

This year, we celebrate the 325th anniversary of the founding of the First Parish of Sherborn. One of the ways we plan to commemorate this milestone is through a new weekly series called the “Roots That Hold Us.” In case you miss a Sunday, the previous Sunday’s “Roots” installment will be posted on the web site.

The Roots that Hold Us, Jan 3

Although the people of this area won their 1674 petition to separate from Medfield, the breakout of King Phillip’s war delayed the building of a meeting house and the settling of a minister. Once the Indian danger was passed, they entered into a 4 ½ year controversy over the siting of the meeting house which was finally arbitrated by a committee from the General Court. They signed an agreement with Daniel Gookin for 20 pounds money and 20 pounds country pay in April of 1681 and set about building the first meetinghouse on this hill above Edward’s Plain with lumber from Sawin’s saw mill. Daniel Gookin was ordained here as our first settled minister on March 26, 1685.

Judge Samuel Sewell, later of Salem Witch Trials fame, attended the ordination of Mr. Gookin at this Church of Christ in Shearborne, as the church was then called. Gookin was a good friend and colleague of John Eliot’s and helped him with his mission to Christianize the Indians at the South Natick Church. Mr. Gookin served this parish for 27 years.

The Roots that Hold Us, Jan 10

In the early years of the town and the church, Massachusetts was a theocracy based on Calvin’s teachings. Only those persons who had publicly confessed their sins and professed to have been selected to receive the grace of God were regenerate and deemed worthy of church and Town membership. They believed in the Trinity and accepted the divinity of Jesus. In these early days, there was a 2-3 hour sermon, a noon break and then another sermon. And, by the way, the meetinghouse was not heated. If you didn't go to Meeting you were fined and if you didn't pay the fine you were put in the stocks right out in front of the meetinghouse.

In 1674 there were 16 inhabitants and proprietors and a total of 108 souls (women and children were souls but not inhabitants). By 1721, the town had grown to 400 souls. The problem which had beset the town when it first tried to site its meetinghouse still persisted: the inhabitants were too spread out and it was difficult for some to get to Meeting. In 1700, Framingham was established and 17 Sherborn inhabitants plus their families were annexed to the new town. Some of this land ended up as part of Ashland when it was incorporated in 1846.

In 1723, the burgeoning town had outgrown its first meetinghouse and voted to build a new larger one next to the old one. The second church was 40’ by 32’ and sited just to the north of the present building. It had an gilded acorn weathervane at the top. Since there was no change in the site of the new meetinghouse, in 1724, those inhabitants to the west of Dopping Brook petitioned the general court to be separated from Sherborn and the Town of Holliston was established.

It is interesting that much of our current membership, although from different towns, resides on land that was originally part of Sherborn.

The Roots that Hold Us, Jan 17

In the mid-1700s, liberalism started to take hold in the Eastern part of New England. The ministers in the east were primarily Harvard trained and Arminian and the ministers in the Connecticut Valley were primarily Yale trained and orthodox. (Definitions of these terms can be found in your insert.) Samuel Locke, our 4th minister, was ordained in 1759. Locke was highly regarded by the theological liberals. He said “there is no impiety in examining the proofs by which truth is said to be supported”

During his tenure, the town again decided that it needed a larger meetinghouse. The building was sawn in half and 20 feet was added to the middle. The town then voted to color the clapboards on the outside of the meeting house an “oring culler, all to be handsomely done and fashionable and workmanlike.”

Mr. Locke was a good friend of John Adams, having studied with him at Harvard in the 1750s. While a call to ministry was assumed to be a lifelong commitment, much to Sherborn’s dismay, Locke left Sherborn in 1770 when he was offered the Harvard presidency. Unfortunately, in 1773, Locke suffered a fall from grace at Harvard when it was discovered that he fathered a child with his sickly wife’s housekeeper. He resigned and fled back to his farm in Sherborn where he was welcomed back by most but not all of the townspeople.

