

Clark University

Clark Digital Commons

Publications

Lancaster, Church of Our Father, 1919-1924

1931

The Church of Our Father, Unitarian. A Descriptive Statement Of Its History, Art, and Principles

Unitarian Universalist Church of Lancaster

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.clarku.edu/lancaster_publications

The
Church of Our Father
UNITARIAN



West Chestnut and Pine Streets
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

• • •

A DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT
OF ITS HISTORY, ART, AND PRINCIPLES

THE CHURCH OF OUR FATHER
UNITARIAN

A DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT
OF ITS HISTORY
ART AND PRINCIPLES

1931

HISTORY

ON Sunday morning, January 26th, 1902, a religious service was held in the Orange Street Opera House at Orange and Christian Streets. The preacher was the Rev. William R. Lord of Boston, Mass. He had come in response to overtures addressed to the American Unitarian Association by a group of local people who were no longer able to find a satisfactory religious experience within the churches of the traditional faith. The service was one of the first steps taken for the purpose of establishing in the city of Lancaster a liberal religious fellowship. Other services were conducted, some of

CHURCH OF OUR FATHER

which were held in the G. A. R. Hall then on the second floor of 44 North Queen Street. On Sunday morning, February 23rd of the same year, twenty-two persons attached their signatures to a statement in which they expressed their desire for a Unitarian Church in Lancaster. Interest in the movement was sustained by regular services, conducted by lay-members until a settled minister was called during the next year.

Formal organization of the church was effected on July 15, 1902, at a meeting of interested persons at the home of Mr. and Mrs. M. T. Garvin, 133 North Queen Street. The present name of the church was adopted and the society was incorporated. A Board of Trustees, composed of the following members, was elected: Warren S. Rehm, Fred S.

ITS HISTORY, ART, AND PRINCIPLES

Pyfer, I. C. Arnold, Esq., C. V. Lichty, W. H. Ebelhare, M. T. Garvin, Charles H. Tucker, J. M. Yeagley, M. D., Morris Cooper. In September of the same year the congregation began to worship in Unity Hall, 213 North Duke Street. Services were conducted there until October of 1908 when the place of meeting was changed to the Iris Club at 323 North Duke Street.

In the meantime plans had been adopted for the construction of a stone church on the corner of West Chestnut and Pine Streets. The stone was quarried from the Lindsay Quarries near Christiana, Lancaster County. In August of 1908 the corner-stone was laid, and on May 12, 1909, the church, a beautiful example of English Gothic was formally dedicated. The social room on the ground floor

CHURCH OF OUR FATHER

was named Emerson Hall in honor of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Unitarian preacher and philosopher. The Rev. Eugene R. Shippen, D.D., whose ancestors were prominent figures in the early history of our city and state, was the minister of the Church of Our Father during the period of building operations, and he and Mrs. Shippen were responsible for much of its architectural and artistic beauty. In April, 1910, the brick dwelling next to the church building on West Chestnut Street was purchased as the residence for the minister.

ITS HISTORY, ART, AND PRINCIPLES

ART

The Church of Our Father is a shrine of beauty. Very appropriately might we write over its portals — "Oh worship the Lord in the holiness of beauty." From the shrubberies that define its surroundings to the chancel within where interest focusses in worship it is an example of good taste and skilled workmanship. The artistry of its stone exterior suggests the more highly refined beauty within. To enter the church and linger in its mellow light is to feel the force of truly artistic talent combining to express itself through the medium of glass, canvas, wood, and other forms. Symbolism is freely used but it is a singular symbolism in that it repre-

CHURCH OF OUR FATHER

sents the creation of concepts distinctly Unitarian and independent of the traditional and Trinitarian standards.

The Church of Our Father has been designated, "The Chapel of The Emancipators." The key to this designation is to be found on a bronze tablet near the entrance to the nave. The tablet bears this inscription— "To the glory of the children of God. Erected July 4, 1926. To mark the sesquicentennial of the Declaration of Independence by the American Colonies and in appreciation of the valuable contributions made by Lancaster County to the American Revolution, and to memorialize the men, who in all ages and at all costs have contributed to the political, intellectual and spiritual liberation of mankind. This church pays tribute to these bearers

ITS HISTORY, ART, AND PRINCIPLES

of light and truth by placing upon its pulpit and in its windows the names and records of the foremost of the procession of the emancipators. Done by Lancaster Chapter Unitarian Laymen's League in the twenty-fifth year of the congregation."

