

Unitarian Church

Hampshire at Sixteenth Streets - Arts and Crafts Style - 1914 - Architect unknown

Unitarianism first appeared in the United States in 1825...the year in which Quincy was founded...and fifteen years later, on December 29, 1840, the first Unitarian Church was founded in Quincy. The church was organized within the Second Congregational Society of Quincy, which was formed May 31, 1839, as a result of meetings by a Mr. Huntington. Assistance was given in these formative years by Dr. William G. Eliot, a Unitarian minister from St. Louis who was later the founder of Washington University in St. Louis.

The first meetings were held in James DeHaven's schoolhouse on Third Street between Maine and Hampshire Streets. The first church building was built by Robert Benneson, a founder of the church, on leased ground on the north side of Maine Street between Third and Fourth Streets in 1840 at a cost of \$1,135.69...complete! The first minister was the Rev. George L. Moore, whose first sermon was preached the first Sunday in December, 1840.

In 1850, the Second Meeting House was built on the north side of Jersey Street between Sixth and Seventh Streets at a cost on \$2,343, the ground costing \$700. The society soon outgrew this structure and a magnificent new building was built...the Third Meeting House...in 1858 on Maine Street between Sixth and Seventh Streets where the present Majestic Building is located. The cost of this structure was \$18,500. Ten years later the Sunday School room was built at the rear. This building served until 1914 when the present structure was constructed.

The present lovely stone and timber building...the Fourth Meeting House...at the northwest corner of Hampshire and Sixteenth Streets was dedicated Thursday evening, February 5, 1914. The plan of the structure is simple and straightforward. The entrance through the tower gives access to the auditorium which runs along the entire west side of the building, the chancel at the north end. To the east of this area is a large parlor with a stone fireplace and separated by folding leaded-glass doors. These are the sections open on today's tour. Other areas include a study located just north of the parlor and a meetingroom on the second level of the tower. The lower level contains another auditorium equal in size to the sanctuary with a stage at the north end. Also on this floor are Sunday School rooms and a kitchen. All of the woodwork on the main floor is oak except the organ case which is butternut. The general design of the panneling and furniture in the chancel is a modified gothic.

The organ is especially noteworthy as it is the oldest remaining organ in Quincy in its original form. It was built about 1875 when the congregation was still worshipping in the the Third Meeting House on Maine Street, and replaced a smaller pipe organ. It was moved to this location upon completion of the building. The instrument was built by the Steere Organ Company in Springfield, Mass., a very prestigious firm that built organs for many eastern churches. The organ is tracker action, meaning direct mechanical connection between the organ keys and the pipes themselves. Originally the wind was supplied to the organ by a hand-pumped blower and the knob on the console to ring the bell for the blower boy is still in place. An electric motor is now used. In 1975-76, the organ was completely disassembled for cleaning and repairs by interested church members under the supervision of a local organ technician.

Other interesting features are the stained-glass windows. The chancel window, or Founders Window, is a representation of a scene in Indian Mounds Park in Quincy. It was given to honor the founding members of the society. The memorial windows in the parlor recall events of our national heritage. Mrs. Henry Walton gave the window with the Pilgrim Fathers shown signing a covenant aboard the Mayflower. Mrs. Benjamin Berrian gave the William Penn window showing Penn's treaty with the Delawares at Shackamaxon, November, 1682.

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