

## UNIVERSALISTS AND UNITARIANS IN KENNEBEC COUNTY, MAINE

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Union, later Universalist Church, Readfield, ME

### ALBION

Albion is a small town between China and Unity on the eastern edge of Kennebec County. Its principal cash crops in the early days were hay and trees. In 1821 Sylvanus Cobb was invited to town and preached the first Universalist sermon there. Seven years later they organized enough to employ a half-time minister, Moses McFarland of Montville. They built a meetinghouse in the center of town in 1838 and a year later bought the land under it. The Eastern Association of Universalists (Maine) held their annual meetings there in 1840. The church had part time preaching from time to time until 1910. Members of course owned pews in their meetinghouse and there are records of two mortgages attached to members' pews. In 1893 the Maine Bible Society did a door-to-door religious census in Albion and found 44 Universalist families. Only the Disciples had more (73). However, the Universalist Yearbook for 1893 showed only 20 individual members so there were two or three Universalists in the town for every one in the church. In 1911 the meetinghouse burned and the 90 year history of Universalism there came to an end. Today the Advent Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses have churches in Albion. Note: Known Universalist families in this parish were "Strattons,

Fowlers, Wellingtons, some of the Crosbys,” Gen. J. Wellington, John Wellington, Dr. Archaleus P. Fuller and E. Farnham, Esq.

#### AUGUSTA (1)

The Unitarian congregation in Augusta began in typical Unitarian fashion with a split in a territorial parish of the Puritan order. Here the more liberal wing in the South Parish formed a new East Parish in 1825. While 45 miles from the sea the early members represented an elite of wealth and fashion including Daniel Cony and U. S. Senator Reul Williams, journalists, inventors and of course merchants. The first minister, William Ford, proved to be too conservative theologically and was dismissed within three years and the seventh minister, Henry Brown, was a single issue advocate of Abolition and was eased out for being too liberal politically. The much loved Sylvester Judd lasted 12 years (1840-1853) far and away the longest tenure in the nineteenth century. He died in office while preparing a sermon and lectures for a trip to Boston. While two of Maine’s Unitarian governors served before the capital moved to Augusta (William King and Enoch Lincoln) eight served after 1834 and may have attended the church while in office: Robert Dunlap, Edward Kent, John Fairfield, William Crosby, Hannibal Hamlin, Joseph Williams, Samuel Cony and William Haines.

Having been chosen as the seat of state government beginning in 1832, the city was also a center of commerce and manufacturing, connected by water to the sea and after 1851 by railroad as well. Unlike surrounding towns the population of Augusta grew between 1850 and 1900 but the church led a marginal existence with brief ministries, exhausting itself building somewhat unfortunate buildings. Its first building called “Jerusalem Church” was on the wrong side of the river. The second building (1833) known as “Christ Church” was wooden gothic, a stripped down cousin of the newer Episcopal version nearby. In the 1870s during a wedding ceremony just before the declaration of the couple “as husband and wife” the floor of this church gave way dropping several feet to the damp ground beneath. Shortly thereafter the third building (1879) was more useful but homely, also in wood (more or less “stick Victorian” without the sticks). It partially burned in 1842 and was restored enough to last until abandoned in 1977 just before the ceiling in the worship room collapsed. The fourth building on King Street was a modified brown shingle house devoid of any redeeming aesthetic features. The congregation revived enough there with ministerial and religious education leadership to bring some substance to its merger with the Winthrop Street Universalist Church in 1992.

#### AUGUSTA (2)

The year after Augusta was chosen as the new state capital the Universalists were organizing, meeting in “Bethlehem Church” after the Unitarians abandoned it for their second meeting house. Quickly they raised their own meeting house in 1835 across the river on Court Street. In thirty years the church grew with the city and a larger building was erected in 1866 on Winthrop Street, a large brick pseudo Romanesque/Italianate structure with a 135 foot corner steeple. The artist, Charles Schumacher, created a copy of Raphael’s Ascension behind the pulpit balancing the musical transcendence of the large Stevens organ opposite in a balcony. In early years of occupying this church it was nicknamed by some the “governors’ church as four of the seven Universalist governors of

Maine attended in this period: Lot Morrill, Israel Washburn, Sidney Perham and Sheldon Connor (the others were Anson Morrill, Horace Hildrath and Bert Fernald).