Like most ministers of the time, Locke was a farmer: the horse chestnut trees he planted still grow at 8 Washington Street. Locke became a town leader and went every evening to the local tavern where his political arguments carried such weight that there was not one Tory in Sherborn. Locke died suddenly in 1778 while bringing in the cattle. President John Adams wrote that he never remembered his old classmate, Locke, “without the most lively emotion of affection and the highest sense of esteem.”

On May 21, 1776, Sherborn voted to support independence. Sherborn formed its own company of minutemen and stored supplies of arms and gunpowder in the Meetinghouse. This caused a great deal of concern to the womenfolk -- we’re not sure how the men felt about it.

The Roots that Hold Us, Jan 24

Elijah Brown became our 5th minister in 1770, beginning a 46 year pastorate - our longest. Brown began his ministry as a Calvinist, but having accepted the concept of human free will for good or evil, he soon drifted towards Arminianism. It was only one small step to the Arian point of view that Jesus was not God, but was chosen for a special mission on earth. Brown was the first true though unnamed Unitarian in our pulpit. We were a bit ahead of the times: the first official Unitarian church in the US was founded in 1794 in Pennsylvania by Joseph Priestly.

Times were changing. During the Revolutionary War, everyone was concerned with the right of the individual to make choices. The authority of the church to govern the entire community was decreasing. Brown’s sermons were described as generally practical rather than doctrinal – he even began to cut his sermons in the cold, unheated meetinghouse to 10 or 15 minutes in the winter! Mr. Brown said, “Christians may differ widely in speculative opinions and yet rejoice in the light of the gospel with equal sincerity and walk by the light with equal uprightness and safety. If Christians would bestow half the pains to find out how far they agree in sentiment that they do to discover wherein they differ, and walk by the same rule, so far as they are agreed, it would have a strong tendency to increase their happiness, both temporal and external.”

Brown had perhaps an even greater influence on the development of the Unitarian Church than one would anticipate from a country minister. Brown supplemented his income by starting a classical school in Sherborn which won considerable fame. A former student, Henry Ware, was appointed the first Hollis Professor of Theology at Harvard and played a large part in the formation of Harvard Divinity School and its unofficial association with the Unitarian church. Because he was a liberal, his appointment caused quite a stir. The leader of his opposition was Jedidiah Morse from Yale, a Calvinist who took a leading role in founding Andover Theological Seminary for the training of Orthodox ministers. This dispute was one of the significant events that contributed to the split in the Congregationalist denominations, and to the eventual founding of the American Unitarian Association in 1825. His son, Henry Ware, Jr., also a Harvard trained Unitarian minister was a mentor for Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The Roots that Hold Us, Jan 31

After the War of 1812, the war between Orthodox Congregationalist and the Arian, Arminians or Socinian Unitarians entered its most violent stage - men split along different lines in religion and politics. The ruling powers of Harvard were both Unitarian and Federalists. Thomas Jefferson, Federalism's arch foe, had Unitarian sentiments. Jefferson said, "I trust that there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die a Unitarian." That Jefferson's prediction did not come true was due in part to the organized opposition of the orthodox churches and to the reluctance of the Unitarians to proselytize.

William Ellery Channing was preaching at Boston's Federal Street Church and serving as the leader of liberal Christianity. The much feared split in the Standing Order of Congregational Church had begun. The conservatives kept a watch on the country churches and quickly supported those church members who were Trinitarians. Channing preached and published his opinions, but he felt that people and churches should be free to make their own decision and did not encourage the organization and recruiting as practiced by the orthodox.

After Elijah Brown died in 1816, First Parish called Shearjashub Townsend to the pulpit. Mr. Townsend served during a tumultuous 13 years where many New England congregations were splitting into Unitarian and Trinitarian factions. By 1820, there were 120 Unitarian churches in eastern Massachusetts. Townsend, although well aware of the conflict between liberal and orthodox, rode the fence and tried to keep his charge together.

