

WHITE MEMORIAL UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

School & State Streets

The "good news" of Universalism came to Concord early in the nineteenth century. Shortly before the Revolutionary War, John Murray came to America and taught and practiced the doctrine of "the final harmony of all souls with God." He established the First Universalist Church in America at Gloucester, Mass. He was a Chaplain in George Washington's army. Great preachers followed along the spiritual trail he blazed. Many came to New Hampshire and found receptive ears and sympathetic hearts.

Hosea Ballou, a native of New Hampshire, and Thomas Whittemore were in the vanguard of the great preachers who planted the seeds of Universalism in Concord. In 1833, the first Universalist State Convention was held in Concord at the First Baptist Church. This inspired the informal organization of a Universalist Society in Concord. Until 1841, the pulpit was supplied by traveling Universalist preachers, and the new organization was financed in part by the "parsonage fund" (about \$30) from the town.

In 1841 the Society contracted for its first full-time minister, the Rev. Nathan R. Wright of Dumbarton. Salary: \$300.00. A Sunday School was organized about the same time. On January 5, 1842, the Society adopted its first Constitution and By-laws at the County Court room. A Building Committee was also appointed to contract for and finish a church building as it saw fit. On October 6, 1842, a wooden church building was dedicated. Cost: \$4000. Location: on the northerly half of the present lot at the corner of State and School Streets. On January 23, 1843, the Society voted to purchase the meeting house from the Building Committee. The ladies of the Society started their first organization, the "Murray Circle", which became the Ladies Social Aid Society in about 1855.

The period from 1843 to 1850 was one of great difficulty for the young society, primarily financial, but some ministerial. Members were expelled for not paying their subscriptions, pews were foreclosed, money was borrowed frequently. But each time things looked the darkest, loyal members increased their subscriptions to meet the deficits. The Society became entirely free from debt on January 2, 1850; the annual budget was \$619.00!

The corner-stone of the new church (the present building) was laid on September 1, 1855. A Dedication service was held at "10 1-2 o'clock A.M. with prayers, hymns, address and statement of documents deposited. The Dedication of the present church building was held on July 2, 1856. The following summary appeared in the New Hampshire Statesman of Saturday, July 5, 1856:

"Dedication. The new, expensive and very beautiful House of Worship, erected for the use of the Universalist Society in Concord, was on Wednesday afternoon last dedicated to the public worship and service of Almighty God..."

"This Church is one of the largest in the State; is constructed of brick, stuccoed in imitation of marble, elegantly but suitably frescoed, and is provided with an organ of greater power than any other in the city. The organ cost \$2500.00...."

The cost of the building was over \$20,000, the expense being met as before by the sale of pews, over half of which were taken by Nathaniel White.

The period from 1856 to 1860 was one of great controversy over the question of the abolition of slavery. The minister, the Reverent J.H. Moore, was a strong abolitionist and his views were causing some members to leave the church. Nathaniel White himself was a strong abolitionist and offered to buy the pews of any members who left. Mr. White said "If the principle of freedom is driving people out of the Church, I will be responsible for every dollar they pay."

On January 6, 1869, the Society voted to admit women into membership for the first time with Armenia White being the first woman to sign the Constitution and By-Laws. The Universalist Church was the first in Concord to admit women into membership.

Commemorative services were held for Nathaniel White on October 10, 1880. From the start of the Church, Mr. White's purse had always been open to its needs. How much he did for the Society will never be known, for the records show but a part of his continual contributions to square debts and make up deficits. Many times his helpful self-reliance prevented collapse. Mrs. White, in memory of her husband, made a gift of his entire holdings to the Society. The Church was rededicated on October 8, 1885 as the "White Memorial Church."

Since that time, White Memorial has grown in stature and influence, serving its members and community. The 100th anniversary of the dedication of the first church was observed on October 4-6, 1942. On several occasions, a proposed merger with the Unitarian Church of Concord was considered and rejected. Today its members stand forthrightly on the principle of "the final harmony of all souls with God" as did their founding fathers. Throughout the years, its members have demonstrated their faith at home and abroad.

### M I N I S T E R S

Rev. Nathan R. Wright	1841-1842	Rev. A.P. Rein	1881-1889
Rev. Eazekiel Dow	1842	Rev. T.W. Illman	1889-1895
Rev. J.F. Witherall	1843	Dr. John Vannevar	1895-1912
Rev. Wm.H. Ryder	1843-1845	Dr. Roger F. Etz	1913-1917
Rev. Thompson Barron	1846-1850	Dr. Harold H. Niles	1917-1923
Rev. John Moore	1850-1855	Rev. Harry F. Shook	1924-1930
Rev. J.H. Moore	1855-1862	Dr. Arthur W. Grose	1931-1936
Rev. A.J. Canfield	1862-1865	Rev. J. Wayne Haskell	1937-1946
Dr. Rowland Connor	1865-1866	Rev. Philip R. Giles	1946-1949
Rev. F.E. Kittredge	1867-1869	Dr. Gustav H. Ulrich	1949-1955
Rev. E.R. Sanborn	1869-1871	Rev. Geo. Pennington	1956-1962
Rev. Everett L. Conger	1872-1880	--Interim Ministers	1962-1964
		Rev. Richard W. Knost	1964 -