CARVINGS

From the foregoing the reader will note that various parts and furnishings of the church are intended to honor the memory of distinguished contributors to human progress. In this sense they are memorials. Because of its central place in the worship of the church mention is first made of the pulpit. It is constructed of solid oak, and in color and substance blends with the other wood furnishings. A series of panels follows around its six enclosed sides and

CHURCH OF OUR FATHER

in each of these are two hand-carved figures of famous Unitarian preachers. One exception to this is found in the front panel in which stands alone a larger figure of Jesus of Nazareth, the greatest Unitarian of them all. Above each subject is the coat-of-arms of his respective nation, and at the side are his name, the years of his birth and death and name of the land of his birth. The subjects chosen are — Robert Collyer, England — Edward Everett Hale, America — Francis David, Hungary — William Ellery Channing, America — Michael Servetus, Spain — James Martineau, England — Fausto Paolo Sozzini, Italy — Theophilus Lindsey, England — Martin Cellarius, Germany — Rene Loyson Hyacinthe, France. Although the carving of such diminutive figures is difficult work, their

ITS HISTORY, ART, AND PRINCIPLES

finish in this case speaks of a master hand.

On the opposite side of the chancel are the lectern and minister's seat. The lectern supports separately bound copies of the Old and New Testaments. Beneath the Testaments are three figures which symbolize the affairs of business, science, industry and mechanics.

Crowning the sides of the minister's seat are two carved figures of famous translators of the Bible. On one side is the figure of William Tyndale who translated the New Testament into English for which work he lost his life. On the other side is the figure of John Eliot, apostle to the Indians and translator of the bible into the Indian language. Both men are shown engaged in their work. Enclosing the minister's seat and the chancel area is

the exquisitely carved chancel rail.

On the extreme west side of the church and immediately back of the minister's seat is the Children's Corner. This space is indicated by a low platform on which stands the baptismal font. On the upper edge of the panel back of the font is the statement, "For Unto Us a Child is Given." A small carved figure of St. John and another of St. Paul, each surmounted by a canopy are set in the panel on opposite sides.

The church contains two hymn boards—one on the wall back of the pulpit; the other on the wall back of the lectern. On the first are carved the names of the following English hymn writers — Watts, Gaskell, Adams, Barbault, Bowring. On the second are the names of American hymn writers—Hosmer, Sears, Gan-

nett, Longfellow, Johnson. All were Unitarians.

The ends of the choir stalls are ornamented with carved figures bearing musical instruments. The four figures honor four of the great composers of sacred music—Bach, Handel, Palestrina, Haydn.

In the depths of the chancel stands the communion table. On either side of it is a high wooden candlestick, each exhibiting superior craftsmanship. Back of the communion table stands the beautifully carved reredos. This feature of the church is characterized by a wealth of symbolism derived from the theme, "The Heavens Declare the Glory of God, and the Earth Showeth the Handiwork of Man."

The many carvings in the church are the work of famous carvers. The

CHURCH OF OUR FATHER

chancel rail, the font, the candlesticks and all the carved figures were done by the hand of Peter Rendl of Oberammergau, Bavaria, who was "Peter" in the Passion Play of 1930. The reredos, the lectern, the minister's chair, the canopy for the prophets and the women's memorial tablet were done in the studio of I. Kirchmayer the famous American woodcarver at Cambridge, Mass.

PAINTINGS

The central part of the reredos is a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's painting of "The Last Supper." The painting, a Florentine copy, is softly illuminated by concealed lights.

The other work of art on canvas is a copy of John Singer Sargent's contribution to the history of religion in art. This section is known as The Frieze of the Prophets. The original

ITS HISTORY, ART, AND PRINCIPLES

painting may be seen in the Boston Public Library. The local copy, which is not quite so large as the original, occupies an elevated position against the rear wall of the nave. A carved canopy serves to screen the lights by which this picture is illuminated. In the filigree fringe of the canopy the name of each prophet appears directly above his figure, and above the name is a design symbolic of the prophet's life and character. Jonah is symbolized by a ship; Daniel by a lion; Amos by a shepherd's crook, and so on.

Three flags are displayed from the canopy. In the center, in a raised position, is the American flag. On the left in horizontal position is the flag of Pennsylvania. On the right in corresponding position is the flag of Lancaster City.

