

THE
FIRST PARISH CHURCH
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
OF
STOW AND ACTON

A BRIEF HISTORY

PUBLISHED IN HONOR OF THE 300TH ANNIVERSARY OF

THE FIRST PARISH CHURCH

PREFACE

The First Parish Church, Unitarian Universalist, of Stow and Acton had its roots in the early history of the town of Stow. The church was largely governed by the town until 1833, when the parish became a Unitarian Church body. As part of the congregation's 150th anniversary celebration, in 1983, which coincided with the town's 300th, a brief history was undertaken.

It was not intended as a complete record. There is a wealth of material for further study, some of which has already been researched, copied, and indexed. It is hoped that readers will be inspired to contribute material which they might have in their personal collections, to be cataloged for further interpretation.

The committee is grateful to all who contributed and to past record-keepers who so carefully preserved the church records which are now stored in the town vault.

The committee hopes that the reading of this brief history will mean to you what the making of this booklet has meant to us - an opportunity to explore the past and to appreciate the contributions of so many individuals to the past and future growth of the First Parish Church.

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The story of the First Parish begins three centuries ago and is tightly interwoven with the history of the town of Stow itself. The church has been Unitarian since 1833 and merged with the Acton Universalist Church in 1969. But the beginnings of the "Church of Christ in Stow" date back to the incorporation of the town in 1683.

Early church records reflect the hardships of life in a new settlement, the-dogged search for a new minister, and the central role of the church/meetinghouse in village affairs, for there was no distinction between secular and religious matters in the early colonies. The first settlers were pious men and women who considered themselves equally accountable to God and to their civil magistrates. The meetinghouse was the place where both town meetings and Sunday worship services were held. The dual use of one building, located in the center of town, symbolized the unity of citizenship and church membership. It was the town that built new churches, repaired old ones, paid the ministers, swept the floors, bought the hymnals, and provided for horse stalls and carriage sheds.

In or about 1672, the General Court gave conditions for settling the large tract of land that was to become Stow, including among its requirements that a "pious, orthodox and able minister be maintained there¹." The committee in charge of settling the original twelve lots sought "men of good and honest conversations and orthodox in religion...and engage according to their ability to contribute towards the maintenance of a godly minister amongst them². Orthodox at the time was understood to mean Congregational. In fact, the First Parishes or First Churches in the Massachusetts Bay Colony rarely used the term "Congregational" in their official designation, since that affiliation was generally understood.

Because of the priority given to religious matters therefore, one of the first tasks for the new town of Stow after its official incorporation in May, 1683, was to settle a minister. There had been occasional preaching up to this time, perhaps by the minister from Concord whence many of the original settlers came. The first reference to an individual minister was found in June, 1683, when the town voted a tax to help pay Mr. Percival Green for his part-time services on the Lord's Day. After a two year interruption, Rev. Samuel Parris (later an important figure in the Salem witchcraft trials) provided ministerial services for a time, followed by Mr. James Miriot, but apparently neither of these men was invited to settle.

In November, 1686, Mr. William Woodrop of Lancaster, having come to preach and visit, was formally offered the position of

minister. Upon his acceptance, it seems the town made every effort to hasten his settlement. He was to be paid 140 pounds annually, half in money and half in corn and grain.

The building of a house for the new minister was quickly undertaken. It was situated on Lot #1 of the twelve original lots drawn up for the settlement. Located just behind the first meetinghouse, it still stands today on its original location which is now 9 Red Acre Road. The dwelling was to be "of such character that he could invite his wife to come from her English home and abide with him³". A committee consulted with Mr. Woodrop and recommended that "there be with all speed a dwelling house framed and set up upon the lott appointed for ye minister of this town near ye meetinghouse of 26 or 27 feet long (8 or 9 foote thereof to be for ye chimney) ye rooms thereof to be 18 foote square at least, two fireplaces to be below In ye chimney and one hearth in ye chamber ... with a cellar under ye said house and ye cellar walls to be stoned ... All ye floors to be well laid and convenient windows made and glassed doors fitted and hung ... and made habitable in all respects⁴." However, in spite of their attempts to offer a special house appropriate for a minister's family, the townspeople received the disappointing news about three months later that Mr. Woodrop's wife would not come to the new country, and so he concluded that "his call was to go to her⁵"

The enthusiasm of the town diminished considerably at this news and construction of the minister's house apparently came to a virtual halt. A year later, in October, 1687, Mr. Overton, another ministerial candidate, inquired as to whether the town still intended to build a house for its minister. His inquiries prodded the town into action again. Another committee was formed, new workmen were engaged, and a promise was made to finish the dwelling in six months. In the meantime, Mr. Overton boarded at the home of Boaz Brown.

At the same time, efforts were also underway to erect the first meetinghouse, both "in ye fear of ye Lord and of ye Indians⁶." It was also hoped that this would provide an added inducement for a minister to settle in the town. The first religious services were probably held in private homes or even outdoors in good weather. By 1685 however, rough construction was underway near the east end of the Common, probably not far from the Lower Village Cemetery.

The first meetinghouse (the term "church" was not used until well into the nineteenth century) was small, but it was probably the best the townspeople could afford. In March, 1686, the Selectmen drew up a contract with Samuel Hunt that "he finish ye

meetinghouse of this town to ye turning of ye key." He was to "lay ye floors double In ye meetinghouse, make and hang two double doors, four windows and sash with three lights framed two foot and half in length with handsome munions to be dispatched forthwith substantially and completely The Selectmen to pay him for this work when done ten bushels of Indian Corn good and merchantable and to provide board and nails for that work⁷."

By October of 1686 however, it was already evident that further work was needed to protect against the bitter cold, keeping in mind that Sunday services were of many hours duration three centuries ago. It was concluded that "ye publick meetinghouse newly erected in this town shall be forthwith filled between ye wall timbers and studs from ye sills to ye joists pieces with clay and wood and lathes to hold ye cross pieces and to hold up ye clay and that the same be plastered even with ye studs and the whole house shall be well and sufficiently every way round about underpinned ... It is also voted and ordered that ye Selectmen shell make a rate upon all the inhabitants of the town for ye payment thereof⁸."

In spite of the new meetinghouse, invitations to settle in Stow were still declined, first by the former preacher, Mr. Minot, followed by Mr. Mitchel of Cambridge, Mr. Whiting of Billerica, and Mr. Overton. In 1689, a long contract was finally signed with Mr. John Winborne, which included a salary agreement and a provision that the lands and dwelling house allotted to the ministry would become his personal property at the end of five years This may have been an attempt to encourage a long-term relationship between the minister and the town, but it, too, failed. Approximately 6 years later, in 1695, some difficulties arose "from himself and family which have been~matter of great offence at home, besides ye noises and scandal abroad⁹." The nature of the indiscretion was never revealed, but Mr. Winborne did leave soon after and the town was forced to buy back the minister's house and property. However, throughout the six years of his stay, he seems never to have been formally installed as minister.

There follows another series of interim ministers, including a Mr. Woodward of Dedham; Mr. Mors, also of Dedham, and Rev. Parris again. The town even requested financial help from the General Court in order to increase their salary offers, but all to no avail.

