

A Detailed History of the First Parish of Norwell

EARLY BEGINNINGS

Originally Scituate included what are now the towns of Hanover, Norwell, and Scituate. Hanover became a separate town in 1727, our section became South Scituate in 1849 and the name was changed to Norwell in 1888. The First Parish of Scituate was established in 1634 and the meeting house was erected on Meeting House Lane just below the old cemetery as you go toward the ocean. The spot is not marked but there is a hollow place on the right hand side which is where most believe the meeting house stood; also a tablet in the graveyard refers to it.

The Scituate church was not a united one from the first. Mr. Giles Saxton served as minister for a short time followed by Mr. John Lothrop, who a few years later because of disagreement in regard to baptism, moved with quite a number of the congregation to Barnstable. This is the same issue Mr. Lothrop experienced in his church in England. Mr. Lothrop belonged to the liberal party, and wearying of the controversy, took a major portion of the congregation to Barnstable. In 1641, Mr. Charles Chauncy, a man of most distinguished talents became the next pastor. Possessed of an ardent temper, and impatient of opposition, he thought that his own talents should be enough in themselves to overcome any opposition to his views. He soon found himself in trouble with the authorities in England, and finding no security there, he fled to the new world, reaching Plymouth in 1637. The Rev. Charles Chauncy was a scholar and theologian, also skilled in law and medicine who held many strong opinions, the most controversial of which was the form of baptism. The gist of the controversy, as noted in Bradford's History, was that Mr. Chauncy held that baptism "ought only to be by dipping, and putting ye whole body under water, and that sprinkling was unlawful." The dissidents, who were the liberal faction, wanted freedom of choice in the mode of baptism and preferred the simpler method of "sprinkling." They admitted that "immersion or dipping was lawful, but in this coulede countrie be not so conveniente." Mr. Chauncy, who was a progressive and intelligent churchman in so many ways, was stubborn and unyielding when it came to the question of baptism. It was his way or no way. The end result was that the sprinklers moved up river to form a more liberal church.

WILLIAM WITHERELL (1645-1684)

As a result of this controversy, the Second Church was established February 2, 1642, by those with the more liberal ideas. William Vassall was the leader of the liberals and in all probability the first meetings were held in his home at Belle House Neck which stood near the present junction of Neal Gate Street and Route 3A overlooking the North River. The first minister was William Witherell, and the meeting house was located on Wilson Hill, Main Street at the corner of Old Meeting House Lane. It was a small frame building with thatch roof and no glass in the windows, just oiled paper. This was used by the society for the thirty-nine years Mr. Witherell served as pastor. He lived nearby but the house he occupied was not owned by the Society. There is a boulder marking the supposed site of the meeting house. Originally there was a small cemetery but later this land was used for farming purposes and the then owner removed the old grave stones and is said to have destroyed them completely. Mr. Witherell's record of baptisms begins in September, 1645, with that of one of his own children, "Anno 1645 Sarah, ye daughter of Wm. Wetherell, Septbre 7." This record, numbering 608 baptisms, appears in his own handwriting until 1674, when a paralytic affliction compelled him to employ assistance in



such work. This large number of baptisms during the thirty-nine years of Mr. Witherell's ministry, large indeed for a country church in a sparsely settled district, in those early days, is evidence in itself that ministers of Mr. Witherell's popularity because of the broadness of his views regarding church membership, as well as that of infant sprinkling, was an uncommon one. Parents brought their children to him for baptism from as far away as Yarmouth on the Cape.

Mr. Chauncy left Scituate in 1654 and became president of Harvard University while Mr. Dunster left the presidency of Harvard to become pastor of the First Church of Scituate. Mr. Dunster died in 1659, and his successor was Nicholas Baker of Hingham. He and Mr. Witherell were both kindly tolerant men so together they managed to end the long feud between the First and Second Churches. Today both the First Parish in Scituate and the First Parish in Norwell are liberal Unitarian churches and members of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

THOMAS MIGHILL (1680-1689)

The Second Parish grew in population so in 1680 a larger meeting house was erected either in or near the old cemetery on Main Street east of Bridge Street. Mr. Witherell in addition to his sermons also wrote poems which Mr. Deane, a later pastor, thought vastly superior to those of Mr. Dunster. During the latter part of Mr. Witherell's pastorate he experienced ill health. Thomas Mighill, an assistant, became pastor when Mr. Witherell died in 1684. His ministry was brief as he died five years later.

DEODATE LAWSON (1694-1698)

During the ministry of Deodate Lawson (1694-98) the parish had a problem with the long and continued absence of their pastor. He would disappear for months at a time, never letting his congregation know when and where he was going, nor when he might return. He was presumably engaged in more lucrative secular pursuits, completely disregarding his parish obligations. They were finally advised by the Elders of neighboring churches to "use all Evangelical endeavors to settle themselves with another Pastor, more spiritually and...fixedly disposed."

NATHANIEL EELLS (1704-1750)

Mr. Eells was native of Hingham, a graduate of Harvard, and served the parish for 46 years. He was much beloved by his parishioners who were always glad to have him ride his horse to their doors to inquire for their health and hand his pipe to be lighted with a coal from their open fireplace. He was a leader amongst the neighboring clergy and often traveled to distant parts of the state to attend ecclesiastical conferences. He prepared his sons and several other young men for Harvard, also for the ministry, one of them being Thomas Clap who in 1740 became president of Yale.