In 1910 the Ascension fresco was replaced by the Grace Ballard memorial stain glass window depicting the Last Supper. Eight additional side windows were given in memory of George Quinby, Cordelia Quinby, William Drew, Gustavus Robertson, Joseph Homan, Lizzie V. Hill, Josiah Hobbs and William and Sarah Stacy. A large double window over the street entrances was a memorial to Peleg Vickery. After a wind storm the steeple was lowered and later the large pipe organ was replaced by a “modern” electric one. Following the demise of the organ in time the building was torn down as well, replaced in 1976 by the present building with its windowless worship room and comfortable seats.

This church shared with Norway, Waterville, Auburn, Bangor and the Congress Square Church in Portland the distinction of being high profile centers of Universalism in Maine. As well as its location in the capital city the publication of the *Gospel Banner* biweekly newspaper brought Universalism into thousands of living rooms in Maine and elsewhere. Its masthead read “*The Gospel Banner, A Religious Family Paper: Devoted to Universalism, Moral Reform, Literature, Education, Agriculture and News.*” Its editors were all ministers of the Winthrop Street Church with one five year exception. In contrast the twentieth century has been primarily a holding action from its past until the heating oil crisis forced upon a weakened institution demolition and consolidation into a smaller building (replacing oil heat with chipped wood). The congregation was without a minister during the last four years before the Unitarians merged with them and Calvin Dame continued as minister of the new Community Unitarian Universalist Church.

#### AUGUSTA (3)

There may have been a Universalist organization in “North Augusta,” a society in “Riverside” (see also Vassalborough) and a Unitarian venture called “Greenwood Church” which apparently was an outdoor chapel. We read in an 1882 *Gospel Banner* that “Rev. J. Eugene Clarke will preach April 9<sup>th</sup>, in Riverside, at 2:30 p.m.” The 1893 door-to-door religious census of Augusta found 77 Unitarian and 183 Universalist families.

#### BELGRADE (1)

In 1827 the Unitarians and Free Will Baptists built a Union Meeting House on Belgrade Hill and the Unitarians incorporated as the North Religious Society in Belgrade. In 1831 they called together an ordaining council of the ministers of ten churches (the Harvard College Chapel, the West Church and New North Church in Boston, the First Parish in Portland, the East Parish in Augusta the First Unitarian Church in Hallowell, the Independent Congregational Society in Bangor, the First Church in Belfast, the First Parish in Kennebunk and the Second Parish in Saco). William Farmer, their first minister served from 1831 to 1837. After 1837 the Unitarians had very occasional preaching until, in 1885, the meetinghouse was sold to Benjamin Gleason in nearby Oakland for a barn. After-all, Belgrade in 1838 was a frontier town and a long way from Boston and Cambridge. The Maine Bible Society’s door-to-door religious census for 1893 found 2 Unitarian families remaining in Belgrade.

## BELGRADE (2)

When it was incorporated in 1796 Belgrade had a population under 200 but in another half century there were nearly 1800 in the town, an increase of nine times. It is very likely Universalists were a minority among those who built the first meeting house in the town in 1826 at Rockwood's Corner. The Baptists were in the majority but Universalists were able to provide for their own preaching. Universalist J. A. Henry preached there during 1838. A Universalist society there in 1840 had 12 members, use of the Union Meeting House half time and a minister, R. M. Byram, quarter time. There were 70 in the Sunday School. This society is not listed in 1850 or thereafter. However a network of families there were in contact with others nearby. In 1885 for example the *Gospel Banner* carried an obituary for Miss Sarah Giles. In 1892 the *Kennebec County History* summarized that there were no churches left in the town. The population had declined by over a third since 1850. The 1893 Maine Bible Society door-to-door census identified 16 Universalist families remaining in the town.

## BELGRADE (3)

In 1942 the Unitarians held summer services in the Belgrade Lakes Union Church, most likely for "summer folk." Probably this resulted from the efforts of a preservationist group, which obtained title to the derelict former Methodist meeting house and restored it to good repair in 1940. Apparently nothing further came of it for the Unitarians.