The fortune of the town finally turned in 1699 when the call was given to Mr. John Eveleth and he accepted He was paid 140 pounds a year in money, firewood, corn, and other provisions. Although he lived and preached in the town, and had signed a

covenant with the townspeople in 1700, there was no formal installation until sometime around December, 1702, at which time Stow could finally boast a permanent preacher. There is little recorded about his ordination, but we do know that a day of fast was set aside in preparation for the event and contributions were forthcoming from the townspeople. Mr. Eveleth is considered the first official minister of the First Parish Church. It was estimated that there were about eleven members when the church was first organized.

The town enjoyed relative peace and prosperity during the next several years and gradually decided that a larger and more comfortable meetinghouse was desirable. Planning commenced around 1710, but the building was not occupied until May, 1714.

This second meetinghouse was erected "on the right hand of the country road on the little knoll between Capt. Stevens' barn and the dam at Strong Water Brook¹⁰" on a site which, by today's landmarks, would be near the Pilot Grove Building which currently houses the Police Station.

For a cost of 250 pounds, a meetinghouse was constructed 140 feet long and 32 feet wide, with windows, stairs, pews "all around the body", and a gallery - all in all, a much improved building.

In 1722, a small bell was presented to the town by an "Englishman", a Mr. Jekyll, who lived in the Lower Village, and a turret in which to hang the bell was added to the meetinghouse.

The old meetinghouse was sold and to purchase a "burying cloth". Almost a century later, in 1809, the former Common at the Lower Village where the first meetinghouse stood was sold to Rufus Hosmer and Jacob Soper for \$100 on condition that it always remain a Common, never to be fenced or built upon.

About fifteen years after Mr. Eveleth's settlement, questions arose concerning the minister's conduct. There is reference to a meeting on November 14, 1717 to "consider what steps to take in reference to Mr. Eveleth's miscarriage of late among us¹¹." Two councils, composed of neighboring ministers, were convened at different times to seek a resolution to the problem, with the latter recommending in 1718 dissolution of pastoral relations. Tradition says that intemperance was the source of the unacceptable behavior, but no definitive records exist. Church records of 1719 inform us that at some point, "Mr. Eveleth, upon manifestation of repentance, was restored to the church fellowship and communion¹²." He stayed and taught school in Stow

and later moved to Arundel, Maine where he continued his ministerial calling.

In June, 1718, after a brief search, Mr. John Gardner (father of the well-known Henry Gardner) was called as minister. He was ordained later that year and was given 100 pounds in land as a settlement or "relocation expense" and an annual salary of 70 pounds. The church at that time consisted of about thirty persons. Mr. Gardner states that the ordaining council "advised us to covenant anew, the foundation covenant being lost¹³." This refers to a written agreement signed by minister and church members establishing a bond of union among the members. A covenant was neither a creed nor a set of by-laws, but simply a declaration of the members' intent to worship together and help one another. Covenants were usually written by the church members, although the minister might have helped with the phrasing. Since the first two covenants of Stow's church are lost, their contents must remain a matter of speculation.

Mr. Gardner's ministry seems to have been peaceful and prosperous, although he is described as a stern individual, somewhat intimidating to children. Yet he was considered intelligent and faithful in the discharge of his pastoral duties. Because of a detailed letter that he wrote to a friend, Nathan Stone, concerning the settlement of Stow, he is frequently regarded as the first historian of the town. During his ministry, 209 people joined the church, and 1,346 were baptized. As the town was obviously growing and as the old meetinghouse was increasingly in need of repairs after 37 years, the town meeting of December, 1751 voted to spend money to repair the old meetinghouse, including the turret and broken windows. However, a few months later, that vote was reconsidered and it was decided instead to build a new meetinghouse. Although the merits of various sites were discussed for many months, this third meetinghouse seems to have been erected on a site just east of the Hillside Cemetary. A later town meeting in 1754 considered giving Rev. Gardner some extra compensation in light of the distance between the minister's house (still back at the old Common) and the new meeting house, but no action was taken.

Again, the old structure was sold, with the proceeds going to the support of the poor. This new building was 50 feet long and 40 feet wide, probably with a double front door and a door at each end, with a gallery on three sides of the building. It was decided that "there be nineteen pews around the Meetinghouse, as they are in the old meetinghouse, one of the Nineteen excepted for the Minister's Pew¹⁴." The pews were arranged around the outside walls, with long benches occupying the middle floor space, one side of the aisle being for the women, and the other

side for the men. Later, many of these benches were replaced with additional pews, since there was definite status attached to the ownership of a pew. The use of the stairs leading to the gallery was also restricted – men's stairs on the west side of the building and women's stairs on the east. There is no record of a belfry or steeple being included. It appears that the old bell was not used, and it was sold in 1832.

The house was first used for public worship on February 9, 1755 and Mr. Gardner preached from the Old Testament Book of Haggai, Chapter 2, Verse 9, on the occasion: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former saith the Lord of Hosts and in this place will I give peace saith the Lord of Hosts." The cost of the building was about 266 pounds and construction was financed through the sale of pews, with each pew going to the highest bidder.

The etiquette of seating arrangements often occupied the attention of the town at various times and reflects a somewhat elitist approach to religious worship. In 1722, it was voted that seating should be organized according to age and according to the amount of financial support bestowed on the church. In 1771, rules were set out for the proper departure from the building, those in the galleries being last to leave. In 1773, the singers were told not to sit in the "women's seats" although no further provision of seats for the singers was made. (Music during worship was merely tolerated in the eighteenth century.) And later, a detailed seating plan was drawn up for persons not owning pews.

John Gardner served his town and his church well, but in 1773, he became too infirm to preach on a regular basis. The church members sought a colleague who would act as joint pastor and thought they had found one in John Marrett. Surprisingly, although the church voted almost unanimously to invite him to settle in Stow, the town meeting did not concur and Mr. Marrett was eventually settled in what is now Burlington instead.

A year later, both the church and town agreed on the choice of Jonathan Newell, and he was ordained in October, 17714. Three months later, John Gardner died, and Rev. Newell took over the pastoral duties entirely.

Rev. Newell's ministry was a long one, and fondly remembered. He was "a man of a strong mind, of sound judgment, exceedingly well acquainted with human nature, benevolent and generous to the poor ... He had a great deal of shrewdness and of wit ... His passions were naturally very strong, but he kept them under control ... His whole ministry was marked with consummate

prudence¹⁵." One of his secular contributions to society was the invention of a machine for cutting nails, which apparently was quite successful. An interesting anecdote from the church's history also occurred during Mr. Newell's ministry, on the subject of dogs. It was not uncommon to bring one's dog into the cold and drafty meetinghouse to act as an inexpensive foot warmer during the long Sunday services. However, as the practice became more widespread, the dogs became more troublesome. Finally, in April, 1796, it was deemed necessary to appoint a committee to take care of the dogs that came into the meetinghouse on the Lord's Day. William Walcott, Isaac Brown, Capt. Hezekiah Hapgood, George Davidson, and Josiah Conant were given authority to kill the dogs "if they cannot keep them out without [killing them]¹⁶."