By 1828, his failing health (he had tuberculosis) drew him away from his ministerial duties and Amos Clarke, a Sherborn native, temporarily supplied the pulpit. Townsend's repeated selection of Amos Clarke as supply pastor irritated the conservatives in the congregation, for Clarke was an avowed liberal. As his health worsened, Townsend resigned and travelled South in search of a milder climate. The spark of discontent among the congregation continued to be fanned by Amos Clarke's liberalism.

The Roots that Hold Us, Feb 7

In February of 1830, the conservatives in the congregation petitioned the court for a warrant to form a Second Religious Congregational Society in Sherburne and started having separate prayer meetings.

The conservatives attended First Parish, where Amos Clarke was temporarily supplying the pulpit, as well as their own prayer meetings while they tried to influence the selection of a permanent orthodox minister for First Parish. They were unsuccessful and in March of 1830 First Parish called Amos Clarke to be installed as the 7th minister. Dissatisfied with Amos Clarke's views, the conservatives withdrew in April and engaged Samuel Lee as their pastor.

Amos Clarke was Sherborn born – his ancestral home at 90 Maple Street is still owned by his descendents. He prepared for Harvard under the tutelage of Elijah Brown and held several teaching posts before returning to Sherborn as supply pastor. When he was ordained in March of 1830, he was nearly 50 years old, had a large family and was very definitely a Unitarian.

Reverend Clarke attempted reconciliation with the conservatives but to no avail. The Second Parish raised a new church in July of 1830 and, perhaps in the spirit of competition, First Parish followed suit by raising this new Meeting House on August 16th and 17th of 1830. This building is an exact copy of the church then in the town of Sutton, which later burned. It had a huge advantage over the previous two Meeting Houses: it was heated.

Here is how they ran a church capital campaign in 1830: church records show it was voted that “two pews be reserved in the new Meeting House for the use of the present ministers as long as they remain connected with this parish in their pastoral office; and that one pew be reserved for the use of death people, and seven pews for the other persons who may not wish to purchase pews; and that the whole expense of building and furnishing the new Meeting House be levied on the other sixty-eight pews on the lower floor of said House.” Substantial amounts of about \$100 were paid for the pews and, as you can see on your order of service, many old family names such as Leland, Dowse, Sanger, Holbrook, Ware, Goulding, Nason Hill and Leonard Morse are listed as purchasers.

The Roots That Hold Us, Feb 14

Amos Clarke served for 12 years until 1842 when he resigned claiming ill health.

First Parish next called Richard Stone to the pulpit. Mr. Stone was a self-taught farmer from Rhode Island. He was initially popular and invigorated the Sunday School. But, to quote the writings of Martha D. Leland, “Mr. Stone's zeal for the cause of temperance involved him in controversy....He was untiring in his efforts to put an end to the selling of liquor at the local tavern, and this at a time when public sentiment had not quite caught up with him.”

Those who were against Rev Stone, mostly young men, and those who supported the tavern keeper were called the “rum party”. The more staid members of the congregation valued loyalty to their minister even though they didn't agree with all his views. In addition to his unpopular temperance campaign, some people were angered when he wrote in opposition to the Transcendental writers. And, still others were upset with him because he favored abolition. It all finally degenerated into a contest to see which party could muster the greater number of votes. The church voted to dismiss him

but only by a very small margin. Immediately, another meeting was held and 42 families decided to withdraw from First Parish and form a new organization with Rev. Stone. They quickly raised a new “Independent Congregational” chapel in the Methodist tradition. The new church stood near 5 Washington Street and was later moved to Zion’s Lane where it was eventually destroyed by fire.

Twice in just 18 years, the congregation had divided in half over its differences! Stone stayed in Sherborn 3 years after causing all this uproar and then moved on to a Wesleyan church in Boston. Eventually, he left New England for the Midwest, but members of his family continued to have Sherborn friends. He would often ask visitors from New England, “Well, the Unitarians have about died out, haven’t they?”