By this time the parish had grown considerably, so in 1707 soon after the coming of Mr. Eells, a larger meeting house was built on Herring Brook, the site being south of the old tomb yard opposite the present edifice. At the same time a highway was laid out "from the way of Job Randall's along over to the eastward of Benjamin Sylvester's home and the saw mill pond until it comes to the way near to Bryant's house".



JONATHAN DORBY (1751-1754)

In 1751 Jonathan Dorby, a nephew of Judge John Cushing, came to serve the parish. He seems to have been a young man of ability and charm who probably would have been as much beloved as Mr. Eells had he not died after being in Scituate only three years.

DAVID BARNES (1754-1811)

The next pastor was Reverend David Barnes, D.D., who served the parish for 57 years. He, like his predecessors, was a Harvard graduate, much beloved by his parishioners and considered an excellent preacher. His sermons were said to be "clusters of maxims" and inspired thoughts on the divine providence revealed in the natural world. He discoursed on a wide variety of subjects such as bees, east wind, lightning, making salt, to mention a few. Dr. Barnes was known for his progressive and tolerant views on many subjects. Dr. Barnes was also a successful farmer, interested in the cultivation of his fields and raising livestock including bees. He was noted for his hospitality and his home was a favorite gathering place for his many friends in Scituate and nearby towns. One interesting characteristic is that he continued to wear a wig even after they had gone out of style.

SAMUEL DEANE (1810-1834)

After Dr. Barnes came Samuel Deane who proved to be an equally lovable pastor. He was liberal at a time when a decided difference of opinion between Trinitarians and Unitarians had developed. In this connection Mr. Deane never embroiled his people in quarrels not their own and kept them apart from the controversy which was dividing so many churches and creating such keen hatred in some cases.

The parish was prosperous and active during the pastorates of both Dr. Barnes and Mr. Deane so in 1830 the present edifice was erected, the architect being William Sparrell, a native of Norwell. Mr. Deane, like Mr. Eells prepared young men for college. Unlike Dr. Barnes, Mr. Deane did not wear a clerical robe which rather disturbed some of the ladies of the parish so they purchased one for him. Mr. Deane wrote a history of Scituate and also wrote poetry. He was also considered an excellent judge of horses. A man in the village offered one for sale mentioning that Mr. Deane said the horse was seven years old. The prospective purchaser was rather doubtful so he asked Mr. Deane if he had made that statement. "Oh yes" replied Mr. Deane, "but that was seven years ago." Both Dr. Barnes and Mr. Deane with their wives are buried in the ministers' lot in the First Parish Cemetery.

SAMUEL JOSEPH MAY (1836-1842)

After the placid years under the guidance of Dr. Barnes and Mr. Deane came a change of pace. In the 1830's William Lloyd Garrison and some other Bostonians began ardently advocating the emancipation of slaves, which was a decidedly controversial subject. Among Mr. Garrison's enthusiastic followers was Reverend Samuel J. May who served the Parish for six years. Not only did he devote much energy to the anti-slavery movement but he was also an ardent worker for Total Abstinence, Women's Rights, and Universal Peace. Samuel May was the uncle of the famous female author Louisa May Alcott, who wrote the novel "Little Women." He organized the first church school in the Parish and, in addition, the Cold Water Army, recruiting children from all over town. Led by Mr. May they paraded about waving banners, some of which still exist and chanting such rhymes as:

"Now we pledge eternal hate
To all that doth intoxicate."



Despite his advanced views, Mr. May seems to have been much admired and loved by his congregation. He evidently was a dynamic person, warm hearted and gifted with an eloquent tongue. There were some, however, who were not well disposed towards his preachments against the institution of slavery. May spoke out against the segregation of the poor and blacks in the balcony of the church. The comment upset many church members. Wishing to avoid an ugly fight, May resigned his pulpit in the summer of 1842 and accepted a position as president of the Lexington, Mass. Normal School for the training of teachers. He later went on to serve the Unitarian church in Syracuse, N.Y. (now the May Memorial Society) for a period of 20 years until his retirement.

WILLIAM OXNARD MOSELEY (1843-1847)

The Parish was without a settled pastor until the following spring of 1843, when a call was extended to William Oxnard Moseley of Newburyport, recently graduated from the Harvard Divinity School. Mr. Moseley remained here until sometime in 1847, when he resigned his charge on account of ill-health. He is remembered as a highly cultivated gentleman and scholar. During his pastorate the organization known as the Ladies' Aid Society was begun, under the name of the South Scituate Sewing Circle, with a charter membership of forty-seven active and six honorary members.

CALEB STETSON (1848-1858)

Then next minister of the Church was the Reverend Caleb Stetson, a man of mature years and experience, who had been for twenty-one years the Pastor of the Unitarian Church at Medford, Mass. Like his friend, Samuel J. May, he was devoted to the anti-slavery cause, and was one of the early advocates and prime-movers for total abstinence. It was during Mr. Stetson's ministry, in the year 1855, that Henry A. Turner, then a young man of twenty-seven, lately returned to his native town, was made Superintendent of the Sunday School, a position that he faithfully filled for more than sixty years. Mr. Stetson was a descendant of Cornet Robert Stetson of Scituate, and served the Parish of his ancestor from 1848 to 1858.

