

Universalist Heritage

Spring - Summer 2007

An Occasional Newsletter from the Universalist Heritage Foundation

Dear Friends,

We are very happy to share with you this first edition of our Universalist Heritage Foundation Newsletter. We have been working for nearly two years to lay the groundwork for this project that will center and celebrate both the rich legacy of the Universalist faith and its message for the present day. Now the time has come to spread far and wide the news of the strong beginning that has been made, and the ever expanding vision of how this project may develop in the years ahead, strengthening and enlivening our liberal religious faith.

Because of your appreciation for the great gifts of Universalism, we know you will want to be familiar with this project. In the following pages you can read the story of how our journey began, the visions for its future, and the current movements underway to bring that vision into full flower.

*Jeanne Nieuwejaar
for the Board of the UHF*

Imagine

A Home For Our Universalist Heritage

Imagine an elegant, historic building in which pictures, documents and carefully selected artifacts of our Universalist heritage are lovingly displayed, and both oral and videotapes celebrating that heritage are available.

Imagine that people from the area gather there regularly for worship, meetings, musical events, conferences, retreats and educational opportunities.

Imagine that young people from around the country travel there with their Coming of Age classes. Imagine that tourists visiting in that scenic area stumble upon this place and have their minds and hearts opened to the good news of Universalism.

Imagine that the deep, faithful message that "God is Love," that hope and forgiveness are powerful and are possible, is kept alive and fresh, and applied creatively to our contemporary realities.



The Mission of the Universalist Heritage Foundation is to celebrate and preserve the rich legacy of the Universalist faith, to educate future generations in the Universalist tradition, and to continue to put forth the Universalist message as an agent of hope for a fractured world.

Vision

Here is the story of how this imagined vision is becoming real

The Winchester Profession of Faith, adopted in 1803 by Universalists gathered in Winchester, New Hampshire, was a defining theological statement. It focused and identified the fledgling Universalist denomination, and, although the theology remained fluid even sometimes controversial throughout the course of history, that particular statement grounded and shaped the future conversations.

The 200th anniversary of this historic event was celebrated in 2003 at this same site in a handsome building that was rebuilt in 1909 after a fire destroyed the original. This later building was erected as a memorial to the adoption of the Winchester Profession, with contributions received from Universalists across the country. Two brass plaques in tribute to the 1803 event flank the front door.

As happened in many small New England towns, in time the Universalists of Winchester, NH joined with other local congregations to form a federated church and have been joined with the United Church of Christ and the United Methodists for many years. This federated congregation, The United Church of Winchester, maintained two old buildings for many years, but could not sustain that endeavor and determined that they needed to sell the Universalist church. The building is in fine condition, is structurally sound and has beautiful stained glass windows and a new heating system

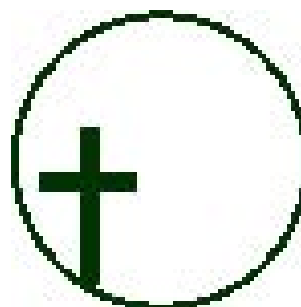
By deed the New Hampshire–Vermont District of the UUA had the right of first refusal to purchase the building. An ad hoc group of the District, called the Winchester Universalist Explorers, formed to explore the feasibility of preserving this Universalist landmark and the possible uses that the building might serve. A vision of a Universalist Heritage Center to preserve and celebrate our rich history began to emerge, but it was hard to imagine that we could ever afford to purchase the building.

A Story of Generosity

Simultaneously the Ten Talents Team of The United Church of Winchester was meeting to discern the terms of the sale. They were delighted that the building might continue to be used in a way that would honor and preserve its historic nature and the Universalist message of hope and love. Grounded in a clear sense of mission, that group decided to make the building available to

the New Hampshire – Vermont District to be used as a Universalist Heritage Center at only a fraction (2%) of its appraised value. Because of this act of generosity, and through the added generosity of three donors, the full amount of the purchase price was quickly raised.