It was during Mr. Newell's ministry that the fourth meetinghouse was erected because the old structure needed so much repair work. Many meetings were held beginning as early as 1819 to decide first on the feasibility of the new building and then on its location, which was the focus of lengthy discussions and considerable conflict. The house was finally built during the year 1827, on the site of the present church. The land was purchased from John Eveleth for \$200. The old structure was sold to Moses Whitney and Augustus Tower in exchange for their services toward building a new house of worship for the town. The cost, to be financed by the sale of pews, was not to exceed \$4,000, and any surplus money from the sale of pews was to be paid into the town treasury. In order to get construction underway quickly, several church members bought shares at \$50 each as security until the proceeds from the sale of pews were in hand.

This fourth meetinghouse seems to have been the most elegant. It was the largest, being 68 feet long and 50 feet wide, with a circular gallery for the "orchestry" over the entry, and a circular staircase at each end for access. There were also some free seats mainly in the gallery for those who could not pay the price of a pew. The pulpit was located at what we would consider today the back of the sanctuary, so that the audience, in facing the pulpit, also faced the entry doors. The floor of the building was on an inclined plane, as in an auditorium or theater. There were three aisles and a total of 614 pews, with the side pews angled to face the pulpit. The top of the pulpit was covered with oriental blue silk damask, which also draped the columns on either side. There were 10 windows with a circular top, one fan window in the front gable end, a tower and cupola, and a large portico with 4 columns. The exterior was painted white with green shutters.¹⁷ From the Account Book; we learn that "Boston" glass, as manufactured by the Boston Crown

Glass Company, was specified for the windows. There was a continued strong preference at this time for American products due to past interference with American shipping by England and France earlier in the century. The basement of this meetinghouse was finished for the use of town meetings. It consisted of one large room and two anterooms "for the use of committees". There was a platform and desk for the moderator and other town officials. The room is said to have been rather gloomy, however, due to the small size of the windows.

There was no organ for worship services at this time, so music was provided by different members, playing a variety of Instruments from violin and flute to trombone and bugle. The choir (under the direction of Ephraim Hale, Jr. for many years), as well as the music, was said to have been of very high quality.

As the fourth meetinghouse was being built in 1827, Mrs. Abigail Eveleth, whose deceased husband was a grandson of Rev. John Eveleth, made known her intention to bequeath \$1400 to the town for the purchase of a new bell for the meetinghouse¹⁸. Prior to her bequest and with her approval, the town ordered a bell from P. Revere & Sons for \$222.19 to be installed in anticipation of the dedication of the new meetinghouse in October, 1827. Unfortunately, Mrs. Eveleth died suddenly in September of that year and the bell was tolled for the first time at her funeral. This same bell tolled at the end of the two World Wars, the Korean War and the Vietnam conflict, as well as at numerous weddings, funerals, Fourth of July celebrations and other special occasions.

Some years later, in November, 1832, a vote was passed giving "certain persons liberty to erect two stoves in the meetinghouse providing they will do it free of expense to the Town¹⁹." Two large box stoves were placed in the front entry and were run to full capacity with doors to the audience wide open. The heat was surely a welcome addition.

The site of this fourth meetinghouse was on a high hill, but surrounded at the time by wetlands on its southern and western sides. Parish records describe the marathon efforts of numerous volunteers during a ten day period to raze the hill, using the earth to fill in the bog, thereby establishing the present town common. It was estimated that six to eight feet of fill was added and \$1,000 worth of labor (by 1827 standards) supplied by the inhabitants! A clump of eight trees (mainly elms) were set out on the east side of the common in an elliptical shape; seventeen trees were placed on the west end of the common; and two were set out immediately in front of the meetinghouse. A

later footnote confessed that "the trees mostly died²⁰."

Mr. Newell had become ill in 1828 and offered to give up half his salary to fund an assistant. Three months later, he was forced to give up his work altogether. During his ministry, he admitted 1140 persons to the church, baptized 1,100, and married 337 couples. Mr. Newell lived two years after his retirement, and his death in 1830 was sincerely mourned. His successor was James Kendall who was settled briefly as a minister in 1828, followed, also briefly, by Mr. Chickering. In May, 1829, Rev. John Langdon Sibley was ordained, and given a settlement of \$500 yearly salary. A major contribution of Mr. Sibley was the establishment of the first Sunday school in 1830. Jacob Caldwell, preceptor of the Stow Academy, was appointed superintendent and about 125 children attended the school during its first year.

Unfortunately for Mr. Sibley, he took over his new assignment at a time when the notion of one established religion was being seriously challenged throughout the Commonwealth, including Stow. The success of the Revolutionary War effort and consequent freedom from unfair taxation led many to question the validity of continued taxation for the support of a minister whose beliefs were not always shared. In Massachusetts, (a predominantly Congregational state at that time), there had been a slow but steady movement away from the strict tenets of Calvinist orthodoxy and toward a more liberal and reasoned approach to religion. This Unitarian movement, boasting such leaders as William Ellery Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Theodore Parker, took a firm hold in Boston and, in fact, was scorned by orthodox ministers as the "Boston religion" in contrast to their own "Christian religion". The movement spread steadily westward, eventually encompassing over 100 churches in the state. The first Massachusetts state constitution (1779) provided a loophole for these Unitarian dissidents, having eliminated the word "Congregational" when requiring public worship. Thus, as the Unitarian movement gained influence in the towns, the Unitarians eventually constituted a majority of voters, and voted out the Congregational ministers, even if it was against the wishes of the majority of the regular churchgoers. Further, in 1820, in a test case involving the town of Dedham, the Massachusetts Supreme Court handed down a decision stating that the entire town (not just the congregation) still had the right to vote for the minister and that, therefore, the town also still had the right to control the church property. Thus it was that most of the First Parishes in Massachusetts became Unitarian.

Stow's First Parish became Unitarian in 1833. Church records during this time are sadly incomplete. However, it is known that a Universalist Society, with views closely related to Unitarianism, was formed in town in 1830. Mr. Sibley apparently sympathized with some of their beliefs and drew some criticism on himself from the more orthodox church members. Sensing the changing times, he offered to resign in 1831. The parish, though divided on the issue, rejected his resignation. However, he resubmitted it two years later and it was then accepted.

Rev. Sibley was the last minister to be settled and supported by the town. The separation of church and state was overwhelmingly approved by popular vote and became law in Massachusetts in 1831.

The First Parish welcomed all who had not withdrawn from the old church. The meetinghouse now belonged to the parish, not to the town, although the land on which it stood remained town property until 1906 when it was deeded to the First Parish Society for the sum of one dollar. The town did continue to use the meetinghouses for town meetings until the present Town Hall was completed in 1848.

The first Parish Committee was elected in December of 1833 and replaced the Selectmen as overseers of parish activities. Early Parish Committee notes reflect the concerns of the day, with frequent reference to parish expenses, contracts with new ministers, sale of church land, pulpit exchanges, and attempts to attract new members. The pulpit was vacant often between 1833 and 1840, a clear indication of the confusion and lack of continuity in preaching during those years. According to parish records of 1833, there was no public worship on about half of the Sabbaths and not at all during the winter months. In fact, the meetinghouse was rented out to the Universalist Society about a quarter of the time. At the parish's request, Mr. Sibley, who had been dismissed from the pastorate of the "Congregational Church and Society in Stow", returned for a year in 1835 as pastor of the "First Parish (Unitarian) of Stow" before leaving the ministry entirely to become the librarian at Harvard College.