## BENTON

The Congregational Church at Benton Falls was built before 1829 by three families as a Union Church. It was used by Baptists, Methodists and Universalists as well as Congregationalists. It has in its steeple the last bell cast in the Revere foundry in Canton, Massachusetts. As is often the case the Universalists never organized either a society or a church in Benton but were strong enough to sponsor occasional preaching. The *Gospel Banner* noted rites of passage there, for example the marriage of George Small with Hannah Cole and the death of Daniel Sylvester in 1885. The 1893 door-to-door religious census found 4 Unitarian and 41 Universalist families living in Benton. For perspective the Congregationalists had 16, the Baptists 42 and the Methodists 62 families.

## CHINA

China has a Friends private school and strong Baptist and Methodist churches. A Universalist minister, also a doctor, A. Hatch, lived there and presumably preached in the Union Meeting House. In 1846 a Methodist minister, Nathan George in his book, *An Examination of Universalism, Embracing its Rise and Progress, and the Means of Its Propagation*, complained that the *Gospel Banner* ran a continuing ad "inviting people to patronize a rum tavern in South China" operated by A. H. Furbush in 1840. Whether despite or because of this alleged ad the Universalists managed to organize a society in South China in 1849 but nothing was heard of it afterwards. The 1893 religious census lists 1 Unitarian and 13 Universalist families.

## CLINTON

As early as 1833 there were Universalists in Clinton as M. Weeks, Esq. was agent for the periodical *The Christian Preacher* distributing a Universalist sermon each month of the year. Clinton's first church was the Union Meeting House, built in 1847 by Congregationalists, Methodists and Universalists. Pews were sold by the East Clinton Meetinghouse Association in 1852. In 1866 the Methodists built their own church and by 1890 the Congregationalists were extinct leaving the Universalists in sole possession. Preaching was very occasional though *Gospel Banners* in the 1880s took note of weddings and deaths there. In 1893 the Maine Bible Society door-to-door census found 40 Universalist and no Unitarian families in Clinton. The church was sold, moved behind Bean's store and used as a garage, destroyed by fire in 1931. Clinton families did produce two Universalist ministers: A. A. Ross, minister in Haverhill, and Hannah Powell who served six churches in Maine and one in North Carolina. In 1954 she was buried with her family back in Clinton.

## FAYETTE

The 1863 Universalist Register (Yearbook) listed Fayette as a new society but without a "settled" minister. This continued until in 1885 the society was no longer listed. There was Universalist preaching however. In the *Gospel Banner* in 1838, George W. Quinby preached in the Union Meeting House and in 1883 Costello Weston preached at the Grange Hall. He apparently returned as North Fayette in 1900 and 1901 is listed as a "mission" with C. Weston as preacher. In the 1893 door-to-door religious census Fayette had 28 Universalist families.

## GARDINER

As was often the case in Maine towns sermons were heard in school houses before meeting houses were built. The earliest Universalist sermons in Gardiner, about 1820, by Barzillai Streeter, Elias Smith and Hosea Ballou were in response to a group calling themselves "the Christian Band." A society was organized in 1835 by Hon. Parker Sheldon (convener), Major Seth Gay, Colonel John Stone, E. McLellan, Allyn Holmes, John Roberts, Joel Snow, Silas Andrews, Welcome Pincin, Abel Thompson, Moses Lord and numerous others. Soon a fine meetinghouse was erected in 1843, on the site of an early 1763 fort to protect the settlers against the Indians. One of Maine's gems, it featured a gothic revival style with fine details, Greek revival pilasters on the façade and a graceful Wren-type steeple with town clock and bell and surmounted with a sculptured Angel Gabriel weathervane. Sheldon began a popular Universalist newspaper, the *Christian Intelligencer and Gospel Advocate*, later absorbed into the *Gospel Banner*. By the time of the Civil War this church claimed 125 families and a Sunday School of 180 children making it the chief rival of the Episcopal establishment nearby on the common. With a fairly stable ministry, the addition of a vestry building in the late 1870s and 750 volumes in the Sunday school library it is not surprising that the 1893 Bible Society door-to-door religious census found 3 Unitarian and 130 Universalist families.