Soon thereafter, the Winchester Universalist Explorers became The Universalist Heritage Foundation and incorporated as a non-profit corporation. This fall purchase of the building was completed and a moving Sunday morning service in that facility celebrated the transfer of ownership from the United Church of Winchester to The Universalist Heritage Foundation. (see story on next page)



An Expanding Vision

The vision has expanded to include:

- 1) A Universalist Heritage Visitors' Center housing a small collection of historical books, pictures and artifacts; displays, some of them interactive, to lift up significant pieces of the history of Universalism; a collection of oral histories, an introductory video and a Gift Shop with printed materials, postcards, etc.
- 2) Meetings, events and conferences would be hosted, including summer religious services, UU RE programs and meetings of UU organizations.
- 3) A guide to a Universalist Heritage Trail, with maps and commentaries would be available at the Heritage Center, telling the story of Universalism through people and events from the Winchester area.

Our understanding of the possibilities for achieving our vision continues to evolve. We are eager to hear from many voices as the vision continues to grow, that this work may reflect the hopes and dreams of all those who continue to cherish the Universalist faith.

Continuing the Story of Generosity

We have noted the extraordinary generosity of the United Church of Winchester in their transfer of the building to our organization and of the donors who so gladly made it possible for the building to be purchased. Members of the Board have pledged more than \$12,000 to the project and dozens of other contributions have been received, including donations from the Pennsylvania Universalist Convention and the New York State Universalist Convention.

Significant fund raising is still needed, however, to take the next steps in building renovation and the start-up costs for the exciting possibilities envisioned. We have engaged an architectural firm to make measured drawings of the building, and have also received a conceptual rendering of a plan to accomplish the important step of making the building accessible. Such renovation, of course, is costly. The “Story of Generosity” needs to be continued with vigor, commitment and joy.

Introducing the Governing Board

President: John Sanders – Vice-President of the NH-VT District Board

Vice-President – Rev. Elizabeth Strong – Program Consultant for the Mass Bay District

Treasurer – Jon Lasselle – Member Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua, NH

Secretary – Rev. Jeanne Nieuwejaar – Interim Minister, Unitarian Universalist Church of Springfield, VT

Rev. Janet Bowering – Unitarian Universalist Minister, retired

Dr. Ernest Cassara – Professor of History, retired

Rev. Olav Nieuwejaar – Unitarian Universalist Minister, retired

Rev. Lee Page – Community Minister

Douglas Shaheen – Member, Unitarian Universalist Church of Dorchester, MA

Working closely with the board are Pam Bigelow, a member of the United Church of Winchester who serves as our liaison to the Winchester, NH community, and Rev. Richard Trudeau, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Weymouth, MA who chairs our Program Committee.

You can contact the Board at: P.O. Box 6441, Nashua, New Hampshire 03063-6441; or at: UniversalistHeritageFoundation@gmail.com. A fledgling website exists at www.universalistheritage.org. We anticipate that it will be expanded soon.

Advisory Board

In addition to the governing board, we are beginning to gather an Advisory Board of folks who share our excitement about the Universalist Heritage Foundation. Advisory Board members will follow our progress and share their advice and wisdom with us to shape the development of this project. Our first invitation to this Board was to the Rev. William Sinkford, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association who gladly accepted the invitation. We are in the process of inviting others to join this Advisory Board.



The original Universalist Church of Winchester

Celebration

Celebrating the Transfer of the Winchester Church from the United Church of Winchester to the Universalist Heritage Foundation

Many tears were shed at the service on Sunday, September 24 in the United Church of Winchester, as ownership of that building was passed to the Universalist Heritage Foundation. But it was said that, although there was some sadness, the tears were more tears of joy that the building would continue to house and to celebrate the Universalist faith. It had been feared that the building might have to be sold to a group whose values were not in keeping with our sacred tradition.

