

The First Universalist Church

Pittsfield, Maine

Centennial Celebration

May 27th & 28th

- Saturday - 4:00 Registration and fellowship
6:00 Centennial Dinner and reminiscences
- Sunday - 10:45 Morning Worship
12:30 Informal luncheon
2:00 Music recital
3:00 Centennial Commemoration Service

1867 - 1967 One Hundred Years of Organized Worship and Service

MINISTERS

1866 - 1868	The Rev. James M. H. Smith
1868 - 1870	The Rev. George W. Quimby
1870 - 1872	The Rev. David B. Byther
1872 - 1874	The Rev. Elijah Case
1874 - 1876	The Rev. Norris C. Hodgdon
1876 - 1883	The Rev. Caroline E. Angell
1883 - 1888	no minister engaged
1888 - 1891	The Rev. Henry S. Fiske
1891 - 1892	The Rev. James H. Little
1892 - 1896	The Rev. Ephraim A. Read
1896 - 1897	The Rev. Harry E. Townsend
1898 - 1907	The Rev. Leroy W. Coons
1907 - 1908	The Rev. Frederick Taylor
1908 - 1915	The Rev. Frederick Walker
1915 - 1917	The Rev. Alfred E. Wright
1918 - 1924	The Rev. Sidney J. Willis
1924 - 1927	The Rev. Frank L. Cann
1927 - 1939	The Rev. Milo G. Folsom
1939 - 1946	The Rev. Josephine B. Folsom
1946 - 1954	The Rev. Donald M. Hinckley
1954 - 1958	The Rev. Robert D. Fiske (non-Universalist)
1958 - 1960	The Rev. Scott D. Kittredge (non-Universalist)
1960 - 1961	The Rev. Sheldon Christian (interim)
1961 - 1965	The Rev. Donald M. Hinckley
1965 - 1967	The Rev. Rolfe Gerhardt

CENTENNIAL WORKERS

Mrs. Lena Dobson	Mrs. Selina Mathews
Mrs. Evelyn Hersey	Miss Frances Noble
Mr. Sumner Jones, Jr.	Mrs. Ruth Parkhurst
Mr. Donald McPherson	Miss Ethel Sanford
	Mr. Earle Vickery

The members of the Universalist Ladies Aid Society and the Universalist Women's Club and
The Rev. Rolfe Gerhardt

FOR RESOURCE MATERIALS FOR THIS BOOKLET WE THANK:

Mr. Sanger M. Cook, Mr. Harry Cornforth, Mrs. Selina Mathews,
Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Percival, and Mr. & Mrs. Irving Whitman.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS WITH THE FIRST UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

In 1855, the sleepy rural town of Pittsfield was rudely awakened – horses scattered and ladies stopped their ears with their fingers – as a locomotive blew off steam at the town station. The railroad had come, bringing with it the promise of progress. The community woke up and grew. Businesses expanded; a modern hotel was built; a still-famous school was founded; and a Union Meeting House took form at the top of the hill. Little did anyone suspect that this spirit of progress was to motivate the leadership of Pittsfield to adopt a modern, progressive religion as the outlook of the leading religious society.

The Union Meeting House was begun as a community project, and wishing to remain unsectarian, engaged circuit-riding ministers to preach the morning service. Universalism, with its doctrine of salvation for all souls, was growing in popularity all over Maine, and in 1866, The Rev. James M. H. Smith was engaged to preach every other Sunday. For two years Rev. Smith's hopeful liberalism soothed the fire and brimstone of his Baptist alternate, and on May 25, 1867 forty-two of the leading citizens of the town signed a constitution establishing "The First Universalist Society in Pittsfield, Maine," in order to promote the cause of "Liberal Christianity". The original officers of the Society, including many of the town's leaders, were: Going Hathorn, F. D. Jenkins, Moses Maxfield, Orin Libby, G. H. Hunter, Orin S. Haskell, and W. L. Hathorn.

The Rev. George W. Quimby ministered to the new Universalist group from 1868 until 1870, on the same alternate Sunday arrangement, but by 1870, the Society had gained enough support, having grown to 78 members, to call a Universalist minister to preach every Sunday. The Rev. D. B. Byther was called at a salary of \$900 a year. In return he was to present a forenoon service immediately followed by Sabbath School and topped off with an evening service. To listen to Rev. Byther's services you could subscribe \$155 for the best front and center pews (but not all the way front – they were worth only \$140), or you could sit way in the back corner for only \$15 for the church year.