The Reverend John Fleming succeeded Stone preaching at the Methodist chapel. As the chapel congregation dwindled in 1850, they voted to reunite with First Parish. Fleming served the reunited congregation from 1850-1853. He stayed in Sherborn and he and four brothers established a willowworking business that succeeded for 50 years. His family built houses at numbers 5, 16, 18, 37 and 58 Maple Street. In fact, the Curtis’ live in one of those houses, today.

The Roots That Hold Us, Feb 21

As we approach the 1860s on our historic timeline, we might wonder about the history of slavery among the First Parishioners and the prevailing sentiments about abolition.

Daniel Gookin was strongly against slavery, influenced by the fact that some of the Indians with whom he worked in Natick were sold into slavery.

Our second minister, Daniel Baker, owned at least two slaves who he set free. Some townspeople were opposed to giving slaves freedom because they feared they might be reduced to want and become public charges.

Three adult people of color were baptized in the church between 1737 and 1742. One slave, named Duty, was freed by his master, Capt. Joseph Ware, when he became such a proficient miller that his mill could grind more grain than the others.

Fifteen or twenty “people of color” were “Rec’f to Full Communion” and three marriages were recorded in the 1840s as “people of color”. The last entry in the church record books where color is noted was made in 1848.

As the Civil War approached, the town was divided on the issue of slavery. Some of the shoe shops in town produced brogans specifically for the Southern market and they were anxious that a war would upset their business. There were many heated arguments over the right of an individual to own slaves.

After the Civil War began in 1861, the church worked to support the soldiers with garments and supplies for the Sanitary Commission, the forerunner of the American Red Cross. Earlier doubts about anti-slavery views were forgotten and there were Underground Railroad stops in town, most notably at the Clewes house at the corner of Lake and Farm.

Amos Clarke, at 83, wrote an inspirational address to the Sherborn Volunteers as they went off to fight. An excerpt from it can be found on your order of service.

Roots That Hold Us, Feb 28

The period following the Civil War saw an end to First Parish's relative prosperity. Young men returning from war moved west looking for land and gold. Population decreased in both the town and the church. The railroads had been built and Sherborn had only a spur line. Sherborn's small shoe industry suffered and gave way to the towns served by the railroad, namely Natick and Framingham. It was hard to support a vigorous church. Over the years, it was necessary to take out mortgages on the building to cover essential expenses. Many times, the church was "bailed out" through a special gift.

The women of First Parish were very active in fundraising and acted as a steady force for the church. The earliest record of the Young Ladies Benevolent Society is a letter dated 1837. There is written evidence that the Alliance held its 50th annual Church Fair in 1901. The Women's Alliance is probably one of the oldest Unitarian women's groups in existence. In 1854, the women raised enough money to buy the first organ for the church.

Our 13th minister, Eugene De Normandie, served from 1876-1890. Complaints from the previous two ministers about lack of housing, made it necessary for the First Congregational Church, as it was then called, to provide a parish house. The property roughly where the playground is now was owned by the church and leased to Palemon Bickford who built a straw factory on it. After the factory closed, the building was converted to tenements. The church recovered the property and offered the building to DeNormandie as a parsonage.

Mr. and Mrs. DeNormandie were very active and invigorated the church. There was a thriving Sunday School with 10 teachers and 70 students. There were several groups including The Ladies Benevolent Society, the Busy Bee Society, the young woman's Octagon Club, the Sabbath School Association and the Floral Mission. The Busy Bees, a children's group, raised the money for and donated our chandelier in 1890. At the time, there were two matching lamps on the organ and two on the pulpit. The chandelier, originally kerosene, was restored and wired in 1952 when electricity was installed in the church.

The Roots That Hold Us, Mar 7

In the early 1890s, First Parish could no longer afford to pay a minister so it joined with the Eliot Church in South Natick to call Reverend Leverett R. Daniels. This was the first time since Daniel Gookin's tenure that we had shared a pastor with South Natick, but it would not be the last. It was a hardship to travel each Sunday over unpaved roads by horse and buggy to South Natick, so we agreed to pay Mr. Daniels \$10 more per Sunday.