WILLIAM A. FULLER (1859-1864)

In September, 1859, a call was extended to the Reverend William A. Fuller, who was installed in November of that year. He came to the church from Barre, Mass., and remained until the autumn of 1864. He was much interested in the Sunday-School, and visited each home in his search for children to be enrolled, and was able to gather one hundred and twenty-five members. The first special observance of Christmas in the church was arranged by him, and the service, which was an innovation in this section, drew a large audience.

WILLIAM H. FISH (1865-1885)

In the fall of 1865 the Reverend William H. Fish became minister of the church. He occupied the pulpit for twenty years and, again, was an especially beloved pastor. He worked ardently for the spiritual and material welfare of the Parish. It was thanks to his efforts that Miss Abigail Otis and Nathan Cushing donated the parsonage on Main Street. Also, he persuaded Josiah Leavitt James of Chicago, a former resident of South Scituate, to donate funds for the James Library. There were also a number of trust funds created by well-to-do parishioners for the benefit of the parish, undoubtedly at the instigation of Mr. Fish. Some of the activities were not so desirable. Miss Abigail Otis, daughter of Dr. Cushing Otis, had the Paul Revere bell recast so she could hear it more distinctly when the clock in the belfry struck the hours.

While the James Library is the greatest monument to Mr. Fish's twenty-year service, he worked with untiring zeal for the welfare of the community, although failing eyesight was a great handicap during his last years. Before his death he became almost totally blind. His energies were ever directed toward a healthy, moral social life for his people, endeavoring by means of lectures on topics of the day, to keep the community, rather an isolated one, in touch with modern affairs.

JOHN TUNIS (1886-1889)

The changing conditions of modern life were ending the long pastorates in country churches, with the passing of the ministers of Mr. Fish's generation. The old town of South Scituate had, a few years before, changed its name to its present one of Norwell, and the church then became known as the First Parish Church of Norwell. In 1886, the Reverend John Tunis from New York was called to the office made vacant by Mr. Fish's resignation. Being a new worker in the Unitarian ranks, he was both ordained and installed on taking up his work in this place. Coming from the Episcopal Church, he felt that the simple service common in our churches would be enriched by a more liturgical one, and he made changes in it that were instrumental for good. A special Easter service was another innovation. He instituted the "Two Mile Missions," holding services in schoolhouses about two miles apart, during the summer of 1883. He served until the Spring of 1889 when he accepted a call as colleague to the Reverend George Briggs, D.D., of the Third Unitarian Society of Cambridge, at Cambridgeport.

WILLIAM H. SPENCER (1890-1891)

In the spring of 1890, the Reverend William H. Spencer, from Providence, accepted the pastorate, serving the First Church of Scituate in connection with it. Of energetic type and modern thought, he put new life into the Society. Not content with full service on the Sabbath, he filled the week-days with helpful affairs. Much was probably lost to the Parish by Mr. Spencer's retirement at the end of that year, for he was filled with Christian enthusiasm and an eager wish to serve the people of his church and section.

THOMAS THOMPSON (1891-1901)

The Reverend Thomas Thompson, from Lexington, came to the vacant pulpit in November, 1891, remaining until 1901, a long pastorate for modern days. The work of the Sunday School was faithfully carried on by him, and the Young People's Christian Union, a society of great worth to the Church and community for more than ten years, was formed through his efforts.

HORATIO EDWARD LATHAM (1902-1905)

His successor for three years was the Reverend Horatio Edward Latham. On his resignation in 1905, he left many friends who followed his career with interest.

CHESTER ARTHUR DRUMMOND (1906-1908)

During the late winter and spring of 1906, several young men, soon to graduate from the Theological School at Meadville, came to the Parish as candidates. An invitation was extended to the Reverend Chester Arthur Drummond, who accepted in time to celebrate the conclusion of Mr. Tuner's fifty years service as Superintendent of the Sunday-School. Mr. Drummond was greatly interested in the School, and did much to increase its membership. During his two years pastorate he worked zealously and untirely to interest and aid the young people of the Parish. His work with the "shut-ins" was

productive of help and inspiration to a number who were unable to attend service on Sundays or participate in any way with the church life, either from advanced age or from illness. At the end of his second year's work, he accepted a call to the First Church of Littleton, Mass.

WILLIAM E. ENNIS (1908-1911)

In 1908, the Reverend William E. Ennis came to the Parish from Yarmouth, Maine. For two years the Parish work and interests were carried on satisfactorily; but at the end of his second year, his preaching became so markedly influenced by the teachings of Christian Science as to be seriously objectionable to the members of his Parish, who were strongly opposed to any appearance of approval by the Society of such views or practices, and Mr. Ennis' resignation was unanimously accepted.

EDWARD L. HOUGHTON (1911-1916)

The Reverend Edward L. Houghton came to the Church in June, 1911. Under his leadership for five years, the work showed renewed activity. A branch of the National Alliance of Unitarian and Other Christian Women was formed with Mrs. Houghton as its first President. Her interest in the work of the organization placed the Norwell Branch on a firm footing.

HOWARD CHARLES GALE (1916-1920?)

When the Rev. Howard Charles Gale came here in late November 1916 Norwell was a small town of a few hundred people (more in the summer) and the church was a country parish with a total membership of 60 persons. He was very well liked and was quite active in town and community affairs. The Rev. Mr. Gale probably holds the record, at least in this parish, and maybe in the Guinness Book of Records, of performing the most baptisms at a Sunday morning service, 22 on Children's Day, June 9, 1918. Of the 22 children baptized that day, 9 bore the surname, Henderson. Not all had the same parents, but no doubt all were from the same clan and cousins one to another. If the people in Norwell were kind of clannish they had good reason for being so.