We would share with you a couple of pieces from that service. The closing hymn was one written by Henry Nehemiah Dodge for the Dedication of the building in 1909. This is the first verse:

This temple fair, this love-built shrine
Make now Thy dwelling, Love Divine;

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From here proclaim, through endless age,
The glory of man's heritage.

And these are the words of the liturgy "Entrusting the Stewardship of the Building into New Hands"

One: We have loved this building. We cherish its history – that which happened centuries ago and that which we celebrated here in this building last year, last month, last week.

Members of the United Church of Winchester: So many of our important life events happened here. We are sad to say goodbye to this beloved space. Yet we are also filled with hope and excitement for the new thing that God is doing in the work of the Universalist Heritage Foundation.

One: We pray that this building may become a place where Unitarian Universalists from around the country can come and learn more about their Universalist history. We entrust its loving stewardship to the Universalist Heritage Foundation knowing that they will continue to care for and maintain this building as we have done.

All: Behold the new thing that God is doing!

Universalist Heritage Foundation:

We give thanks for the United Church of Winchester's faithful stewardship of this building and we promise to continue that work. We give thanks that our dream of a Universalist Heritage Center is now becoming real in the world. We will honor this building's rich heritage and celebrate all that is yet to come within these walls.

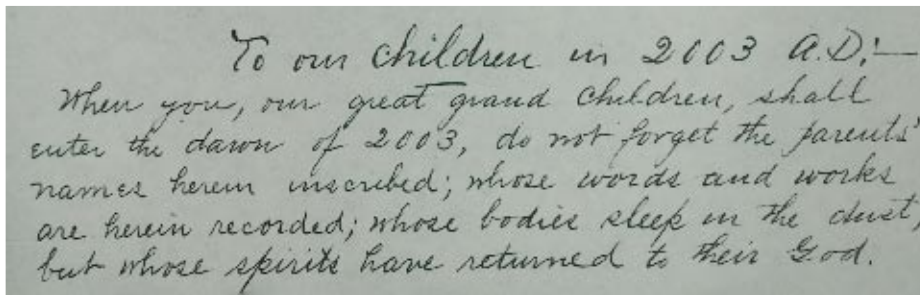
Workshop at General Assembly

"Are You a Closet Universalist and Don't Even Know It?" is the title of a workshop to be offered at General Assembly this June in Portland, Oregon. John Sanders and Rev. Elizabeth Strong, president and vice-president of the board, will lead the workshop which is sponsored by the New Hampshire – Vermont District. In addition to the workshop, our literature will be available at the Unitarian Universalist Historical Association booth. Also shown at that booth will be a video which is currently being developed to present the Universalist Heritage Center. If you will be at General Assembly, look for our presence there.

A message from the 100th Anniversary of the signing of the Winchester Profession

The Members of the
Winchester Parish
herein present to their posterity
a record of the observation of
The Hundredth Anniversary
of the adoption of the famous
"Winchester Profession of Belief"
of the Universalist Church
which took place in our church
September 22 – October 1, 1903

To our children in 2003 A.D.: when you, our great grand children, shall enter the dawn of 2003, do not forget the parents' names herein inscribed; whose words and works are herein recorded; whose bodies sleep in the dust, but whose spirits have returned to their God.



We have done our best for you, and believe that during 1903, we firmly built on the solid foundations which our fathers laid in 1803.

We charge you, who will be the supporters of the dear Winchester church, to never fail to keep alive the sacred fires of our faith on this holy altar. We have enjoyed what our fathers did for us, and we pass on to you their best, with our additions.

Through their deep reflection and generosity in transferring their building to the Universalist Heritage Foundation, the present members of the United Church of Winchester did indeed do their part to keep alive the sacred fires of the Universalist faith.

Its future is now in our hands.

Future issues of this newsletter will be sent electronically to all of you for whom we have email addresses, unless you specifically request a hard copy. We are grateful for your help in making our distribution system as efficient as possible