The twentieth century story is not as kind perhaps because there was no longer much lumber in "the lumber metropolis." In 1900 the church had 42 members, the society 116 families and there were 70 in the Sunday school. In 1901 there were 30 families and in

1902 87 families making it hard to pinpoint its real strength. But the congregation sent 40 men off to World War II (if you trust numbers ending with zero). The church often expressed pride that the poet Edwin Arlington Robinson was an almost Universalist as his pals in his youth were all Universalists. Some even detected “Universalist doctrinal influence,” or at least the minister, Elmer Colcord, did. The steeple was taken down after a wind storm and by 1941 they forgot they had given the Angel Gabriel to the Universalist Church in Belfast, urging anyone knowing its whereabouts to return it. In 1961 the congregation voted no to merger with the Unitarians and by 1964 they had joined the United Church of Christ with the leadership of William Veazie, former superintendent of the Maine State Universalist Convention. By 1975 the church announced to the newspaper that the steeple was gone, the weathervane lost, the pipe organ in disuse with an electric organ filling in, that they could no longer afford a minister and the saving remnant were meeting in the parsonage to save heating costs. It sounds as if more than the exterior of the building, then being repaired, were affected by “the ravages of modern civilization,” as the article explained.

#### HALLOWELL (1)

A brief Unitarian plant began to grow when an English Unitarian, William Hazlett (father of the essayist), was engaged to preach 14 Sundays in the new Hallowell meeting house during the winter of 1784-85. After General Sewell detected “Arminian tendencies” in his sermons Hazlett knew his time was limited in Hallowell but his motivation for traveling to New England had been the open pulpit of the Brattle Square Church in Boston. During his brief stay in Boston he had a formative influence on the young Socinian, James Freeman, as he prepared to revise the King’s Chapel prayer book. Hazlett shared with him the new Unitarian prayer book edited by Theophilus Lindsey in London. It is interesting to note that Daniel Little, first minister of the First Parish in Kennebunk, removed the trinity from its baptism covenant in 1784, perhaps another Hazlett influence for which some of us are grateful. Hazlett, however, was a British Unitarian, a bit too thoroughgoing for the Brattle Square Church. When they called Peter Thatcher, Hazlett sailed back to England. Frederick Weiss adds a successor to William Hazlett in Hallowell, Isaac Foster, for another two years. Perhaps his Arminianism was a bit too nuanced for General Sewell to detect.

The Vaughan Homestead in Hallowell is an important landmark, political, economic, cultural and religious for its Unitarian significance. Benjamin Vaughan inherited 3600 acres from his grandfather, Benjamin Hallowell. After a full liberal political career in England Vaughan arrived here at age 46 in 1797. He is one of Maine’s “founding father” types along with the likes of Henry Knox in Thomaston or George Thatcher of Biddeford, also Unitarians. He gave a marble fireplace and mantelpiece to President Washington, which can be seen at Mount Vernon, and a telescope to Jefferson ensconced at Monticello. He was a close friend of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Joseph Priestley. Portraits of Joseph Priestley and his wife can be seen in Vaughan’s library, at the time the largest in New England second only to that at Harvard. Joseph Priestley dedicated one of his books to Benjamin Vaughan, signed “your affectionate friend” in 1788. Perhaps this is why Vaughan has been called “the Bulwark of Unitarianism in America,” not because of anything he organized but by keeping a network of

correspondence and friendship guiding the fortunes of the religion in the early days of the Republic. In Maine Dr. Vaughan designed the Maine State Seal and flag. He sponsored the first agricultural fair held in what is now Manchester and organized the Maine Agricultural Society in 1818. As a doctor he instituted smallpox inoculations in Hallowell during outbreaks in Philadelphia and Boston. His correspondence reads like a who's who of early Unitarianism, lawyers John Lowell or Daniel Webster, Doctors John Warren and Jackson, Unitarian ministers Buckminster, Channing (who visited him in Hallowell) and Kirkland (President of Harvard) and of course the first five Presidents of the United States. Elizabeth and Mary Peabody lived for a year each at the Homestead as tutors of the Vaughan grandchildren. When General Lafayette visited Portland Benjamin Vaughan came to his reception, dressed of course in country clothes. An aide turned to Governor Parris and asked if he should be eased along as his conversation with the Marquis was lengthy. Parris fortunately knew to say no. Vaughan had been his close friend in France representing England and Lord Shelburne's Whig government. Benjamin Vaughan died in 1835, twelve years after the founding of Hallowell's next Unitarian venture, of a more substantial duration than the first.