The church grew slowly during those early years. Short ministries were as common as the divided opinions on what was wanted from the minister. Probably the greatest growth was in a small organization begun under Rev. Quimby when twelve ladies and their husbands met in the parlor of the Lancy House to organize the

Ladies Social Aid Society. Probably the most significant group in the history of the church, there is hardly a year from that time on that the Ladies Aid did not substantially support the church. Since their full story will be told in their Centennial in three years, we'll leave the details to them and summarize the Aid's work through portions of a poem written by Selina Mathews for the Aid's 50th Anniversary:

*The object of this society
Is to aid our church in all ways;
By our social affairs we help finance,
Having suppers, entertainments and plays.*

*We try to remember the sick ones
With letters, fruit, or flowers,
And hope that each message of love we send,
Will help brighten the lonely hours.*

*Financially and socially we're helping,
And altho our bit may seem small,
It may enable our church to go onward:
For that purpose, we gladly give all.*

Overall, these were years of steady growth, during which substantial improvements were made on the Meeting House, even though the Universalists did not formally own the building. A re-dedication service in 1872, established the building as the Universalist Meeting House, but the deed remained with an independent Meeting House Society. In 1882, the Constitution was modified, and in 1889, the Ladies Aid became incorporated as the Universalist Ladies Aid Society. In 1890, the Young People's Christian Union was organized with nine members, continuing until about twenty years ago.

A major handicap to the desire for long-term ministries was the lack of a suitable parsonage. In 1891, the Ladies Aid responded to this need when their minister had no choice but to board his family at the Lancy House. In November of 1892, an excellent, debt-free parsonage was presented to the church, constructed through the donations of the Ladies Aid and friends of the church.

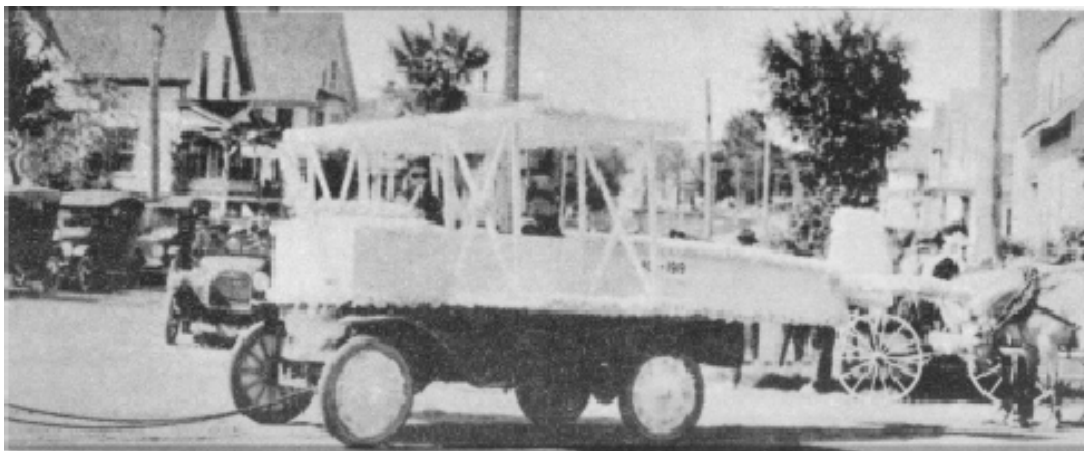
The same year that the parsonage was finished, the Universalists recognized that the church served many who did not necessarily share the Universalist beliefs, and they formally





Photography and copy work by Margit Photo Studio,
Pittsfield

Children's Day Concert in the Universalist Meeting House in 1888. Does anyone know why bird cages with live birds were hung in the sanctuary?



For the Pittsfield Centennial Parade in 1919 the Universalist Church wished to demonstrate its progressive nature and entered this float.



The new building in 1901, two years after completion. The old Meeting House turned 90° is seen on the far right. An olive color, it was a very modern church building.



The Rev. Milo G. Folsom and his wife, The Rev. Josephine Folsom, were with us 19 years.