Other ministers followed, including Jonathan Farr and Matthew Harding, but only for short periods of time. There were clearly some financial difficulties, since the support of the church now depended solely on the generosity of its members. In 1834, it was voted to close the meetinghouse for the month of July, apparently to save money, although the decision was later rescinded. A committee was formed within each school district in 1838 to invite new people to join and support the church. The

next year, a vote was taken to sell the land behind the horse sheds belonging to the parish, In 1840, the members voted to raise the money to support public worship by soliciting subscriptions, with the hope that there would be sufficient money left over to pay the balance owed for the painting of the meetinghouse.

Gradually, however, the new church stabilized. The parish revoked the privilege granted earlier to the Universalists and resumed full occupancy of the meetinghouse. Rev. William Kinsley became minister in 1840 and remained for six years, during which time the church was reorganized. A new covenant or expression of faith was adopted under his leadership, which read: "We believe in the Divine authenticity of the Bible and agree to live in all respects as God shall therein reveal himself to us." Thus began the evolution of the First Parish (Unitarian) into the church that it is today.

In the meantime, several attempts were made to organize an orthodox church in Stow, culminating in 1839 with the establishment of an evangelical church. This group hired a minister and built a chapel in 1840, but eventually disbanded to help form a church in Assabet Village (Maynard) in the 1850s, In 1846, First Parish members voted that a letter be addressed to the "other parish" with regard to a union of the two parishes, but there is no record of any further action on that particular matter by either church. However, their relationship was a cooperative one, as evidenced in 18~47 when catastrophe struck the First Parish.

On November 9, 1847, the meetinghouse was entirely destroyed by fire, sometime between 9 and 11 a.m. There is no record of the probable cause of the fire. Only the books, clock, communion service, and pulpit were saved. The Evangelical Society expressed their sympathy and regret at the loss and unanimously voted to offer the Unitarians the use of their chapel for worship. The offer was accepted and the first Parish worshipped in the chapel until the last Sunday of January, 1848, when they engaged Mr. Francis Conant's "hall" until the new meetinghouse was ready.

Planning started immediately for the new church building. Ten days were allotted to the pew holders in the old meetinghouse to take away any of their property which might have survived the fire. A building committee was appointed with instructions on the desired proportions for the building and the recasting of the bell which cracked when it fell from the steeple during the fire. A "subscription paper" was circulated throughout the town to underwrite the cost of the new structure at \$50 a share. Pews

were again sold, with the understanding that the shareholders would make up any difference between the proceeds from the sale of pews and the actual cost of the new building. The entire expense for the new church came to \$4,074. The parish gratefully acknowledged a \$150 gift from the members of the First Parish of Bolton; \$20 for a pulpit from Dr. Geo. Parkman of Boston; an "elegant" Bible (Oxford edition) for the pulpit from Nathaniel Faxon, Esq. of Boston; and a "very chaste and beautiful" communion service from William K. Knight, Esq. also of Boston. As the minister, Rev. Reuben Bates, related at the time: "The Parish commenced the work of rebuilding in a good spirit, have gone on with great harmony and been prospered." The new church was dedicated on August 30, 1848; "the day was pleasant and the concourse of people was very large, so that every part of the house was entirely filled²¹." Rev. Bates wrote a description of the new church for the Christian Register which appeared on September 9, 1848 and which hints at his pride in the structure and in the people who helped build it.

"The new church stands on the same site of the old one ... and is a chaste and well proportioned edifice. The dimensions are 60 feet long, '40 feet wide, and the posts 22 feet high. The spire measures almost 100 feet from the ground. In the front of the building is a recess with two columns in the center, on each side of which there is an entrance. The church contains 58 pews and a gallery for the singers, which is over the entry and extends the width of the house. The pews, doors, window casings, and caps are all grained; the walls are in plain white of a hard finish. The pulpit is mahogany and was built by Mr. Miller of Cambridge. It is a beautiful model and did not cost over \$130. The house is carpeted and cushioned alike throughout at an expense of \$200. This was done by means of funds raised at a Tea Party, held by the ladies last winter, and by their own exertions the cushions they made entirely themselves. Under the church is a convenient and pleasant vestry."

Construction had been simultaneously underway on the new "Town Hall" which was also dedicated in 1848, and for the first time, the church building was used exclusively for religious worship.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, life settled down for the First Parish Church. The years of upheaval were over and the church spent the next century deepening its roots and refining its Unitarian beliefs. The continuing story reveals itself not in landmark events, but between the subtle lines of parish committee notes. There were the ever present concerns about finances, evident in discussions of overdue bills,

temporary closing of the meetinghouse, the increased cost of materials needed to paint the church, and in November, 1880, the recommendation that the minister (Rev. Thomas Weston) "be released from all obligation to us" since the funds for the year were already exhausted. But it was also during this period that the church had one of its most generous benefactors in Elijah Hale. Colonel Hale gave large sums of money to support the "preaching of' liberal Christianity in Stow." In particular, he donated \$1,000 to support the music of the church, which has become a cherished heritage; \$500 to the Sunday School library; and in 1871, he donated \$2,000 which enabled the First Parish Society to purchase the house and '4 1/2 acres of surrounding property of Martha Whitcomb (currently 28 Crescent Street) to use as the minister's home. This parsonage was in use until 1966 when it was sold and the present parsonage at 339 Great Road was bought from the Dudley Todd family. The Todd house was originally built as a boarding house for the Stow Academy, a private high school.

Parish records during the late 1800s also reveal the church and its members moving into a more complex society. In 1862, there is the first reference to insuring the meetinghouse. In 1865, the parish voted to send Rev. Clark, along with members Edwin Whitney and A.W. Nelson, as delegates to a national Unitarian convention in New York. The year 1866 saw the birth of a First Parish tradition when a committee was chosen to make arrangements for a Fair to be held for the purpose of raising funds for the society. In 1869, a significant expense was the replacement of the old stoves in the church with new centralized "furnaces". The "unsightly stoves which disfigured the vestibule²²" and the dirty funnels that ran in two black lines from beside each door to each side of the pulpit were removed. Apparently, the church took advantage of this opportunity to redecorate by adding fresco work on interior walls and ceilings. The walls of the vestibule were finished in imitation of stonework "adding very much to the appearance of the entrance²³." New carpets were procured for the aisles and straw matting was put down in the vestibule. The downstairs vestry was also enlarged at this time. A small room, separated from the main vestry by a glazed partition, was set aside for the use of the Sunday School library.

In 1892, the current Hutchings organ was purchased, replacing the old organ in the balcony. While it was being built, the new organ shared floor space at the Hutchings factory with organs for St. Bartholomew's and "Little Church Around the Corner," both in New York City, and St. John's Cathedral in Providence. An addition was built onto the church in 1894 behind the pulpit to house the new organ works. Mr. Frank Baker started as the

organ pumper in 1894, and continued in that position for 60 years until the organ was electrified in the 1950s.