Mr. Gale had a deep and abiding interest in liturgical renewal and was quite drawn to the beauty of Anglican style liturgy and had instituted such a ritual at one of his former Universalist parishes in Dorchester. He restrained his interest while in Norwell, and kept the service fairly simple, but later in life, after having pursued a career in medicine and teaching, in addition to the ministry, he joined the Episcopal Church and became an Anglican priest. He came here in 1916 to get away from the stress and turmoil of the city for a while and to find some peace and quiet in the country. That he did for a few years until he decided he wanted to fulfill a boyhood dream of a career in medicine. With the permission of the parish he enrolled in the Massachusetts College of Osteopathy in Boston. He had thought about moving to a new parish closer to the city to be nearer to the school, but Horace Fogg and the members of the church prevailed upon him to remain with them.

To help with his finances Mr. Fogg investigated the possibility of his doing additional part-time ministries at the Universalist Church in Assinippi, which was without a minister, and also at a small Unitarian church in Pembroke. The Rev. Howard Charles Gale had an incredible busy schedule that year. He describes his Sunday workday in the following words:

"My program began with the morning service at the First Parish, followed by Sunday school, with me as superintendent, then my dinner at the parsonage and a quick drive to Assinippi in time for Sunday school, followed by the service and sermon. From there I drove to Pembroke, barely in time for Sunday



school, which was followed by the service and sermon. After that I returned to Norwell for a minute's rest and supper, then to the First Parish again for the meeting of the Young People's Society."

During the week he was up at the crack of dawn to catch the train from Greenbush to Boston, then on and off the subway and a mad dash for a couple of blocks just in time for the start of the anatomy class. He studied early mornings, late nights, and on the train in and out of Boston. Somehow he crowded in parish work whenever possible. He kept up this feverish pace for a year, finally decided it was too much, and accepted a call to be minister at First Parish in Beverly for \$3,000, and an easy train ride into Boston. Three thousand dollars was probably more than he was getting for handling three churches on the South Shore.

He eventually got his M.D. degree and went on to teach in his chosen field. He never entirely gave up the ministry. He went on to serve the Peabody Unitarian Church on a part time basis for 20 years while he carried on his medical and teaching practice. He later wrote his autobiography and called it, MY TRIPLE LIFE, referring, of course, to his three professional vocations of ministry, medicine and teaching. Without a doubt, Howard Charles Gale had to be one of the most gifted, intelligent, and energetic men ever to serve the Norwell parish and Unitarian ministry. He received letters of commendation from AUA President, Frederick May Eliot, and when he left his ministry in Norwell the members of the parish presented him with a generous purse. Though he had only been with them a short time they had grown to love and respect him and hated to see him go.

ALFRED WILSON (1921-1947)

The little church up river was finding it increasingly difficult to hold on to good ministers for more than a few years. For a period of 34 years, including the ministry of Howard Charles Gale, the parish had had eight different ministers averaging a little over 4 years for each ministry. They needed to find someone who would stay with them for awhile. This they found in the person of the Rev. Alfred "Jimmy" Wilson who began his ministry in Norwell on his 40th birthday, April 17, 1921 and stayed with the parish until his retirement on the 22nd of June 1947, a 26 year ministry. Afterwards he was voted Minister Emeritus and returned to his parish from time to time to participate in the installation of succeeding ministers and for other special celebrations. When Rev. Richard Fewkes was installed as minister in the spring of 1969, Jimmy Wilson came down to Norwell from his home in Sprucehead, Maine for the last time. He told the congregation that since his retirement he had participated in the installation of too many ministers of the First Parish in Norwell and he wanted the current one to stay long enough so that he wouldn't have to participate in any more. He was 88 years old and still chipper. Jimmy died the following September.

Jimmy Wilson was born in Liverpool, England during the Victorian era. His father was a sea captain and a man of rather stern visage. Jimmy left his native England as a young man to work and study at a Disciples of Christ Missionary School in the mountains of Tennessee. The school was fundamentalist in orientation, but opposed to dogmas and creeds. Jimmy felt the call to serve God, but his mind felt too confined within the fundamentalist view of the Bible. He went on to study at the University of Chicago and then to Union Theological Seminary in New York City. His first church was a Congregational Church in Walpole, N.H. where he met his future wife, Helen Banning, a Unitarian. He married her and shifted his ministry to the AUA and went on to serve churches in Newburgh, N.Y., Brighton and



Marblehead, Mass. He also served overseas for one year in the YMCA and was actively engaged in Red Cross work before coming to Norwell in 1921. In his first Unitarian parish in Newburgh, N.Y.,

Jimmy Wilson was thought to be something of a radical because he was the only clergyman in town bold enough to sit on the platform and march in the street with Carrie Chapman Catt and her suffragettes.

Jimmy Wilson had a winning way with people. He had a warm smile, a sparkle in his eye, a bounce in his step, and a disarming sense of humor. There was an essential goodness to the man that touched the heart and enabled him to communicate with all sorts and conditions of people. And his crisp English accent was a pleasure to listen to.