The Rev. Leroy W. Coons was responsible for the building of the new church and the strengthening of its programs.



incorporated a separate parish. The Parish remained the legal controlling organization until 1966, when the Parish and Church merged to legally become The First Universalist Church of Pittsfield.

Two philanthropic and mission groups were formed in the early 1890's, the Always Ready Circle and the Anna Osborn Circle. Their work and the general zeal of the membership attracted enough people to the church to begin to cramp the available space. Shortly thereafter even a third group, the Sunshine Circle, was formed to help the church and serve the community's needs.

By this time the old Meeting House began to show wear as well as feel crowded. Repairs were needed, and the 125 Sunday School pupils were hard put to find classroom space. In 1896, a study was made, and the report came back that it was better to build than to repair. For a small church with a small budget this was a frightening thought - that they would have to undertake such a major expense. The minister at the time, The Rev. E. A. Read could make no headway in this project, nor could his successor, The Rev. H. E. Townsend who served only a year. But the next minister knew how to get things done, and The Rev. Leroy W. Coons, a dynamic young man, accepted the call only on terms that the new church be built.

Rev. Coons' leadership was certainly a high point in the history of the church. Within the first year he secured \$8000 in pledges toward the construction of the new building. This was in a church with under three hundred families and barely a thousand and a half budget. Rev. Coons' salary was only \$900 plus the use of the parsonage, so the church really got its money's worth.

When finished, the new building was one of the most outstanding churches in the state. The Meeting House had been stripped of its steeple and turned 90° to stand parallel to the street and was converted into a vestry and church school rooms with a modern stage and an efficient kitchen. A new sanctuary was added on the Main Street side with excellently designed auditorium seating. The now-priceless stained glass windows on three walls cost only about three thousand dollars then, and were memorial gifts.

The famous Maine muralist, Harry H. Cochrane, was commissioned to undertake a series of murals for the new sanctuary. These were done on canvass and attached to the walls and ceiling. Around the central light fixture we find the four attributes of God - light,

truth, justice, and love – represented by angelic figures. On one wall is Ruth gathering grain in the fields. A series around the arch of the ceiling begins, clockwise from the pulpit, with a Bond Slave in Egypt then proceeds through Moses, Gideon, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Isaiah, John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul. These paintings are almost like new thanks to the careful job of interior restoration done by the J. R. Cianchette Company in 1958.

The organ of the new church was an outstanding model with over 600 speaking pipes. Power was supplied by a special pump run by the Sebasticook River, and during droughts, by the young lads of church.

The total cost was around \$20,000, and an impressive service of dedication prepared the church for the Twentieth Century. As part of the service, which filled the 275 seats and overflowed into the vestry, the Union Meeting House Committee officially deeded the property to the Universalists. Mr. C. E. Vickery received the keys to the church and said: *"In accepting this church we as a society assume a trust which will tax our efforts to properly maintain, but I feel certain, with the well-known unity of action of the people in our village and parish as well as the harmony existing between the pastor and parishioners. We shall not lack the means to carry on the work which the building of this church makes necessary."*

And carry on it did. The church prospered steadily under Rev. Coon until 1908. At that time there was a one-year ministry, but the next man, The Rev. Frederick Walker, stayed seven years. An interesting accomplishment of Rev. Walker's ministry was the creation of Troop 1 of the Boy Scouts of America in 1911.

The war years were difficult years for everyone, but the two ministers who served during that time maintained the effectiveness of the church, and the church's service to Pittsfield was uninterrupted during that time. In 1920, the Ladies Aid celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, and during this decade several other smaller women's service groups were born. Between 1916 and the present a number of men's clubs were also formed and served the church and community.

In 1927, one of the church's most memorable couples joined the community. The Rev. Milo G. Folsom and his wife, Josephine, took up the leadership of the church. Three years after they arrived the original Forest Street parsonage was sold in favor of a fine old house on the corner of Easy and Main Streets which was donated by George M. Parks from the Lancey property. One of the permanent

accomplishments of the Folsoms was the creation of a Mothers Club which today continues under the title Women's Club.