WINDOWS

One of the most conspicuous and interesting features of the church is its colored glass windows set in mullions of Indiana Limestone. The chancel window is of international significance. Its central design is that of the Tree of Life referred to in the book of Revelation, the tree whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Fruits of various kinds grow upon its branches. Many of the Christian virtues are symbolized by familiar and appropriate symbols.

In the nave of the church are eighteen medallion windows. There are nine windows on each side of the church, grouped in panels of threes. The windows are memorials to great men in the history of civilization. The men memorialized are grouped according to definite classifications al-

though the choices are free from sectarian or provincial considerations. The windows on the west side in their order from front to rear are dedicated to philosophers, presidents, and scientists.

Those in the same order on the east side are to the memory of religious reformers, pioneers and eminent Unitarians. The individual members of each group are as follows. Philosophers — Socrates, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Milton. Presidents — Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson*. Scientists — Galileo, Copernicus, Newton, Christopher Columbus, Charles Darwin, Gregor Mendel. Religious reformers — William Tyndale, Martin Luther, Michael Servetus. Pioneers

* Mrs. Woodrow Wilson was present at the formal dedication of the window in memory of Mr. Wilson.

CHURCH OF OUR FATHER

—Jonathan Mayhew, William Penn, Roger Williams. Eminent Unitarians — Joseph Priestley, William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker.

An appropriate inscription, usually chosen from the writings of the subject, appears at the base of each window. The windows are made of antique glass but their designs express a distinctly modern motif. The Lincoln window will serve as an illustration. In the center of the medallion is the national shield of red, white and blue. Above is a representation of a flat boat such as Lincoln navigated on the rivers of the middle West. Beneath the shield is a log cabin, the birthplace of Lincoln. The edge of the medallion is fringed with oak leaves, symbolic of the sturdiness of Lincoln's character. In one of the lower diamond inserts are the dates

ITS HISTORY, ART, AND PRINCIPLES.

of Lincoln's presidency. In another are the sword and balances of the law. The inscription on this window is the familiar passage from the Gettysburg address — "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." This example indicates the manner in which all the other windows are done.

All windows in the chancel and nave of the church and the children's window were executed in the studios of F. X. Zettler, Munich, Germany.

Opening into the nave of the church from the rear is a large room known as The Women's Memorial. This room is also entered at the right of the vestibule. While the character of this room blends readily with the rest of the church, the room has its own distinctive atmosphere. The open fireplace with its blazing fire in winter, the furniture and hangings,

CHURCH OF OUR FATHER

suggest the comfort and congeniality of home. Above the fireplace is a large copy of the Madonna and Child by the German artist, Nathaniel Sichel, a member of the modern school of painters. This picture is hung against a background of beautiful blue drapery. The walls are further adorned with portraits of famous women and pictures of noted cathedrals of the world.

On the wall to the left of the fireplace is a carved wood tablet which reads as follows — "To the Glory of Great Women — that noble company through whom in all ages the Eternal has worked for the growth and achievement of His purposes in the triumphant destiny of all souls. Mothers of the race who have fostered the welfare of home and state and all the institutions born of faith,

ITS HISTORY, ART, AND PRINCIPLES

hope and love. Leaders of woman-kind are memorialized in the windows of this room as an example to those who may come after them."

Somewhat after the manner of the windows in the nave although in less detail, these windows serve to honor the names of twenty-four of the world's greatest women. Three names appear on each window and are grouped together by reason of a common contribution to the welfare of the race. The four windows in the front of the room are larger than those on the side. All are medallion windows. In the window to the extreme left in front are the names of Mary, Hannah and Cornelia. The title of the window is — To All Mothers Who Lend Their Sons unto The Lord. The other windows in order bear the following inscriptions and

CHURCH OF OUR FATHER

names. To All Who Gladly Learn and Teach — Anne Clough, Mary Lyon, George Eliot. To All Ministering Angels — Martha, Clara Barton, Florence Nightingale. To Those Who Break the Bonds of Affliction — Elizabeth Fry, Lucretia Mott, Harriet Beecher Stowe. The Pioneers in Suffrage — Susan B. Anthony, Julia Ward Howe, Frances E. Willard. The Pioneers in the Professions — Elizabeth Blackwell, Maria Mitchell, Anna Howard Shaw. The Struggle for Education — Sophia Smith, Alice Freeman Palmer, Anne Hutchinson. The Conquest of Nature — Priscilla Alden, Nancy Hanks, Sacajawea.*

It will be observed that the windows in The Women's Memorial contain less color, admit more light, and there-

* Justice Florence E. Allen, Ohio State Supreme Court, was the speaker at the formal dedication of these windows.