Rev. Daniels came to Massachusetts from Michigan where he had already organized and built two liberal churches. With an experienced and able minister on board, even part-time, things were looking up. First Parish repaired and redecorated the meeting house and had a grand re-opening ceremony on October 21st, 1894. The picture on your order of service is most likely of that time period.

Now let's shift slightly northeast and discuss what was happening in Natick, because the Natick Unity Church's history became part of First Parish in Sherborn's history, in 1977, when the two churches merged. In 1897, Sarah Allen Cooney (yes, of Cooney room fame) founded the Natick Unitarian Association, meeting initially in her

home. She died a year later and soon after, the small group voted to build a church in her memory. They changed the name to the Unity Church and, in 1903, they dedicated their beautiful new building. Edward Everett Hale, Unitarian Minister and United States Senate Chaplain, delivered the dedicatory address.

In 1924, the Town of Sherborn celebrated its 250th Anniversary with a 3-day celebration – both the Unitarian and Congregational churches took part. It was in honor of that milestone that the bronze tablet in memory of our former ministers was dedicated and it now hangs in the rear of this sanctuary.

The Roots that Hold Us, Mar 14

Although these were lean years, from 1903-1919, we were able to support our own minister. In 1919, First Congregational Parish, Unitarian, as we were then called, again shared a minister with The Eliot Church. William Daniel Wilkie, a Canadian of Scottish descent, was an excellent preacher but, by 1927, diabetes had made it impossible for him to continue serving two churches. Wilkie stayed on at South Natick and we decided to call a part-time minister, Reverend Cicero Adolphus Henderson, who was also a Babson professor and lived in Wellesley. Although brilliant, he was ambivalent about the ministry and served only 3 years. The next part-time minister, Marshall Jones, was even less successful as he was a religious conservative and lived in Boston. For four years, the church declined due to lack of attention. In the midst of the Great Depression, in 1932 we again united with South Natick to call William Billingham. This began another period of 14 years of sharing with South Natick.

In 1935, the First Parish Unitarian in Sherborn put on an extensive celebration of the 250th Gathering of the Church and the Ordination and Installation of the First Minister of Sherborn. The celebration included a pageant which is described in the newspaper clipping on your OOS. Guest speakers at the special service included:

- Mr. Robert H. Barber, descendent of the original founders
- Reverend Louis C. Cornish, President American Unitarian Association
- Professor Edward C. Moore, Harvard University
- And, The Honorable Leverett Saltonstall, then Speaker of the State House of Representatives, who would become Governor of Massachusetts in 1939.

The Roots that Hold Us, March 28

Today's Roots that Hold Us brings us to the 1930s when we continued to share a minister with South Natick.

Rev. Howard G. Matson served this church and the Eliot Church from 1936-1938. He started a very active Young Peoples Religious Union or YPRU at his churches. Howard Matson and his wife were lifelong social activists. After he left Sherborn, he marched on Selma, worked in Haight-Asbury and was a minister to the migrant farm workers of California.

In honor of the youth service today, here's a little history of the Young Peoples Religious Union. Organized in 1896, it was essentially a missionary organization chartered to "call out the young, and train them to independent thinking and speaking on religious topics." It was seen as a potential breeding ground for future homegrown Unitarian ministers. Around the same time a similar Universalist youth organization was

founded and these two youth organizations merged in 1953 to become the Liberal Religious Youth or LRY. The successful merger of these two youth organizations paved the way for the eventual merger of the Unitarian and Universalist churches eight years later. Some of you may remember the LRY from the 60s and 70s. It was deeply involved with the beginning of the anti-war movement in the 1960s and was notorious for its radical approach to social justice. As the UUA became more conservative, the radical counterculture activities of the LRY became too controversial and the organization was disbanded in 1982.

Michael Tino of the UUA said this about the history of UU youth organizations, “It is a fascinating story, not only of our youth movement but also of the leadership that youth have provided our faith over time. This demonstrates the importance of investing in partnerships between youth and adults. It also illustrates that youth provide a vibrant, cutting edge and prophetic voice that keeps Unitarian Universalism vital and alive.”