There were some important events that took place in the parish during his ministry. In September 1928 a special Service of Re-dedication and Commemoration was held in celebration of the restored meeting house. Over 300 persons were present. The Parish had painted the outside of the church, shingled the roof and wired the church for electricity. The restoration of the interior of the church consisted of restoring plain glass windows in place of colored glass which had been installed during the Victorian era, restoring the pew doors which had been removed and stored away in an attic somewhere for more than a generation, and the building of a new chancel and pulpit. All of this was the gift of Horace T. Fogg, Chairman of the Parish Committee, in memory of his parents and grandparents. He did a great deal of patient research into the style of New England Meeting Houses of the period in which it was built and did his best to make it the way it was when Samuel Deane delivered his dedication sermon in 1830.

Two years later, in August 1930, Horace Fogg died suddenly and left a great gap in the lay leadership of the church and town. In the Minister's Record Book Jimmy Wilson made the following notation:

"Funeral of Horace Tower Fogg--a great loss to our church, our leading layman, an influential member of the community, a man of large affairs and wide influence. He was advisor to a very large number of persons and was a man of sterling quality and unswerving devotion to the causes of the church. We shall miss him greatly."

Horace Fogg was one of the founders of the South Scituate Savings Bank and the Rockland Trust Co. He was influential and accessible to a great many people in the community. At home, unfortunately, according to Helen, he was distant and unapproachable to his wife and daughter, especially after the death of his son Faulkner at age 14. We are the beneficiaries of his largess and generosity and that of his daughter, Helen.

Jimmy Wilson was the spiritual leader for two significant anniversaries in the life of the church--the 100th Anniversary of the Meeting House on Oct. 12, 1930, and the 300th Anniversary of the formation of the Parish on February 15, 1942. At the latter ceremony, Dr. Frederick May Eliot, President of the AUA, preached the dedicatory sermon, with almost 300 in attendance. Later in the afternoon, at 3:00, a brief service of Re-dedication was held at the commemorative boulder on Wilson Hill at the corner of Old Meeting House Lane marking the location of the First Meeting House. Again, it was Horace Fogg who had made the arrangements and spoke at the original dedication of the Boulder at the 275th Anniversary Service in 1917.



Jimmy Wilson is remembered as an excellent horseman, as was his wife, Helen, loved to sail, and enjoyed a good game of chess. During the summers, he and his wife, tended to their summer cottage in Sprucehead, Maine, to which they later retired, and when he was in Norwell, during the summer, he would stay overnight at the Kent House, because he and Helen rented out the Parsonage for a little extra income.

HERMAN H. GEERTZ (1948-1953)

Herman H. Geertz was 34 years old when he was called to be minister of the First Parish in Norwell on the 29th of December 1947. He was married and had two children, William and Hope, aged 4 and 2, and while here became father to a second daughter. This was the first time that there were children living in the Parsonage in more than 30 years, maybe even since the turn of the century. Herman graduated from Andover Newton Theological School, my alma mater, in 1942. He had served churches in Ellsworth, Maine and South Boston, and as a US Army Chaplain for two years during the war.

Herman Geertz had a hard act to follow after 26 years of ministry under Jimmy Wilson. He was a little on the shy side in comparison to Jimmy Wilson's easy going friendly British manner. But he fostered some important changes in the parish which later bore fruit. It is the wise custom in more and more UU churches that after a long ministry the church employ an interim minister for one to two years to provide a transition period of adjustment between the ending of the previous ministry and the beginning of a new ministry. Herman Geertz followed Jimmy Wilson only six months after the latter's retirement. Whatever he did in his brief five year ministry was compared to Jimmy Wilson and he always came up short in the minds of those parishioners who had not yet let go of their previous pastor. It wasn't right and it wasn't fair because Herman Geertz was a good minister in his own right and deserved a chance to be accepted on his own merits.

Mr. Geertz was meticulous in terms of keeping a record of church events and ministerial activities. For example, he noted on Feb. 27, 1949, that David Turner and three other members of the Youth Group spoke at the Sunday Service on the theme of "Youth Faces the Future."

On June 30, 1950 Herman Geertz recorded an event which nearly resulted in the destruction of our ancient New England meeting house. Some workmen were painting the steeple and "dropped a burning cigarette on the roof causing a blaze which had gained some headway before the fire department arrived. An area about 6 feet square was burned in the southern slope of the roof near the eaves." Luckily, there was "no damage to the interior of the church." In December of that same year formal notice was given of the placing of the memorial tablet in the church in memory of Horace T. and Faulkner Fogg.

Under Herman Geertz' ministerial leadership the church began to grow. Younger families started coming into the church with their children. The James Library was not big enough to accommodate the growing numbers and parishioners began thinking about the need for a parish house for church activities and meetings and additional Sunday School classes. There were some stresses and strains between newer and older members of the church about matters large and small. You catch a hint of this strain in a brief notation by the minister from June 1, 1951: "Donation of 50 cents each from a large number of people made possible the purchase of a mimeograph for parish use, the parish committee



having expressed its unwillingness to invest in such a machine despite the high cost of printing the parish bulletin."

Divisions over lay leadership broke wide open the following April at the Annual Meeting. Herman Geertz records that... "...two members of the Parish Committee were not re-elected, younger men being voted in in their places. The men's group, which has been working hard to build up the church, felt that this change was necessary for the spiritual health of the church, and the minister did nothing to discourage this healthy democratic trend. (He goes on) It was apparent, however, that the feelings of some of the older group were deeply wounded, for nothing of this sort had transpired for half a century. Yet it had to be done; the church is not the private possession of any individual or group."