ITS HISTORY, ART, AND PRINCIPLES

fore conform more to the social and less formal atmosphere of the room. The windows were executed in the studio of Charles J. Connick of Boston, Mass.

One more window, smaller than most of the others, but necessary to complete the unity of the family structure, is the window in the church vestibule. It is the Children's Window. The colors are vivid and admirably suited to the theme. In the medallion are the figures of two children — a boy and a girl, gathering flowers. Their faces, forms and clothing are wholly life-like. Elsewhere in the window appear objects of children's play — a kite, a teddy bear, a doll, a swing, a dog and a ball. The inscription chosen for this window is Dr. James Moffatt's translation of a part of the fourteenth verse of

CHURCH OF OUR FATHER

the tenth chapter of Mark — “ Let the children come to me; the Realm of God belongs to such as these.”

The entire scheme of memorials and decorations here set forth were the conception and gift to the community of Milton Thomas Garvin, citizen and merchant of Lancaster and a member of The Church of Our Father. He was ably assisted in realizing his ideas by one of Boston's outstanding masters of architecture, Mr. Woldemar H. Ritter.

As has already been noted in the paragraph on “ History,” the large room on the ground floor is called Emerson Hall. This room is used for educational and social purposes. The portraits of many well-known Unitarians hang on its walls. A group of pictures in the southwest corner of the room recapitulates chapters in

ITS HISTORY, ART, AND PRINCIPLES

the history of the local church. The convenient and substantial construction of Emerson Hall, its fresh and well-ordered appearance, are fully in harmony with the total structure of which it is a part.

PRINCIPLES

The Church of Our Father is a constituent of the American Unitarian Association. Authority in all matters of polity resides in the congregation. No doctrinal tests are imposed upon the congregation or its individual members. The traditional creeds of Christendom are acknowledged and respected as documents of history but they are rejected as incapable of expressing a modern religious faith. Each member of the church must formulate his own creed and is expected to square his religious beliefs with the accredited results of scientific method and rational analysis.

The broad basis of our faith is expressed at three points in the church building. First, in the simple phrases cut into the large beam across the front of the church — “Love to God — Love to man.” Second, in the form around the frieze of the vestibule — “In the freedom of the truth and in the Spirit of Jesus we unite in the worship of God and the service of man.” Third, in the framed copy of the five points of Unitarianism displayed in Emerson Hall — 1. The Fatherhood of God. 2. The Brotherhood of Man. 3. The Leadership of Jesus. 4. Salvation by Character. 5. Progress Onward and Upward Forever.

The distinguishing characteristics of Unitarianism are not found in an official creed but rather in certain fundamental principles which are

herewith enumerated: 1. Perfect mental freedom rather than bondage to any one's external authority—Our Method In Religion. 2. Enlightened reason rather than conventional opinions and traditions handed down from the past—Our Guide In Religion. 3. Broad fellowship with all who seek the same ends rather than exclusion of those who differ from us in opinion—Our Spirit In Religion. 4. Self-forgetting service to all who need our help rather than the salvation of our own souls—Our Supreme Aim In Religion. 5. Character rather than belief or profession—The Decisive Test In Religion.

In this fellowship of free minds some of the greatest men and women of America have been numbered. Of our presidents, the two Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Fillmore, and Taft

have been Unitarians. The list of Unitarians among the American men of letters is a long one and includes such persons as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Cullent Bryant, James Russell Lowell, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Among eminent Unitarians of more modern times are Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University, David Starr Jordan of Leland Stanford University, Daniel Willard, president of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Of sixty-three American men and women elected to the Hall of Fame, twenty-two have been Unitarians.

If you are in sympathy with the purposes and aims of The Church of Our Father, you will be made welcome should you desire to join this fellowship. Those who have ques-

CHURCH OF OUR FATHER

tions or who desire further literature in which this liberal church and its faith are interpreted are invited to address their communications to The Church of Our Father, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

CHURCH OF OUR FATHER

tions or who desire further literature in which this liberal church and its faith are interpreted are invited to address their communications to The Church of Our Father, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.