The Roots that Hold Us, April 4

From 1938-1942 we again shared a minister with South Natick. Marius McCarl Nielsen stood 6'5" had red hair and mustache and was nicknamed “The Great Dane”. His sermon topics ran the gamut from Zen Buddhism, Mein Kampf, and The Sun Rising over Concord Bridge. Memberships at both churches doubled during his stay.

The Hurricane of 1938 knocked the steeple off this church. Richard Saltonstall graciously replaced it in 1940 (1942?) and the church was redecorated.

The following is Reverend Nielsen’s statement to the press upon his ordination:

“To friends, members, and friendly enemies of the Eliot Church in South Natick and the Sherborn Unitarian Church of Massachusetts. These churches under my leadership will be kept steadfastly loyal to the Unitarian tradition. The type of expression permitted in these pulpits is free to seek truth from every possible source and from all human experience.

Unitarians are not committed to any dogma, not even the one suggested by their name. Should we be convinced that there are three Gods or thirteen we would not deny our faith if we expressed our conviction. Our unity is not the unity of homogeneous opinion. We are committed to an end, not a means; a purpose, not a method; a deed, not a doctrine; a Christ-like life, not any Christian creed.

As much as we are able, we try in this Unitarian fellowship to live up to a maxim that ‘in this church we do not agree to all think alike, but all alike to think.’ We try to think the great thoughts of the mighty souls of our race, a race which is spread over the whole globe.

In this, we invite people to join with us—the rich, the poor, all ages, all crafts, all colors, the Gentile and the Jew, the fortunate and the underprivileged, all men and women of good will, all free in thought and sincere in purpose,—all realizing that man’s life on earth, though a brief span between two eternities, a song that breaks everlasting silence, a torch whose light must quickly be passed on to other waiting hands, is yet a noble and precious thing, the divinest thing we know.”

The Roots That Hold Us, April 11

Waldemar Argow, a seventh generation Unitarian minister, served South Natick and Sherborn for two years during World War II. Rationing of gasoline and food, long work hours and an overall population decline made the shared minister arrangement untenable. When Mr. Argow left, South Natick decided to pursue federation with a nearby congregational church which left us without the resources or the Parish House to support a minister of our own.

As written by Mrs. C. Arthur Dowse, "So once again, we had a meeting to consider the idea of getting along without South Natick. There was an element in our church at that time, better versed in finance than in doctrine, who had advocated union with the Pilgrim Church. They argued that we were paying two ministers, two janitors, two organists, etc. and we had only enough congregation for one church in the community. Now this sentiment was not mentioned at the above meeting. And yet, the morning after our meeting, our moderator saw Mr. Elijah Barber on the street and he said something to the effect that 'We had a meeting last night. What do you say to uniting?' Inasmuch as Pilgrim Church was also struggling at this time, they took this comment on uniting seriously. A church meeting was called at once and they voted to accept the invitation as extended by our moderator."

And so the Federated Church was born.

The Roots That Hold Us, April 18

Ministers came and went at the Federated Church, none staying too long. The ministers had a difficult time here as it seemed impossible to please a congregation with such diverse beliefs. Still, progress was made. The First Parish installed electricity (it's true, the building did not have permanent wiring until 1955!), restored and redecorated the sanctuary, had the chandelier cleaned and electrified and then rededicated the building. Services were held here as we had the better heating. In 1957, the Federated church built a new kitchen, meeting hall and educational wing at Pilgrim and restored their parish house at 2 North Main Street. First Parish still owned the original Unity Hall which sat about where the playground is now and had been used as a parish house and meeting space in the past. With no current need for it, it was sold to John Bryer in 1959. The Bryer's moved it to 17 North Main Street where it is now the private home on Unity Lane. It was a sunny fall day when almost everyone in town gathered along the route to watch the venerable building move up North Main Street to the tracks and up the hill.