In 1902, the First Parish celebrated the 200th anniversary of the installation of its first minister with a large gathering and a special address by Rev. J. Sidney Moulton, later published, in which he recounted the history of the church and its ministers. Ever mindful of the independent spirit of the early founders, Mr. Moulton reiterated the pride of the membership "that never yet have we been obliged to ask aid of our parent association (the American Unitarian Association). I trust we may not have to do so²⁴." Rev. Moulton served the town as minister for 40 years (1885-1925) and had a reputation as a scholarly yet kind and civic-minded citizen of the town. He served as the Superintendent of Schools in Stow for 20 years; was a chaplain of the local Grange; and founded the Civic Club which, among other things, invited guests of distinction to speak on cultural and civic affairs. During his ministry, in the year 1895, another covenant (the fifth) was drawn up, which read as follows: "Believing with Jesus that true religion is summed up in love to God and love to man, in the freedom and love of the truth, we join for the worship of God and the service of man."

Also during his ministry, efforts were begun to raise a \$10,000 permanent endowment fund, the yearly income from which would be applied to the support of the church. Mrs. Susan Lawrence, a teacher and, later, first librarian of the Randall Library, was chosen solicitor and collector, and raised \$2,500 in the first year. A generous portion of that endowment fund came from the sale, in 1909, of the house and the surrounding 7 acres of Mrs. John S. (Nancy) Fletcher at 398 Great Road, bequeathed as a memorial of her affection for the church.

Many repairs and improvements to the church building were accomplished during Mr. Moulton's ministry. Water pipes were put in (1907); electricity was installed in the church (1911); and the church was "beautifully redecorated" through the generosity of the family of Robert Derby (1917). When Mr. Moulton resigned in 1925 due to poor health, he was made a Pastor Emeritus and a plaque dedicated to his memory still hangs in the church vestibule.

Mr. Paul Carries is another former minister who deserves special mention. He undertook his first assignment as a minister in Stow in 1946 and preached here for two years before going on to other duties which culminated in his election to the presidency of the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1977.

Stow's First Parish has been well served by her ministers through the centuries and a complete list of them is included at the end of this history. The public accomplishments of a few have been singled out, but no one can fully appreciate the quiet contributions of the majority, who have sustained our members in times of stress and sorrow, and who have helped maintain our optimism in humanity.

In 1958, church records report on the first of many discussions on the possible merger of the First Parish Unitarian of Stow with the Universalist Church of Acton, as Unitarianism and Universalism had always shared many similar concepts and values. The First Parish was being served by an interim minister at the time and a "Pulpit Committee" was trying to decide on a permanent pastor. The church was experiencing financial difficulties and was also somewhat divided on "the degree of Unitarianism acceptable to the congregation." A special parish meeting in February, 1958 discussed the possibility of sharing a minister with the "Acton Community Church (Universalist)." However, it was decided not to pursue the Acton alternative at that time and Mr. Ronald Mazur was hired as minister.

The liberal tenets of Universalism, which included a belief in the innate goodness of man and universal salvation, suggested a natural partnership with Unitarianism. Indeed, negotiations were already underway concerning a national merger of the Unitarian and Universalist church groups. Since the Unitarian congregation in Acton had been dissolved long ago in 1860, the Acton Universalist Church agreed to explore the possibility of a merger with its nearest Unitarian neighbor, the First Parish of Stow. .

The Acton Universalist Church had its beginnings in 1814 when the first Universalist sermons were preached in Acton by Rev. Hosea Ballou, a sort of patron saint of Universalism and its ardent advocate. In January, 1816, the first Universalist Society of Acton was officially formed, consisting of twelve members. By 1821, when it was legally incorporated, the Society had fifty paying members and eventually reached eighty members. The Rev. Dr. Benjamin Whittemore preached half of the Sabbaths in 1821-1822, either in halls, schools, or in private residences.

In December, 1833, a church of 39 members was formed as a result of the labors of Rev. Joseph Wright, who became the pastor of the new church. According to records, the church was well attended for the next six years and services were moved to the First Parish Church in Acton Center which was rented from the Unitarians. The latter were in disarray after the withdrawal

of many of their members in 1832 to form a new Evangelical Society more in tune with traditional Congregationalism. In 1842, attempts were apparently made to unite all the elements not affiliating with the Evangelical Church (which included, of course, Unitarians and Universalists) but these were ultimately unsuccessful. According to one history, "about 1859 our Universalist interest there, at Acton Centre, peacefully expired²⁵." Indeed, from 1850 to 1858, there was no longer regular Universalist preaching in Acton.

However, in 1858, thanks to the efforts of Rev. J.M. Usher, services were resumed, but this time in two locations. Both a West Acton Universalist Society and a South Acton Society were formed in the same year, as separate entities, but served by the same minister. Rev. Usher and succeeding ministers divided their Sunday preaching between the two churches, while the remaining services were run by laymen.

The West Acton Universalist Society first met in Robinson's Hall in West Acton (later known as Grand Army Hall), which was built for them by Charles Robinson in 1858. Ten years later, the West Society built their own meetinghouse in West Acton on Central Street which served them until 1925 when the Society dissolved and the church building became the property of the West Acton Women's Club, and later the home of Theatre III.

The South Acton Universalist Society met in various places until 1861 when the group moved into Exchange Hall where they worshipped for 17 years. Eventually, the South Society commissioned George Wood of Concord to build a meetinghouse in South Acton, at what is now 140 Main Street. It was dedicated in February, 1878 with the name of South Acton Christian Church. The new building had an interesting feature in its basement where there was access through the kitchen to a valuable open spring which proved very useful until the introduction of town water. In 1948, the original altar and rail that were used in Exchange Hall when the services were held there, were rediscovered in the Exchange Hall attic. They were refurbished and installed in the South Acton church.

In 1960, the official merger of the Unitarian and Universalist Churches of America was announced. This provided a strong impetus to both the Acton and Stow congregations to consider their own merger of services and facilities. Ultimately, in 1969, it was officially proposed to "effect the consolidation of the First Parish Church, Unitarian, of Stow and the First Universalist Church of South Acton²⁶." The motion passed, though barely receiving the required two-thirds vote (33 affirmative, 11 negative, and 3 abstaining). The South Acton

church building was later sold and the communion service of the former Universalist Society was donated to the Acton Historical Society.

Although the religious beliefs of First Parish members today may differ from those of our predecessors, the church structure itself stands relatively unchanged since its dedication in 1848. The white steeple, tall windows, and elegant columns continue to evoke a quiet peace.

However, a few modifications have been made. As was mentioned previously, a small addition was made to the rear of the building to accommodate the new organ works in 1892.

A clock was placed in the steeple in 1869, through the generosity of Mrs. Moses Whitney and Mrs. Elijah Hale²⁷. It is reported to have had a face on the front of the tower and one on the front of the gallery inside the church as well. In 1927, a new clock from the E. Howard Clock Co. was purchased and installed in the tower to replace the original²⁸.