#### HALLOWELL (2)

According to one Hallowell historian, South Parish in Hallowell, the Orthodox Congregational Church, was the center of stability with the Unitarians a temporary bloom of the wealthy and fashionable but considered a heresy, the Methodists considered a "wild fire," the Baptists in "disfavor," and the Universalists "outspokenly dangerous" with a questionable confidence in salvation. By mid-nineteenth century the fortunes of the city had shifted downward and the ranks of wealth and fashion thinned so precipitously that the Unitarian church evaporated.

In 1823 the Unitarians began meeting in the Academy and by 1825 organized the First Unitarian Society, the first in the state to have the word, Unitarian, in their name. During the ministry of the first minister, Stevens Everett, a striking Greek Temple was constructed featuring a recessed portico with four large Doric columns facing east on a hillside overlooking the city. Soon the church's popularity required enlarging the building. The third minister, Henry Miles, extended the congregation's influence in the region. An example of his orientation was the title of a sermon he delivered for the dedication of the Union Meeting House in Dresden in 1833: "A discourse on the Criminality of Attempts to Have Dominion Over Men's Faith." For example he asks, "To resort to art and management to prevent a knowledge of doctrines deemed heretical, is not this exercising dominion over men's faith?" Miles had a finely nuanced view of religious freedom. It was during his ministry that Benjamin Vaughan died at age 85 and within a year Miles was called to the Unitarian Church in Lowell, Massachusetts. The fortunes of the church declined so drastically during the next two ministries that preaching was only occasional after 1857 and in 1868 the meeting house was sold to the Baptists. They victorianized the exterior and added a steeple rending unrecognizable the former simple dignity of the Unitarian temple.

#### HALLOWELL (3)

According to Richard Eddy's *Universalism in America*, Samuel Baker, following his conversion from Baptist to Universalist in 1812 while minister of the South Thomaston Baptist Church, went on to preach Universalism in Hallowell. This would make him the second minister to preach Universalism in Maine. Apparently his work was forgotten a decade later as Sylvanus Cobb is credited with preaching the first Universalist sermon here in 1821. The following year Cobb returned to Hallowell to marry Eunice Hale Wait, the ceremony officiated by the Trinitarian Congregational minister. The Universalists organized a society in 1839 and a church in 1843. They constructed a classic revival building with pointed steeple in 1843. The portico departed from this style and was said to have been patterned after the entrance to Pilate's house in Jerusalem (!). With one exception this congregation had two periods of prosperity, both featuring longer settled ministries: N. Gunnison (1842-1850) and the other, J. W. Steele (1908-1913). All remaining tenures averaged two years. One of these two year ministries, of Lorenza Haynes, inspired the building of a separate Vestry building next door on Second Street in 1878. There appear to have been no settled ministers in the 1850s and 60s nor after 1926. In larger cities and towns the restless coming and going of devoted itinerant ministers likely worked against the Universalists. Clearly that was the case here, despite the congregation's reputation for having the best music in town. The church expired between 1930 and 1938. In the 1893 door-to-door religious census of the Maine Bible Society they found 9 Unitarian and 98 Universalist families in Hallowell.

#### LITCHFIELD

The story begins late in Litchfield as it was not until 1868 that a Universalist Society is listed in Yearbooks and with G. W. Quinby as minister. There were 20 families and a few years later 35 in the Sunday school. They had a quarter time use of the Union Meeting House. In 1876 a local young adult, Annette Crossman, apprenticed herself to George Quinby, preaching in Litchfield. Then she left for St. Lawrence University to study for the ministry. In 1884 the society is listed as having 42 families, in 1886 as being dormant and in 1892, not listed. As usual for rural towns the *Gospel Banner* noted that in 1880 Charles Chick died, that the twins, Hon. Josiah and Thomas True, had turned 80 in 1882 and that Dr. Daniel Bartlett's wife, Rebecca, had died. In 1883 under "Appointments" it was noted that "Bro. O. M. Hilton to preach in South Litchfield at the usual hour." The 1893 door-to-door religious census found 2 Unitarian and 45 Universalist families living in Litchfield.