Meanwhile, the Natick Unity church was a vigorous part of its community. They added on to their beautiful building in 1951 and there were several active groups in the Natick church at the time: the Women's Alliance, the Women's Evening Alliance, the Unitarian Men's Club and the Community Discussion Group.

The Roots That Hold Us, April 25

Today's installment brings us to Sherborn in the early 1960s. In 1961, the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church in America merged to become the Unitarian Universalist Association. Also in 1961, the Sherborn Federated Church dissolved during the controversial ministry of the fundamentalist James E. Turner and once again the liberals at First Parish stood on their own. At the time of the break-up, the Women's Alliance was the only live spark of Unitarianism in town and the women took the initiative to pull First Parish back together. The UUA were concerned

that some of their churches were being swallowed up by larger Christian churches. They sprung into action and supplied our pulpit with some of the denomination's finest preachers.

First Parish had a beautifully restored sanctuary, but no toilets or running water, no RE space, no meeting hall and no parish house. The Alliance swiftly organized a church fair that funded church school curriculum and supplies. The Good As New Shop was founded in 1962 with the purpose of raising funds for a religious education building. We hired an interim minister, James Hutchinson, who did yeoman's work to rejuvenate the church and provided a refreshing theological contrast to the Federated Church fundamentalist, James Turner.

Sherborn joined with Medfield and Natick to build an area Liberal Religious Youth or LRY group, expanding liberal youth relationships beyond town boundaries just like now. Local publicity attracted the first few families from Holliston. And then we were fortunate to receive the generous donation of the new RE wing from the Bothfeld sisters, long-time supporters of the church. By 1965, First Parish Unitarian Universalist was back on its feet.

The Roots That Hold Us, May 9

In 1967, we called our first woman minister, Joyce Smith. Although First Parish was stronger than it had been in decades, finances were still precarious. In fact, many of the liberal churches in the area were struggling. The UUA suggested we begin merger talks and Reverend Smith met with other UU churches nearby, namely Medfield, Franklin and Natick, but no decisions were reached. In fact, no town was willing to give up their building but the groundwork was laid for future cooperation.

To the East, the Wellesley Fells Community Church, Universalist, merged with the Natick Unity Church, Unitarian. Then, on April 16, 1967 disaster struck when the Natick Unitarian Church was destroyed by fire. The carved wood altar table at the front of our sanctuary was rescued from the fire and is a tangible reminder of the beautiful cypress paneling and pews in the old Natick church. (You can see a sketch of the church on your order of service.) The Wellesley-Natick congregation did rebuild, but the new church was modern and utilitarian, hardly a replacement for the warm wood and stained glass of the 1903 building. In fact the Natick/Wellesley UUs intentionally built a generic building that was easily saleable in case they could not make a go of it.

The next minister called to Sherborn immediately started working with both the Natick and Sherborn churches. During this trial period, we explored and tested ways we could work together. In 1974, we officially started sharing a minister with Natick. The merger of the two churches was finalized in 1977. The modern Natick church building was sold to the town of Natick as an office building and is now houses a RE/MAX office.

The Roots That Hold Us, May 16

In 1977, through the merger of the Natick and Sherborn churches, the UU Area Church was founded, and I quote, "... to serve as the center of Worship and Fellowship for the area including but not limited to Sherborn, Natick and Holliston. It shall be a church to foster tolerance, communication, respect and understanding".

The first UUAC minister, Mr. Deane Starr, was an excellent preacher and served for 5 years. Our second permanent minister, (and our second female minister since

1685), was Patricia Bowen. She was minister here in 1985 when the church celebrated its milestone 300th anniversary and led the celebration planning. The tercentennial, as you can imagine, was a huge event with many facets. There were two special Sunday services: one with guest speakers including Dr. O. Eugene Pickett, President of the UUA; and the other centered on music. Reverend Bowen invited all past ministers still living to the celebrations. There was a banquet, a commemorative cookbook, and a house tour. There were displays of archival materials at the church and the library. A local artist, Anne Robb, was commissioned to create an original watercolor painting which was used for a notecard design. Reverend Bowen led the project to create a UUAC history book, Three Hundred Years of Growth and Change, which was finally completed and published in 1993. This project is the most enduring legacy of our 300th celebration. Most of the information presented in the weekly Roots That Hold Us has come from that history book and the records she compiled to create it.