To the rear of the church, the horse sheds originally formed a semi-circle around the building. Although the town deeded the land on which the church stood to the First Parish in 1906, the horse sheds remained under individual ownership. Subsequent Parish Committees encouraged the owners to give them up. In 1912, it was voted to collect a \$5 annual fee from those who wished to retain their horse sheds, to cover the cost of upkeep and repairs. By 1935, parish opinion favored tearing them down, but in the end, only the left hand portion was actually razed. The remainder was partially enclosed for storage purposes, and was restored in 1983.

The interior of the church reflects the classic simplicity of an early New England meetinghouse. Two main entry doors lead to a small vestibule containing several items of significant historical value to the church.

To the right of the door hangs a watercolor painting of the First Parish done by church member Martha Ferguson in the early 1950's as part of a "talent auction" for fund raising purposes. Rather than offer it for sale to the public, a group of parishioners jointly purchased the painting and added it to the legacy of the church.

To the far right, on the wall that separates the vestibule from the sanctuary, are two wooden tablets, one containing a synopsis of the Ten Commandments and the other bearing the Lord's Prayer and small selections from the Scriptures. These

were rescued from the fire in 1847 and subsequently bought by Rev. Reuben Bates and removed to his own home. His widow later returned them to the church, in 1869, and they hung for many years the downstairs vestry where they had been in the previous church²⁹.

In the middle of the north vestibule wall stands a table and two chairs, over which hangs a picture of the Stow Lower Village painted by Louise Hosmer Cheney circa 1839³⁰. The oil painting shows the house built by her father, Rufus Hosmer, and known as "Hosmer's Folly". It also depicts the "Stephen Gates house" (formerly the original minister's cottage, now at 9 Red Acre Road); the "old Soper place" (since burned down); and "Capt. Thorndike's place" (now 5 Red Acre Road). The painting became part of the estate of the artist's daughter, Caroline Cheney, of Concord, Mass, and was presented to the First Parish by the Concord Historical Society upon her death.

On the far left, against the north wall, stands a large altar-like table upon which rests the Bible presented by Nathaniel Faxon of Boston to the First Parish at the dedication of the present church on August 30, 1848. Above this table hangs a portrait of Franz Ludwig, Bishop of Bamberg and Wurtzberg (later part of Bavaria) from 1779 to 1795. The painting was found, dusty and cracked, in the attic of the Whitney Homestead in 1932, when that house was bequeathed to the American Unitarian Association. The association gave the portrait to the First Parish, but the course of its journey to Stow was never clear. Its presence remains a mystery speculated upon at length in the book entitled The Bishop Comes to Stow published in 1933.

On the west wall of the vestibule, there hangs an octagonal mirror of hand-carved mahogany, with two sconces on either side.

Two doors lead from the vestibule into the sanctuary or main area of the church. By the right hand door hangs a plaque commemorating those who contributed to the church's endowment fund. By the left hand door, a bronze plaque, procured in 1928, honors the memory of Rev. J. Sidney Moulton, who was pastor for forty years.

Once in the sanctuary itself, the aura of early New England is immediately apparent in the simplicity of white plaster walls and the warmth of mellowed wood pews. Soft blue drapes frame the three tall windows on each side and blue carpeting covers the floor. A balcony runs across the back of the church along the south wall. In front of the balcony hangs the Willard clock donated to the First Parish by Mr. William Parker of Boston in

1832³¹. Mr. Parker owned a paper mill along the Assabet River in an area of Sudbury that is now part of the town of Maynard. He had many employees who lived and worshipped in Stow. The clock was originally placed on the east wall of the vestry, but was later moved upstairs.

The pews still show the original graining which was popular at the time the church was built. The pews were sold at auction to raise money for the construction of the new building. Underneath their gold damask cushions, several of the wooden pews still bear the designation "SOLD", along with the price paid for that pew at the time. The purchase price decreased as one moved further away from the pulpit, with the front pews selling for \$100 in 1848.

Two aisles lead to the front of the church and the pulpit. The pulpit itself is of mahogany and stands on a raised platform of mahogany and of wood painted to look like marble. The top of the pulpit is covered in blue velvet while the minister's chair and two side chairs are upholstered in a blue tapestry fabric. Immediately in front of the pulpit stands a marble-topped table on which fresh flowers and candles are placed each Sunday.

The sanctuary contains two grand pianos which are used both for worship services and for community concerts that are held frequently throughout the year. One piano was donated by the Fletcher sisters in memory of their mother, Mary Moore Fletcher, in 1953. The second piano was acquired in 1981 with the proceeds of concerts organized by various church members with a substantial gift in memory of Nancy Schell by her family.

On the west wall, above pew #11, a plaque honors the memory of that pew's traditional occupants, Robert Watts Derby (1832-1916) and his wife Emeline Eveleth Derby (1834-1913). The tablet was donated by their children in recognition of the Derby's generous support and love for the church.

On the east wall hangs a quilt that was designed and pieced together by several church members in honor of the 300th birthday of the town and the 150th anniversary of the church becoming Unitarian. The squares depict various activities traditionally associated with the First Parish, including apple pies, Strawberry Suppers, the annual Church Fair, Sunday school, and Sunday afternoon concerts. Dedicated at a special service in 1983, the quilt also records the names and dates of service of all the church ministers.

Directly behind the pulpit is the organ, with memorial plaques to former organists Bertha Lawrence (1886-1907) and

George Curtis (1906–1945) on either side. Nearby is the cane-seated chair occupied by Frank Baker during his sixty years pumping the organ for Sunday services. High on the front wall of the sanctuary, on either side of the organ pipes, are two wooden tablets which were donated in honor of Charles A. Hearsey and are used to post the hymns for services. Two doors, one on either side of the pulpit, were added in 1986, and lead to other functional areas of the building.

The church owns two silver collection plates that were given in memory of Edward A. Curtis and two pewter flower vases in memory of Martha Lambert (who took care of flowers for Sunday services for many years) and Pansy Rice.

Downstairs in the vestry is a large octagonal mahogany clock given to the parish by Moses Whitney and Elijah Hale in 1869, with a gold-lettered inscription on the glass which reads: "A life in love, for time and eternity." The vestry consists of a large meeting room flanked by a kitchen, nursery and other small rooms for storage purposes.

In 1984, a Building Committee presented plans for a two story addition to the rear of the church structure, in order to provide desperately needed space for religious education classes, some of which were routinely being held in members' homes. Funding for the construction was approved in 1985 and the completed addition now houses three multi-purpose rooms, a minister's study, two bathrooms, a wide stairway and handicapped access to both levels. A unique table stands in the stairwell on the first floor of the addition. On the bottom of the drawer is a handwritten inscription by Rev. J. Sidney Moulton that reads as follows: "This table was made February 1885, by Andrew J. Smith out of the old pulpit saved from the church that was burned in 1847. Mr. Samuel A. Lawrence turned the legs."

On April 27, 1986, a special ceremony was held dedicating the new space to the present and future congregations of Stow and Acton as a place where the search for truth shall be fostered and where "the lessons of the heart shall be added to the studies of the mind."