Because of this the church by-laws were eventually changed to limit the terms which people may serve on the Parish Committee. It was a move towards a more democratic process and the sharing of leadership responsibilities within the church. Herman Geertz helped to foster this important change, but in the process it cost him his ministry.

There were divisions within the parish about the wisdom and necessity of constructing a new parish house. Nevertheless a Building Survey Committee was formed, gave a preliminary report, and then was directed in December of 1952 to consult with an architect and to prepare specific proposals to be presented at a future open meeting. The following March the plans were put before the Parish Committee and met with "disapproval and skepticism of success." The following April an open meeting at the James Library viewed the plans and discussed methods for the raising of necessary funds. It is apparent that Herman Geertz was on the side of those who wanted to push forward with the building of a new parish house. He was coming into direct opposition with key leaders on the Parish Committee.

It all came to a head on April 24, 1953. A special meeting of the Parish Committee, not previously announced, was held at the home of the chairman, James H. Barnard, the purpose being "to bring to the attention of the minister complaints that his work in the parish was not finding satisfaction." Mr. Barnard prefaced his remarks by saying, "We have never asked a minister to resign, but we are wondering if you are not considering resignation."

Two days later Mr. Gertz made the following notation, painful to report:

"After careful consideration, the minister concluded that his usefulness in Norwell was at an end. Accordingly he read his resignation at the conclusion of the morning service. He suggested that the Parish Committee had no moral right to press matters so far, and in effect called upon the Parish to make the decision at the Annual Meeting the next night. The minister was aware of certain lapses in his work, but felt nevertheless that the criticisms were unjust. In a community such as this, demands on a minister's time are very great, and it is perhaps inevitable that work such as parish calling should suffer. He could not help feeling that growing opposition to the parish house, and to the proposal to use the Torrey bequest for this purpose had an influence on the action of the Parish Committee. Some older members of the church had evinced constant opposition to the increased part younger members were taking in the parish affairs, the proposal to build the Parish House being largely the concern of the younger people. This attitude was well illustrated in the remark of the Chairman, 'We want new



members, but we do not want to lose the church.' The minister could not help feeling that this attitude did not reflect the spirit of our tradition."

Mr. Geertz' resignation was accepted at the Annual Meeting by a close vote, but he was granted permission to remain as minister until he could be settled in a new church. The following September, after failure to find another position, he was asked to cease his ministerial services. On the 10th of October 1953, with the calling of the Rev. N. W. Lovely to be the new minister, Mr. Geertz recorded that he "thought it advisable to leave the parsonage, although he had no prospects of another church....He and Mrs. Geertz, and their three children, left on this day, to depend upon the kindness of relatives for shelter." The first notation recorded by the new minister, Mr. Lovely, stated, "Quite uninformed of the situation and facts related above."

Mr. Geertz went on to serve the Unity Church in N. Easton for a year and a half from April 1954 to September 1, 1955. He was very well liked both as a preacher and a pastor. The main reason he left was that his wife no longer wanted him to be in the ministry, perhaps because of their unhappy experience in Norwell, and he was restless to try something else. In any event, he resigned from the ministry in N. Easton and from the ministry in general, and moved with his family to California to take up a position in teaching through the instrumentation of a sister who also lived in California. He taught English for a period of 9 to 10 years in Garfield High School in the Hispanic section of Los Angeles, made famous in the recent film "Stand By Me." During this time he did some part time supply preaching for several Unitarian Fellowships in the area. Herman Geertz died suddenly at age 50 in 1964 from a coronary occlusion. At the time of his death he was considering going back into the parish.

It is fair to say that the circumstances leading to Mr. Geertz having to leave Norwell were an unfortunate and unnecessary episode in the life of the parish and one of its ministers. Differences and disagreements were not handled in a fair, just and open manner. Things did not have to end the way they did. And certainly the prospective new minister should have been informed of the facts leading to the resignation of his predecessor. That would never happen today with the current procedures for Ministerial Settlement established by the UUA. It is discomfoting to relate this portion of our recent history, but if we are going to bring our history up to date, as we ought, then let it be an honest accounting of that history.

Herman Geertz was a decent man and he was an inspiration to his children. His son William eventually followed his father into the ministry. What Herman Geertz began was finally completed in the ministry of his successor, Napoleon "Bill" Lovely. The new Parish House was dedicated on September 11, 1955 by the head of the Building Committee, Frank Macfarlane and the Chair of the Parish Committee, James Barnard, with a prayer offered by the minister. The new parish hall roof nearly collapsed during construction and a steel beam running the length of the ceiling had to be installed to insure structural support. It was done and Herman Geertz' dream was finally realized.

WILLIAM LOVELY (1953-1958)

Bill Lovely came to Norwell after two years of study at the Graduate School of Education at Harvard. Prior to that he was the first minister of the newly formed Unitarian Church in San Antonio, Texas, and served as a chaplain in the army for four years during the war. Bill Lovely was a bright and talented minister with a flair for writing and liturgy. He published a book of poems, a reflection on the First Parish Covenant, and a small booklet of responsive readings and prayers.

Mr. Lovely was noted as a poet and liturgist. A book of his poems was published and some of his responsive readings were published in the previous HYMNS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF LIFE. One of his Unison Affirmations, "The Gates of Freedom", is still used from time to time in worship services at First Parish: "Though our knowledge is incomplete, our truth partial, and our love imperfect, we believe that new light is ever waiting to break through individual hearts and minds to enlighten our human ways, that there is mutual strength in willing co-operation, and that the bonds of love keep open the gates of freedom."

