1960, 3.

The author is grateful to Philip Krape for information about the storage and eventual reinstallation of the Angel Window. Personal communication, 28 February 2016.

Morning News, 20 December 1937, 2.

Minute Book, constitution of the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Delaware, 24 June 1866.

Scharf, 337.

Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes 12 December 1866.

Reports Read At The 25th Anniversary of the Dedication of the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Del., Sunday, March 5th, 1893 (Wilmington: C. F. Thomas & Co., 1893), 16.

Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 7 November 1905; 16 October 1906; 24 March 1908; 11 April 1910.


Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 1 February 1915; 3 May 1915. A local women’s social work organization, Associated Charities, had identified the candidates to take the sewing classes.

The Alliance of Unitarian Women was organized in 1890 to promote local organizations of Unitarian women “for missionary and denominational work.” The Christian Register, 2 August 1917, 744.

First Unitarian Church archives, Box 3, Folder 8, Miscellaneous, handwritten “Review of the Years of the Ladies Aid Society 1968-1893, Unitarian Women’s (sic) Alliance 1893-1935.” No author indicated.

Unitarian Word & Work, February 1909, 11; Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 1 March 1909; Alliance Minute Book, Alliance annual meeting notes, 10 January 1910; Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 11 April 1911; Alliance Minute Book, “1918-1919 Report to the Philadelphia League”; Minute Book, church annual meeting notes, 14 January 1927.


Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 10 October 1910.

Minute Book, church annual meeting notes, 3 January 1911.

Minute Book, church annual meeting notes, 10 January 1930.

Reports Read At The 25th Anniversary of the Dedication of the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Del., Sunday, March 5th, 1893 (Wilmington: C. F. Thomas & Co., 1893), 11; Minute Book, meeting notes, 11 November 1958.


Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 11 April 1910; 10 February 1913; Alliance annual meeting notes, 8 January 1912; 6 January 1913.

Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 6 February 1912.

Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 4 March 1907; 14 March 1910.

Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes 14 November 1918; 5 May 1919; 5 January 1920.


Berkeley Daily Gazette (newspaper, Berkeley CA), 7 April 1926, 6. By this date, there were 159 “Cheerful Letter libraries” in operation in twenty-seven states plus one in the Philippines and two in the Virgin Islands.


Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 14 March 1910; 11 April 1910; 10 February 1913; 2 February 1920.
122 Reports Read At The 25th Anniversary of the Dedication of the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Del., Sunday, March 5th, 1893 (Wilmington: C. F. Thomas & Co., 1893), 4.
123 The Christian Register, 17 March 1910, 305; Sunday Morning Star, 20 February 1910, 1. Interestingly in 1894 Clara Bent purchased a piano for the church’s use, but required the Alliance to pay semi-annual “interest” on her “investment” in the instrument. Finally in 1909, she gave the piano to the Alliance. Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 5 April 1909.
124 Alliance Scrapbook, program for entertainment offered 14-16 November 1894.
125 Alliance Scrapbook, Scottish songs program, 18 February 1904; Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 15 October 1909; Alliance Minute Book, Alliance annual meeting notes, 5 January 1914; Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 4 April 1921; Sunday Morning Star, 19 June 1921, 7; Alliance Minute Book, loose page noting 5 December 1924 program.
126 Alliance Minute Book, “1918-1919 Report to the Philadelphia League.” Wales also performed in productions outside the church, singing a solo in “The Messiah,” adding her voice to a program in aid of a local school, singing with a Gilbert and Sullivan ensemble, and entertaining the Delaware Chapter of the Colonial Dames. The Churchman, 16 January 1897, vii; Sunday Morning Star, 12 January 1913, 16; Sunday Morning Star, 14 December 1913, 9; Sunday Morning Star, 9 December 1934.
127 The Christian Register, 3 January 1895; Minute Book, church annual meeting notes, 15 January 1895.
130 Woman’s Alliance Scrapbook.
131 Woman’s Alliance Scrapbook. The Brownies were creations of author Palmer Cox, who wrote and illustrated stories about them. The books were first published in 1883. Minute Book, church annual meeting notes, 15 January 1895.
134 Reports Read At The 25th Anniversary of the Dedication of the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Del., Sunday, March 5th, 1893 (Wilmington: C. F. Thomas & Co., 1893), 18; Twentieth Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners 1888, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), 43. The industrial school was on the Crow reservation and operated for a decade.
136 Minute Book, church annual meeting notes, 14 January 1945.
137 Reports Read At The 25th Anniversary of the Dedication of the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Del., Sunday, March 5th, 1893 (Wilmington: C. F. Thomas & Co., 1893), 18.
139 Ibid. The two youth groups merged in 1953, eight years before the full denominational merger into Unitarian Universalist.
140 The Christian Register, 2 August 1917, 744.
141 Alliance Minute Book, meeting notes, 14 November 1918; meeting notes, 5 May 1919; meeting notes, 5 January 1920; The Christian Register, 20 December 1920, 1186; The Christian Register, 12 January 1922, front cover; The Christian Register, 16 November 1922, 1107; The Christian Register, 7 December 1922, 1171.
142 Reports Read At The 25th Anniversary of the Dedication of the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Del., Sunday, March 5th, 1893 (Wilmington: C. F. Thomas & Co., 1893), 18.
143 Woman’s Alliance Scrapbook.