Our church family is presently comprised of approximately 130 members. Services are held every Sunday from September through June at 10:00 a.m. in the sanctuary, while the children attend separate Sunday school classes. The church community is small, but nevertheless generates a variety of activities during the year – some for profit, some for fellowship, and others for the welfare of the community at large. Among the highlights are the annual church fair in October; the apple pie stand each fall;

the annual spring auction of used goods; the services auction; the Stow Playroom; the Community Supper, in cooperation with other area churches; the Christmas party and Round Robin dinners; and our joint services with the other Stow churches at Thanksgiving and Memorial Day. The Chronicle, our newsletter, keeps the parish informed about these and all the other activities of the various church committees.

The by-laws of the church contain a statement which provides a fitting close to our history of the First Parish. It reflects the liberal spirit of our church, which has endured hardship and change, yet has emerged stronger each time in its commitment to help mankind and its institutions seek the truth in love:

Our purpose is to join together in a cooperative quest for religious and ethical values; to apply these values to the fulfillment of our objectives, which are: the development of character, the enrichment of the spirit, the promotion of universal brotherhood and service to all mankind.

MINISTERS OF THE FIRST PARISH CHURCH

Rev. John Eveleth, 1700-1718
Rev. John Gardner, 1718-1775
Rev. Jonathan Newell, 1775-1828
Rev. James Kendall, 1828
Rev. Mr. Chickering, 1828-1829
Rev. John L. Sibley, 1829-1833, 1835
Rev. Jonathan Farr, 1836
Rev. Matthew Harding, 1837
Rev. William H. Kinsley, 1840-1846
Rev. Reuben Bates, 1846-1859
Rev. George F. Clark, 1862-1867
Rev. F. W. Webber, 1869-1870
Rev. John F. Locke, 1870-1872
Rev. David P. Muzzy, 1872-1876
Rev. Mr. Dyer, 1877
Rev. Thomas Weston, 1878-1885
Rev. Sidney Moulton, 1885-1925
Rev. Alvah John Shaller, 1925-1929
Rev. Wilburn Beach Miller, 1930-1934
Rev. Robert Allen Singsen, 1935-1936
Rev. Arthur Heeb, 1937-1939
Rev. Ernest Brown, 1939-1941
Rev. Howard F. Smith, 1941-1946
Rev. Paul N. Carnes, 1946-1948
Rev. Charles O. Richardson, Jr., 1948-1953
Rev. Paul E. Killinger, 1953-1958
Rev. Ronald M. Mazur, 1958-1964
Rev. Edward T. Atkinson, 1964-1969
Rev. Hvezdon Kafka, 1969-1986, Minister Emeritus, 1986-
Rev. Ralph B. Galen, 1987-1999
Rev. Thomas Rosiello,

FOOTNOTES

1. Rev. George Clark, "History of Stow", in History of Middlesex County, Vol. I, ed. D. Hamilton Hurd (Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis, 1890), p. 638.
2. Ibid., p. 639.
3. Ibid., p. 641.
4. Records of Stow, Massachusetts, 1660-1736, p. 214.
5. Clark, p. 641.
6. Andrew Drummond, Story of American Protestantism, (Boston: Beacon, 1925), p. 82.
7. Records of Stow, 1660-1736, p. 23.
8. Ibid.
9. Clark, p. 642.
10. Records of Stow, 1660-1736, p. 61.
11. Clark, p. 643.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. p.647
15. Ibid., p. 6'45.
16. Town of Stow Records, 1795-1820, p. 11.
17. Schedule and Estimate of a Meetinghouse to be built in the town of Stow."
18. First Parish of Stow, 1701-1937, p. 29.
19. Town of Stow Records, 1807-1837, November, 1832. (No page number given.)
20. First Parish of Stow, 1701-1937, p. 40.

21. Ibid., p. 67.
22. Ibid., p. 184.
23. Ibid
24. Two Hundredth Anniversary of the First Parish Church of Stow, Massachusetts, (1902), p. 11.
25. Rev. James Fletcher, "History of Acton", in Hurd's History of Middlesex County, Vol. I, p. 293.
26. Church Records, First Parish - Stow, 1950-1970, p. 134-135.
27. First Parish of Stow, 1701-1937, p. 179.
28. Records of the First Parish of Stow, 1879-19149, p. 163.
29. First Parish of Stow, 1701-1937, p. 1814-185.
30. Ibid., p. 238.
30. Ibid., p. 24.

SOURCES CONSULTED

CHURCH RECORDS

Church Records, 1701-1839.

Contains members' names, baptisms, funerals, and marriages.

The First Parish of Stow, 1701-1937.

Contains ministers' records of births, deaths, marriages, and significant events.

Records of the First Parish in Stow, 1833-1879.

Contains minutes of parish meetings.

Records of the First Parish of Stow, 1879-1911.

Contains clerks' records of parish meetings.

Church Records, First Parish-Stow, 1950-1970.

"Account of the Receipts and Expenditures in Building the Meetinghouse". 1827.

"Schedule and Estimate of a Meetinghouse to be built in the town of Stow." 1827. Manuscript describing the building of the fourth meetinghouse.

Two Hundredth Anniversary of the First Parish Church of Stow, Massachusetts. 1902.

Printed booklet containing text of sermons preached by the pastor, Rev. J. Sidney Moulton, and Samuel Collins Beane at the 200th anniversary celebration on July 27, 1902.

Growing Together - First Parish Church, Unitarian Universalist of Stow and Acton, April 27, 1986.

Printed program of the dedication ceremony for the 1986 addition.

TOWN RECORDS

Records of Stow, Massachusetts, 1660-1736.

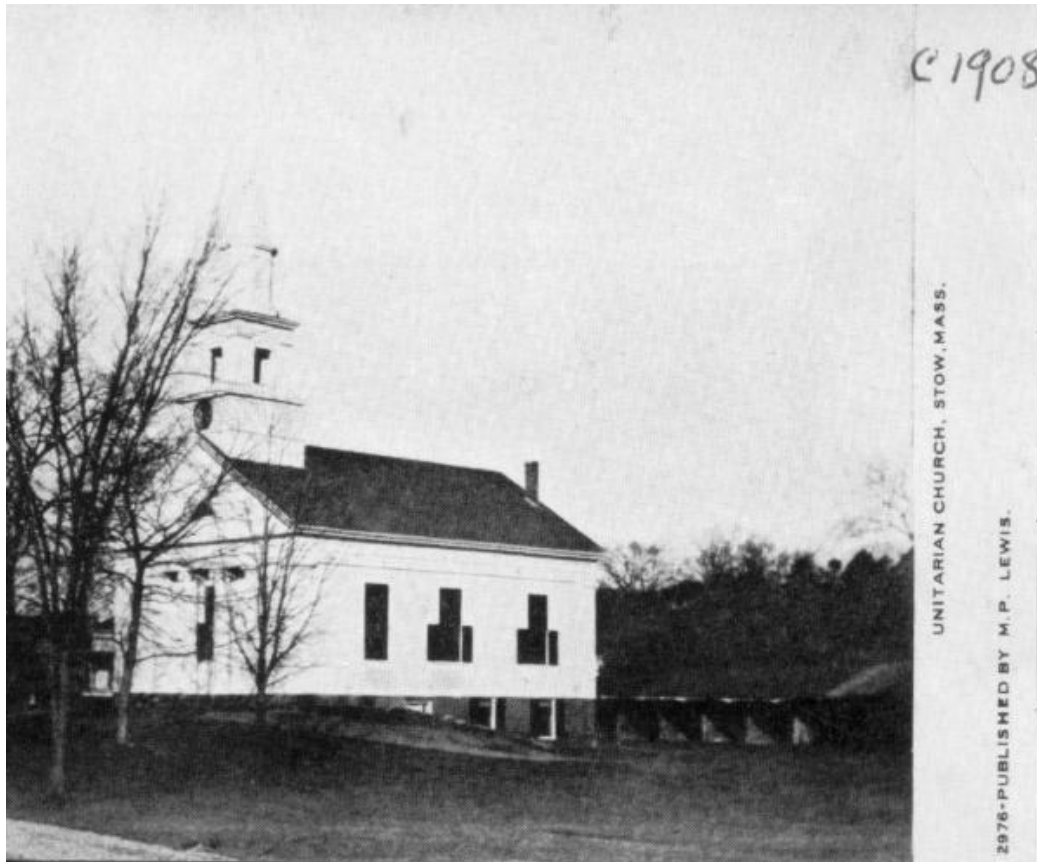
Town of Stow Records, 1795-1820.