In 1958, after five years of a productive ministry, Bill Lovely got restless and accepted a call to be minister of the Unitarian church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. His two sons, Rupert and Brandoch Lovely, who were young men at the time, and did not live in the Norwell parsonage, followed their father into the ministry. Brandy was minister for a number of years at the Old Ship Church in Hingham. Eventually, Bill Lovely was forced to retire from the ministry because of the onset of Parkinson's disease.

VICTOR H. CARPENTER (1959-1962)

Victor H. Carpenter, Jr. began his ministry in Norwell in January 1959 and was formally installed as minister on the 10th of May. He had been Student Minister at Christ Church in Dorchester, a Unitarian church now defunct, for two years while attending Harvard, and they ordained him after he graduated. He was young and full of energy and attracted more young people into the church. His preaching was in the social prophetic mode and generated much heated discussion after the service right out the door and into the parking lot. He once did a sermon on the "Better Red Than Dead" slogan that got the juices flowing and the tempers flaring. Victor was to the left of most of his parishioners on social-political issues and his sermons were always a challenge to status-quo conservative thinking. During his ministry the Adult Education Committee of the church founded the South Shore Community Forum. They brought in some big name speakers to the community similar to later Fogg Lecture Series. The first speaker was famous Harvard theologian, Paul Tillich, who attracted a crowd of 350 people. The second speaker was the controversial pacifist and anti-war activist, Willard Uphaus, who some considered to be a communist sympathizer. It generated a lot of press for the Community Forum.

Victor was only the minister here for two and a half years, but he made an impact upon a lot of lives, especially young people, and is fondly remembered by many. In 1962 he accepted a call to be minister to the Unitarian Church in Capetown, South Africa, right in the heart of apartheid country. Victor liked social challenges and this was as big a challenge as one could hope for. Nearly all of his ministries since have been urban centered ministries, 9 years in Philadelphia, 11 years at Arlington Street Church in Boston, 5 years in San Francisco, and since 1994 he has been minister of the First Church in Belmont, Mass.

CHARLES A. ENGVALL (1962-1963)

Victor Carpenter's successor, the Rev. Charles A. Engvall, barely had a chance to establish a ministry and make an impact before he died suddenly at his summer home in Dublin, N.H. on Sept. 1, 1963, after having served here only one year. He was 55 years old. It was a terrible blow to his family and to the parish. He had been minister in Medford for 10 years prior to coming to Norwell. He had a background in journalism and communication and advised the AUA and the Mass. Council of Churches in radio and television productions. He was the first chair of the Greater Boston Chapter of the Unitarian Fellowship for Social Justice and had been instrumental in the organization of a Fair Housing



Committee in Norwell. His wife, Esther Engvall, still resides in New Hampshire in Keene and is a member of the Peterborough, N.H. Unitarian Church.

JOHN M. KOLBJORNSEN (1964-1968)

The next minister, the Rev. John M. Kolbjornsen, began his ministry here in May 1964. He had an interesting background. He was born in Norway of Norwegian-American parents in 1924 and came to Staten Island, N.Y. with his family ten years later. He graduated from Harvard in 1945 and served as an Ensign in the US Navy. After doing graduate work at George Washington University he entered the State Department and served as vice consul and attaché in the US embassy in Copenhagen, from 1949-52. Then he entered Harvard Divinity School and while there served the Unitarian Church in Sharon, Mass. as Student Minister for one year, and then was ordained by them and served as minister for another three years before accepting a call to the UU Church in Williamsville, NY. Six years later he came to Norwell.

John Kolbjornsen raised some theological issues with the congregation regarding orthodox Christian views of Jesus as the Christ versus a Unitarian view of Jesus as a man. He suggested that Unitarians in Norwell should not be required to affirm Jesus as the Christ or Messiah as they were required to do when they signed the membership covenant which at the time read: "In the love of truth, and in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we unite for the worship of God, and the service of man." He advocated dropping the word "Christ" from the covenant. He was not successful. A few years later the same proposal was put to a vote during the ministry of his successor and passed with only a couple of dissenting votes.

John Kolbjornsen's ministry was caught up in the fervor of the Civil Rights Movement and the protests over the Vietnam War in the 1960's. He was one of many clergy who attended the famous March on Selma, when the Rev. James Reeb was killed. When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated he draped the door of the church in black to the ire of some upset parishioners. His strong anti-war stance from the pulpit led to divisions within the church. There was clear lack of tolerance and understanding on both sides. In the end John Kolbjornsen resigned his ministry in Norwell and accepted a call to the First Unitarian Church of Sioux City, Iowa. In his final notation in the Minister's Record Book, dated August 23, 1968, he wrote:

"The circumstances leading to his resignation as minister of this church were complex and gave occasion to not a little bitterness, making the last year of his ministry here painful for many. Hopeful that the pain might be a vehicle for future good, and with gratitude for many good times of the spirit...."

John Kolbjornsen remained in full time ministry in Sioux City Iowa for a period of seven years and then moved to Portsmouth, N.H. with his wife Margaret. Margaret continued in her teaching profession and John took up teaching as well. He also did some pulpit supply and part-time interim ministries for the UUA in New Hampshire and Vermont. They have since retired and are living in Peterboro, N.H. The brass sconces, which hang on both sides of the gallery clock were a gift to the parish by the Kolbjornsens, which they obtained on a trip to Norway. The Kolbjornsens participated in the 350th Anniversary of the church in 1992 and were warmly received.



