Nine Unitarian Decades

A Pictorial Timeline of Unitarianism in Calgary
2nd Edition

History and Archives Committee
Unitarian Church of Calgary
Nine Unitarian Decades: A Pictorial Timeline of Unitarianism in Calgary.

Prepared by the History and Archives Committee
of the Unitarian Church of Calgary, June 2003:
   Helen Backhouse, chair
   Jim Bowman, archivist
   Pat Martin

Edited and produced by Pat and John Martin.

If you have articles, stories, or picture that you feel should be included in a future edition of this booklet, please talk to one of the members of the History and Archives Committee.

Warning: This booklet has been printed using water-soluble inks. Drops and spilled liquids will cause the inks to run!
1907
The British and Foreign Unitarian Association (BFUA) and the American Unitarian Association (AUA) sent Reverend Frank Wright Pratt of Massachusetts as Field Secretary to Western Canada.

July 23, 1909
The Calgary Herald announced three Unitarian services to be held the next day at the Arcade Theatre on 8th Avenue. Topics were:
- Unitarian Christianity Explored,
- Jesus and His Religion, and
- The Bible in the Light of Modern Scholarship.
By 1910 only one service a month was being held, meeting at the Empire Theatre. Attendance averaged about 150 per service. Monthly afternoon forums attracted 400–500 people, addressing political and social issues and later including a religious dimension. However, membership dwindled to about 75 at Pratt’s departure in 1913.

January 1914
Leif Huseby arrived from New Jersey in November of 1913, to become minister the next year. He was minister for only six months, moving on to become an oil broker in Turner Valley. Bob Edwards’ Eye Opener featured a cartoon congregation singing, “Praise God from Whom OIL blessings flow; Praise Him OIL creatures here below.”

January 1916
William Irvine, former Presbyterian minister tried for heresy in Ontario but acquitted, was installed as minister. Irvine’s political and social interests led him to write a political column in The Albertan; organize well-attended Sunday afternoon “People’s Forums”; establish his own newspaper, The Nutcracker; and help form the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA). Irvine resigned in 1919, to be eventually elected to Parliament.

December 10, 1911
After meetings were held at the Globe Theatre for most of 1911, Unity Hall, at 917 – 14th Avenue SW (now the Full Gospel Church) was dedicated. The wood-frame structure of “simple Greek design” cost $7,000, with title held by the American Unitarian Association (AUA).
1921
Following Irvine’s departure in 1919, Church services continued as lay-led meetings. Participation declined, however, and the last service of the Unitarian Church of Calgary was held in 1921. Although the Women’s Alliance continued to meet in Unity Hall for three or four years under Mrs. J. F. Charlton as president, the congregation eventually became inactive and remained so for over two decades.

1921
The last Church service was held in Unity Hall in 1921. The American Unitarian Association (AUA), who held title to Unity Hall, then rented it to various groups.
The American Unitarian Association (AUA), who held title to Unity Hall, had difficulty selling it because it leaned at an 80° angle and the dirt floor in the basement was constantly flooded. A buyer was finally found in 1946.

There is no record of any activities of the Unitarian Church of Calgary in these decades.
July 14, 1956
Unitarian minister Reverend Charles W. Eddis of Edmonton addressed a small group at the Palliser Hotel.

1950

December 16, 1951
A group met at the old YWCA to initiate a fellowship. Meetings continued for about a year, and then waned.

1957
The Women’s Alliance formed again to get to know each other, to foster Unitarianism, and to strengthen the group. The Alliance’s $100 donation initiated a Building Fund.

Fellowship Established
January 1957
Following adoption of a constitution the previous month, 25 members formed a fellowship and elected officers. After initially meeting in the Manning-Egleston Lumber Company offices on 8th Avenue, the congregation moved to the conservatory of Mount Royal College on 7th Avenue SW.

1958
The Quest newsletter began publishing two issues a month.

1959
The fellowship moved again, now meeting at the Star Temple at 104 – 13th Avenue SE. Membership numbered 83, with 134 children in the Church School.

Women’s Alliance

1958
After outgrowing the Mount Royal Conservatory, meetings were held at the Labour Temple at 11th Avenue and 2nd Street SE.
September 1961
Dwight Brown became our first full-time minister, leading morning and evening services which frequently featured a discussion period after the sermon.