Town of Stow Records, 1807-1837.

NOTE: The titles used for the church and town records listed above were copied directly from the cover or first page of each volume. These handwritten records are located in the town vault. Much information about the early church was obtained from the minutes of town meetings, since the church was tax-supported. Both church and town records overlap chronologically, for reasons that are not entirely clear, although it may be due in part to the fact that some church records were kept by the ministers and others by the parish clerks.



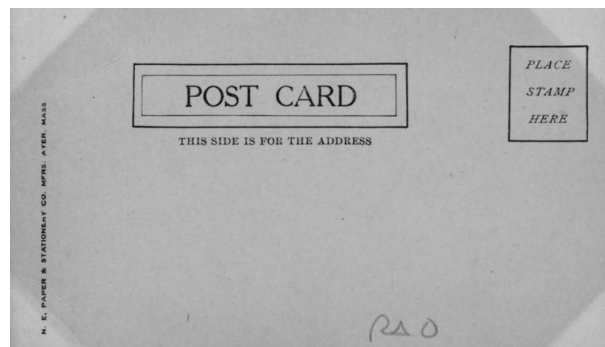
This photograph shows the church as it appeared in the late 1800's. Note the row of horse sheds which originally formed a semi-circle behind and along both sides of the church. A section of the original shed remains today, and was carefully restored by Wayne Fletcher in the mid 1980s.



The church appeared on a post card about 1908.
Note the carriage sheds behind the church



Scan of actual post card



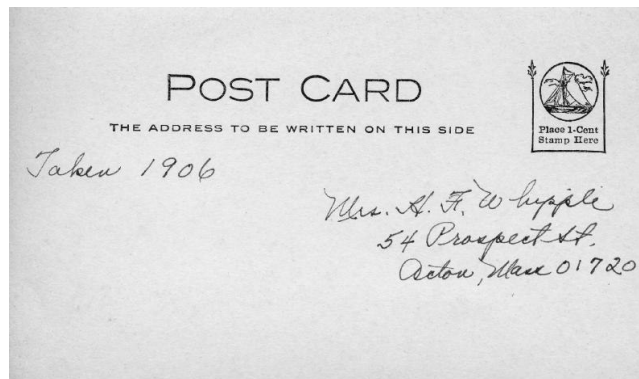
Scan of back of actual post card



The Acton Universalist Church was shown on a 1906 post card. The congregations of this church and the Stow church effected a merger in 1969.



Scan of actual post card



Scan of back of actual post card

Know all Men by these Presents,

THAT we, FRANCIS CONANT, ELIJAH HALE, CHARLES TOWER, JACOB SOPER, and EDWIN WHITNEY, all of Stow, in the County of Middlesex, and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, being a Committee of the First Parish in said Stow, duly chosen and authorized for the purpose at a legal meeting of said Parish and the subscribers to Stock in the New Meeting House, of said Parish, in consideration of

Eighty four Dollars

to us paid by *Nathan S. Turner* of said Stow, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, have granted, remised, released and forever quit-claimed and do for the said Parish and Subscribers, by these presents, grant, remise, release and forever quit-claim unto the said *Turner*

his heirs and assigns a certain Pew in said Meeting House, numbered *Forty seven*

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the same with the privileges thereto belonging to him the said *Turner*

his heirs and assigns forever, so that neither we, the said Francis, Elijah, Charles, Jacob and Edwin, nor the Parish and subscribers aforesaid shall have claim, or demand any title to the premises aforesaid.

In witness whereof, we, the said Committee, have hereto set our hands and Seals, this twenty eighth day of August, in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Forty-eight.

Francis Conant
Elijah Hale
Charles Tower
Jacob Soper

Edwin Whitney

MIDDLESEX, ss: August 28th 1848. Then the above named Francis, Elijah, Charles, Jacob and Edwin acknowledged the above Instrument to be their free Act and Deed before me.

Stow, August 1848. Entered and Recorded in Book of Pew Deeds, page

Moses Whitney Justice of the Peace.

Parish Clerk.

This is a copy of a document by which the right to occupy a specific church pew was purchased. In this case, Nathan S. Turner subscribed \$84.00 to support the construction of the new church in 1848 and thereby, secured the right to pew number 47.

THE ANNUAL
**STRAWBERRY
FESTIVAL**

OF THE
Stow Unitarian Society

Will be held in the VESTRY of the CHURCH

FRIDAY, JUNE 28

at 7.30 o'clock

Miss Flossie Davy, Reader. Master Roy Davy, Violinist.
Mr. Chamberlain, Vocalist.

Strawberries, Ice Cream, Cake and Coffee will be served

Admission, Twenty-Five Cents

E. F. Worcester Press, Printers, Hudson.

A flyer (believed to be from the early 1900's) announces an evening of entertainment plus desert for a 25 cent charge.

FAIR! AND TURKEY SUPPER

THE FIRST PARISH SOCIETY will hold a FAIR AND SUPPER at
TOWN HALL, Stow, Mass.

FRIDAY EV'G, JAN. 24, '02

Entertainment at 9.15 o'clock. A Musical Surprise Party

Something for everyone--old or young. Apron Table, Fancy Table, Candy Table,
Grocery Table, Art Table, China Table, Ice Cream and various other attractions.

A TURKEY SUPPER WILL BE SERVED AT 8 O'CLOCK.

ADMISSION--ADULTS, 10 CTS. CHILDREN, 5 CTS

SUPPER TICKETS--Adults, 35c. Children, 20c.

COME ONE!

COME ALL!

E. F. WORCESTER PRESS  F. E. Sanderson, Maynard, Agent.

The church's first Annual Fair took place in 1866.

This poster, from 1902, promises an evening of activities to include the fair followed by a 35 cent turkey supper plus entertainment Note that a separate 10 cent fee was charged for admission to the fair.

This document and images were scanned into electronic form in May 2006 by Bob Glorioso. Copies of the original photos and the post cards that were not in the original document are courtesy of Liz and Phil Moseley who have been carefully preserving our history.