The untimely death of Rev. Folsom in 1939, compelled his wife to take up his ministry and become one of the few ordained women ministers of that time. Her ministry, along with her husband's was one of the greatest periods of stability. The church school under the enthusiastic leadership of Miss Florence Buxton had become one of the largest in the state, and when Miss Buxton, after twenty years of church service, retired in 1941, it was a model of efficiency and effectiveness.

The years of the Second World War brought many hardships to Pittsfield, but none as great as the overall changes in attitude throughout America. The influx of a number of small churches into Pittsfield and the beginning of today's non-committal attitude towards organized religion began to hurt the established churches. When The Rev. Josephine Folsom passed away in 1946, an energetic young man, The Rev. Donald M. Hinckley, was called in the hope of restoring the waning influence of the church. His ministry was effective in preventing the severe slump experienced by many other churches, but a group of parish members who had lost interest in Universalism terminated his ministry and between 1954 and 1960 called two ministers from outside of the denomination.

The final result of this action was a brief coupling with the Congregationalist denomination, due largely to prejudiced, unfavorable publicity received by the Unitarians while the Universalist and Unitarian denominations were arranging a merger. However, the loyal Universalists rescinded the Congregationalist vote and affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Association. At that point The Rev. Sheldon Christian during an interim ministry smoothed many ruffled feathers, and Rev. Hinckley was called again, and for four years he helped stabilize the situation.

Though the split has had painful, weakening effects, today's membership is dedicated to the continuance of Universalism in Pittsfield and looks forward to another hundred years of worship and service to the community.

FIRST UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF PITTSFIELD, MAINE
CENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION SERVICE

May 28, 1967

3:00 P.M.

ORGAN PRELUDE by Miss Dorothy Burgoyne

*PROCESSIONAL #4 "Holy, Holy, Holy"

*INVOCATION by Mr. Paul Kelley, Minister of All Souls Universalist Church of
Oakland, Maine

*UNISON LORD'S PRAYER Led by Mr. Paul Kelley

SOLO - "The Trumpeter" by Mr. Theodore Burgoyne

READINGS by The Rev. Charles N. Vickery, Program Director of the Unitarian Univer-
salist Service Committee

INTERLUDE ON CHIMES AND ORGAN by Miss Dorothy Burgoyne

*ACT OF COMMEMORATION AND RE-DEDICATION by The Rev. Rolfe Gerhardt

MINISTER: For those who saw the need among the people for spiritual comfort,
for the fostering of truth, for the religious education of the young, and for
a community home in which all would be equally welcome to express love for
God and love for man;

PEOPLE: We set aside this moment with thankful memories.

MINISTER: To those who took the first steps along the spiritual pathway we
now travel and to all the companions of the way whose hearts and hands have
joined during this century to further the hopes of Universalism in Pittsfield;

PEOPLE: We offer this service in commemoration.

MINISTER: Seeing that the pathway leads ever onward, that today, as much as
a century ago, truth needs to be spoken, love needs to be expressed, and man
needs a house of fellowship where he may seek both God and himself, we pledge
ourselves in loyalty and service to this church, and re-affirm the hopes of
our religion by saying:

PEOPLE: We avow our faith

In God as Eternal and All-conquering Love;

In the spiritual leadership of Jesus;

In the supreme worth of every human personality;

In that authority of truth, known or to be known;

*And in the power of men of goodwill and sacrificial spirit to overcome all
evil and progressively establish the kingdom of God. Thus do we re-dedicate
this church and re-consecrate ourselves in loyalty and service.*

*HYMN #214 "The Voice of God"

COMMEMORATION SERMON by The Rev. Donald M. Hinckley, former minister, and min-
ister of the First Universalist Church of Auburn, Maine

CHORAL INTERLUDE - "Climb Every Mountain"

PRAYER OF COMMEMORATION by The Rev. John F. J. McNally, minister of The First
Universalist Church of Dexter, Maine

GREETINGS FROM THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION

by The Rev. Kenneth C. Hawkes, Executive Secretary of the Northeast District
of the Unitarian Universalist Association

*RECESSIONAL #248 "Light of Ages and of Nations"

*BENEDICTION WITH CHORAL AMEN by The Rev. Rolfe Gerhardt

ORGAN POSTLUDE by Miss Dorothy Burgoyne

*The congregation will please stand.