RICHARD M. FEWKES (1969-2000)

Written by Associate Community Minister, The Rev. Judith Campbell

Who would have thought that the young minister from Middleboro, ordained only four and a half years, would be the one to stay and stay and stay. Richard Fewkes, a graduate of Andover Newton Theological School, came to First Parish in 1969. His first Sunday service was Easter of that year, and on that day he also performed two Christenings—Jefferson Detwiler and David Bailey. We put him right to work and he hasn't stopped since. Dick would go on to do many more life celebrations for the people of Norwell, "these are" to use Dick's own words, "the most important tasks of personal ministry that ministers are called upon to perform." Weddings, Funerals and Dedications mark our milestones and bind our hearts and minds together as a community and create bonds of affection and support that last a lifetime.

There is no doubt that these celebrations have been one of his most creative and lasting gifts to us. And here I speak as a former student, and right here beside you, watching and listening to you, is where I learned this most fundamental and powerful work of ministry.

One of the highlights of Dick's ministry was the celebration of the 350th Anniversary of the parish on February 2nd 1992, using costumes borrowed from the Plimoth Plantation. Victor Carpenter sent greetings from San Francisco and a charge to the congregation to remember their history and to learn from it. John Kolbjornsen shared in the service and offered the Prayer of Rededication.

Dick's leadership has enriched First Parish in many ways. In the seventies, First Parish became a "teaching" church, and Dick and all of you would play a vital role in the shaping of the next generation of ministers up to this very day with Rachel Tedesco as the most recent graduate of the Fewkes school of practical ministry. Dick started a chapter of Psi Symposium here, which still continues to meet as an active group, serving the needs of those who are interested in spiritual, mystical and psychic development.

Later, in 1990, through Dick's leadership and enthusiasm, we became a Partner Church to a little church in the village of Kadacs in Transylvania. This relationship has continued over the years and the connection has actually changed and improved the quality of the lives of many of the villagers some 3000 miles away. But it has also enriched our own lives immeasurably. We have recently become an official UUA Welcoming Congregation, a big step towards putting into practice what we preach about respecting the worth and dignity of every person. And our tireless and relentless Service Committee, which was formed during Dick's ministry, and supports many and varied service projects, makes tangible the words, "Service is our prayer".

No mention of Dick's thirty years of loving leadership would be complete without the mention of the minister's helpmate and "right -arm"...his wife Ellie. These two have provided love, leadership, coffee, sympathy, empathy, care and casseroles to this community for more than thirty years.

It is a grand legacy in a great tradition. Dick, we will add your name to our proud history with a tear and a smile. It is the way of things and we all must move forward. But you have trained us well. Your legacy is our future.

JAN VICKERY KNOST (2000-2002)

At the time of Rev. Emeritus Richard Fewkes' departure, Interim Ministry was favored by the UUA, and most member churches, to help congregations transition from one settled minister to another. Jan Vickery Knost became the first officially designated Interim Minister in the long history of First Parish of Norwell. Rev. Knost came to Norwell from an interim position in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He had previously served for two years in Clearwater, Florida. Ordained in 1960, Rev. Knost served as a called minister at churches in Attleboro and Dedham, Massachusetts, Summit, New Jersey, and Houston and San Antonio, Texas before specializing in interim ministry.

While serving in Norwell, he pointed out to the congregation their unique position as the recipients of the sizeable Helen Fogg Trust, and the impact of having significant help to financially support the functioning of the church. During his tenure one of his adult children was involved in a very serious accident that left him quite incapacitated. The church community rallied around the minister and his wife, doing their best to provide support and relieve him of those responsibilities that they could.

VICTORIA WEINSTEIN (2002-2013)

Victoria Weinstein was enthusiastically called as the first female settled minister of First Parish of Norwell. A native of Connecticut and a lifelong Unitarian Universalist, she was ordained in 1997 and served parishes in Maryland and Pennsylvania before coming to Norwell. Reverend Weinstein and the congregation worked together early in her ministry to create a new covenant, which has been recited during services since its adoption. While in Norwell, Rev. Weinstein earned her doctorate from Andover Newton Theological Seminary. She was noted for writing many award-winning sermons. She gained notoriety, including an article in the Boston Globe and an appearance on Nightline, for providing "beauty tips for ministers" in an online blog. She left to serve as called minister at the UU Church of Greater Lynn.

LEN DEROCHE (2013-2015)

Len DeRoche came to the ministry after a long and successful career in the Air Force. He earned his M.Div. from Lancaster Theological Seminary in 1997 and was ordained in 1998. In addition, he has an M.S. in Finance from University of Arkansas. He served two congregations as Interim Minister (Kingston, MA and Charleston, WV) while working toward his D.Min. from Chicago Theological Seminary, which he was awarded in 2002. He served as called minister for The UU Church of the Lehigh Valley in Bethlehem, PA, then returned to Interim Ministry at UU Church of Amherst in Williamsville, NY. His leadership in the Air Force followed by training in pastoral counseling create a leader skillful in mentoring congregations through the transition process between ministers.

Lisa Adams- Sherry (2015-2019)

Lise Adams-Sherry received her Master's of Divinity from Meadville Lombard Theological School in May 2010 and was ordained in January 2012 at the UU Congregation of Salem, OR. She also served as the assistant minister at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Salem, OR.