Fall 1964
Violet Kochendoerfer, first woman to graduate from Starr King Ministry, served as our minister for three years.

September 1968
Jerome Howell became our first minister at our present location.

Early 1960s
Our congregation returned to the Mount Royal College conservatory, with the Church School using the first two floors of the Kerby Building across the street.

May 11, 1961
The American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America merged to become the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations of North America (UUA).

Spring 1968
Mount Royal College could no longer accommodate our growing congregation, and we met briefly at the Oddfellows Temple at 517 Centre Street S.

September 1968
We moved to our current location, formerly Crescent Heights United Church. Services were held in what is now Wickenden Hall while the Church School met downstairs.
Lay-Led Congregation

1972
Jerome Howell resigned as minister in the fall of 1971. From 1972 to 1979 the Church operated without a minister. It was a lay-led group with appointed chaplains to minister rites of passage. The congregation numbered about 120 members in 1979.

September 12, 1979
Jack C. Loadman, previously Unitarian minister in Weymouth, Massachusetts, was installed at the Unitarian Church of Calgary on September 12, 1979. Apart from his concern for religious and social service areas, Loadman took an active interest in theatre and the arts. The congregation named him minister emeritus upon his retirement in 1991.

1970

1979
Anthony Mardiros writes William Irvine: The Life of a Prairie Radical, an authoritative biography.

1979
Mary and Des Smyth begin selling Christmas cakes baked at the Church as a fundraiser, and continued for 12 years. In the busiest years over 600 cakes were sold, and it became a year-round project as supplies were sought at the best price. Mary baked the light fruit cakes, while Isobel Grayston baked the dark ones. They were both helped by a small group of dedicated volunteers.
June 14, 1980
Jack Loadman’s outspoken views attracted much media attention. This *Calgary Herald* photo accompanied a story stating, “Unitarians are free to worship their own or no god at all. Unitarians pass judgment on their own individual actions and morality.”

October 1986
From left: William McKee and Douglas Cass of the Glenbow Museum, and Ruth Barker, Helen Green, and Helen Backhouse oversaw the transfer of historical documents of the Church to Glenbow Archives.

November 1981
Rev. Eugene Pickett, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, visited Calgary in 1981 and 1984. In interviews he commented on the dramatic growth of the Calgary congregation in the last few years.

November 29–30, 1986
The congregation celebrated the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the Unitarian Fellowship in Calgary. Dr. Phillip Hewett from Vancouver was guest speaker.

May 18–21, 1984
The Unitarian Church of Calgary hosted the 23rd Annual Conference of the Canadian Unitarian Council, in Banff. Roy Bonisteel was considered a dramatic and unusual choice for a theme speaker at the conference.

May 27, 1989
Ruth Barker was the recipient of the first William Irvine Award for Extraordinary Service, given by the Church at a special dinner.
Fall 1991
Lisa Presley led the Church as interim minister for two years after Jack Loadman’s retirement in the summer of 1991.

1993
Josiah Bartlett also led the Church as interim minister.

1994
Roderick M. Brown, previously Unitarian minister in Pensacola, Florida, was installed as full-time minister of the Church. Rod frequently referred to himself as a “mystical, humanist, transcendentalist sort of guy.”

June 1992
The Western Canada District hosted the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association in Calgary, with over 2,200 members attending from around the globe.

December 1, 1993
Mauricio Romero accepted sanctuary in the Church. Mauricio had fled El Salvador to Canada, and feared imprisonment or death if he was forced to return. He stayed in the Church until receiving permission to remain in Canada in May 1994.

May 1996
The Church joined the CUC/UUA Partner Church Program, and shared information with and provided friendship and support to the 3rd Unitarian Church of Cluj (Kolozsvar), Romania, through 2001.

October 10-13, 1997
The Church hosted the Annual Conference of the Western Canada District of the UUA. A highlight was the musical comedy, Are You My Mother?, by Calgary Unitarian Jennie Paine.
August 2002
Dana Worsnop served her first professional ministry as interim minister in Calgary, after Rod Brown returned to teaching in 2001. During the interim year, Dana reinvigorated and challenged the Church with moving sermons and thoughtful services (even including pets). Membership grew by 15% and the Church took on several new projects, including one of Dana’s favourites, the “Green Sanctuary” program.