The Roots That Hold Us, May 23

In honor of our Spring Music Sunday theme, Singing for Human Rights, I'll mention a few moments in our church's long history of advocating for human rights. Our first minister, Daniel Gookin, was vehemently against slavery. In 1756, we housed displaced Acadian women and children and met their basic needs for food and shelter. During the Civil War, church members hosted Underground Railroad stops. In February 1970, the congregation voted to join a petition that protested American involvement in Vietnam and requested rapid withdrawal of troops. In 1978, UUAC minister, Deane Starr, preached a sermon on Gay Rights for the UU Gay and Lesbian Caucus and in 1996 we began our journey towards becoming a Welcoming Congregation by offering diversity education opportunities to our congregation. And, this year we will send our 8th group of volunteers to New Orleans to help people who have suffered so much from the combined blow of natural disaster and the government's failure to provide adequate aid.

The Roots That Hold Us, May 30

In honor of our 325th anniversary year, we have been progressing through our church's history each week with our Roots That Hold Us series. This is the final Roots installment which summarizes what has happened at the UUAC in the last 25 years.

It's no surprise that there has been overall growth. In 1985, there were 45 children enrolled in the RE Program and today there are 127. Likewise, 25 years ago there were approximately 150 members and now there are 243.

Since Pat Bowen resigned in 1988, we have had two settled ministers and four interim ministers. Rosemarie Smurzynski served this parish for 10 years from 1991-2001 and Nathan came to us in 2003.

The church ran two capital campaigns prior to the current DREAM Campaign. It's amusing to note that the last one was called Beyond the Dream. These campaigns raised about \$170,000 each and funded several improvements. In 1988, we painted the sanctuary and replaced the sanctuary carpet – yes, the same carpet that was just replaced this year. We also added a dormer to the RE wing to expand RE space on the second floor. Ten years later, a similar campaign funded the elevator, a new organ and \$50,000 in seed money for an Endowment Fund. The endowment was later merged into the UUAC at First Parish Trust.

In 1997, the church celebrated the placement of the Daniel Gookin headstone in the front of the sanctuary. Reverend Gookin's stone was discovered serendipitously in 1996 in the Central Burying Ground along with 12 more stones dating from 1716 to 1758. The stones had been discarded and buried when the corresponding remains were moved to Pine Hill Cemetery in 1857. Reverend Gookin's stone was broken and too fragile to reset in the ground, so it found a home in our sanctuary. If you haven't ever taken the time to look at it, check it out.

In 2001, the UUAC officially became a Welcoming Congregation and that was also the year that we completed our agreement with Cingular for our first antenna in the steeple and built the Cooney Room addition which houses the cellular antenna equipment and the elevator.

In 2006, a committee was formed to develop a strategic 5-year plan. Part of the plan included restructuring the church governance which created a separate Ministry Council and Board. This plan included elements of growth planning, increased social action, and a more active adult programs effort.

Since 2003, the church has initiated several important social action initiatives that are going strong today, for example: the Power of the Quilt, Gulf Coast relief, Winter Walk and participation in the Interfaith Hospitality Network.

One constant has been the spring church retreat to the Cape Cod Sea Camps. That has been going on continuously for at least 27 years.

The story of the UUAC culminates this year with our designation by the UUA as a breakthrough congregation and our planned \$1.6M building addition. The past 25 years have not been trouble-free – we've had our ups and downs with leadership, finances and membership – and we are now in a position to look back with a sense of accomplishment and joy. We truly have succeeded in acting on and achieving a vision which has carried this church to a period of strength such as it has rarely seen in 325 years.