August 2003
Meg Roberts, previously Unitarian minister in Edmonton and Montréal, was called as minister of the Church. Active in the denomination, she is on the Religious Education Curriculum Task Force of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists. Meg calls herself a panentheist, seeking to engage the life-transforming power of Spirit to work towards a more loving and just world.

May 19–22, 2000
During the Annual Conference of the CUC in Calgary, negotiators were directed to reach a new agreement with the UUA to define the structure of the community of congregations in Canada.

June 30, 2000
The Church formally became a “Welcoming Congregation,” committed to “uphold the dignity of all human beings” and “challenge and educate those who diminish the rights of another person.”

September 2001
Although our two-year sponsorship of Faradin and Ylfete Canhasi and their children as Kosovo refugees formally ended, many members and friends continue to help the family.

2000–2003
An all-Church Vision Quest weekend in June 2002 and a wildly successful canvass in November led to the initiation of three “visionary” projects in 2003: “Empty Bowls in Calgary”, “Green Sanctuary”, and a leadership development program.
Index

American Unitarian Association
  1907, 1911, 1921, 1946, 1961
Backhouse, Helen............................... 1986
Barker, Ruth.................................... 1986, 1989
Bartlett, Josiah................................. 1991
Bonisteel, Roy................................... 1984
British and Foreign Unitarian
  Association.................................... 1907
Brown, Dwight.................................. 1961
Brown, Roderick M................................ 1994
Calgary Herald................................. 1909, 1980
Canadian Unitarian Council............. 1984, 2000
Canhasi Family................................. 2001
Cass, Douglas.................................. 1986
Charlton, Mrs. J. F............................. 1921
Christmas cakes............................... 1979
Churches
  Unitarian Church................................ 1968
  Unity Hall...................................... 1911
Crescent Heights United Church......... 1968
Eddis, Charles W............................... 1956
Empty Bowls in Calgary.................... 2003
Eye Opener..................................... 1914
Fellowship..................................... 1951, 1957
First Unitarian Services in Calgary.... 1909
Glenbow Museum and Archives........... 1986
Grayston, Isobel............................... 1979
Green, Helen................................... 1986
Green Sanctuary............................... 2003
Hewett, Phillip................................ 1986
Howell, Jerome................................ 1968
Huseby, Leif.................................... 1914
Irvine, William................................ 1916
Kerby Building................................. 1960s
Kochendoerfer, Violet...................... 1964
Kosovo Refugees............................... 2001
Labour Temple.................................. 1958
Leadership Development Program........ 2003
Loadman, Jack C................................ 1979, 1980
Manning-Egleston Lumber Company...... 1957
Mardiros, Anthony............................. 1979
McKee, William................................. 1986
Ministers
  Bartlett, Josiah............................... 1993
  Brown, Dwight................................ 1961
  Brown, Roderick M............................ 1994
  Howell, Jerome............................... 1968
  Huseby, Leif.................................. 1914
  Irvine, William............................... 1916
  Kochendoerfer, Violet...................... 1964
  Loadman, Jack C.............................. 1979
  Presley, Lisa.................................. 1991
  Roberts, Meg.................................. 2003
  Worsnop, Dana................................ 2002
Mount Royal College......................... 1957, 1960s
Nutcracker, The................................ 1916
Oddfellows Temple............................ 1968
Partner Church Program.................... 1996
Pickett, Eugene............................... 1981
Presley, Lisa.................................. 1991
Quest newsletter............................. 1958
Roberts, Meg.................................. 2003
Romero, Mauricio.............................. 1993
Smyth, Mary and Des.......................... 1979
Star Temple..................................... 1959
Starr King Ministry........................... 1964
Thirtieth Anniversary of the Unitarian
  Fellowship in Calgary....................... 1986
Unitarian services, first in Calgary.... 1909
United Farmers of Alberta................. 1916
Unity Hall....................................... 1911, 1921, 1946
Universalist Church of America........... 1961
Vision Quest.................................... 2002
Welcoming Congregation..................... 2000
Western Canada District.................... 1992, 1997
William Irvine Award........................ 1989
William Irvine: The Life of a Prairie
  Radical......................................... 1979
Women’s Alliance.............................. 1921, 1957
Worsnop, Dana.................................. 2002
Wright, Frank.................................. 1907
YWCA, Old..................................... 1951