#### MONMOUTH

In the North Monmouth Union Meeting House there were 52 pews so that each pew owner could decide the preacher for one Sunday each year. The Universalists fared well in this arrangement for awhile. In the 49 year history of the Universalist Society, 1853 to 1902, only two ministers were listed in Yearbooks, the omni present George W. Quinby (1866-67) and O. H. Johnson (1869-70). In 1873 there were 34 families in the society, 50 in the Sunday school and preaching half time in the Union Meeting House. By 1900 there were 12 families and occasional preaching. The 1893 Maine Bible Society door-to-door religious census found 29 Universalist families.

#### MOUNT VERNON

A Universalist society was organized in Mt. Vernon in 1831. In the 1840s a Universalist minister, J. L. Stevens, was living in the town. The *History of Kennebec County* gives us an idea of its relative strength: “The present Baptist church was built in 1849 by Methodists, Universalists and Freewill and Calvinistic Baptists, as a union meeting house. In 1886 the Calvinistic Baptists obtained control of the house.” An ad placed in the *Gospel Banner* is important more from the fact that the *Gospel Banner* was chosen to place it than for the content of the ad itself:

NOTICE. Committed to pound this day by Abner Cottle of Mount Vernon, one chesnut colored horse with black mane and tail, with a white spot in the forehead. Said horse was taken up doing damage in the enclosure of said Abner Cottle, for which he demands three dollars and cost of impounding. Said horse is supposed to be the property of John Tilton of said Mt. Vernon; he is hereby requested to pay damage and cost, and take said horse away. Charles Sylvester, Pound keeper. Mount Vernon, July 14, 1838.

We don't know the religion(s) of the three parties mentioned but can imagine several scenarios. The 1893 door-to-door religious census found 43 Universalist families.

## OAKLAND

Oakland was once known as the West Parish of Waterville and much of its Universalist history is associated with the congregation in Waterville. As early as 1802 George Barnes preached here in the West Meeting House. It is clear that Oakland was a strong Universalist society as the 1810 and 1813 meetings of the Eastern Association of Universalists met in West Waterville, then called “back Waterville.” Sylvanus Cobb regularly preached in both town meeting houses, west and east, when he was resident minister, 1820-1828. This arrangement continued with Cobb's successor, Calvin Gardner, until 1837 when Oakland called R. M. Byram, their first resident minister. In 1833 the Universalists together with Free Will and Calvinist Baptists built a Union Meeting House. The following year they organized a formal society and in 1854 a church. In 1859 the Universalists bought out the Baptist pew owners giving them sole possession of their meeting house. Following the Civil War they seemed to have entered a slump of activity until 1876 when they reorganized the Sunday School. This appears to be their key asset for a century until the last 40 years. Three ministers have died in office, two in the same year (1871) but the church seemed to have prevailed strong. Their strength is reflected in the 1893 door-to-door religious census which found 7 Unitarian and 129 Universalist families in Oakland, more than any other religion in the town. In 1879 the church was remodeled. In 1893 the Parish House was built. In 1904 a parsonage was built. In the period following World War I the church was closed for four years, a real period of weakness. In 1922 the parsonage was sold and an apartment carved out of the Parish House upstairs for the minister. In 1927 the worship space was repaired, memorial windows added and a new pipe organ installed. Beginning in 1931 the church developed a steady strength with the leadership of its minister, Will Kelley, and a continuing strong religious education program. This pattern continued for the next forty years in a holding pattern with settled ministers for the most part. By 1990 the pattern had thinned out enough to be considered a weakness. All in all we can see Oakland as a Universalist success story at rural ministry but it remains to be seen how long the story may continue. Rural churches oscillate between steady strength and times

when churches lose their way and even close for a time. Oakland has been unusual with more of the former than the latter.

## READFIELD

The main problem in Readfield for the Universalists was the Methodists who organized three societies and a well known secondary school on Kent's Hill. First in 1818 a United Universalist Society was set up among three towns, Readfield, Wayne and Winthrop. A Universalist Society organized for Readfield in 1823 and in 1827 together with the Methodist Society at Readfield Corner built the Union Meeting House, the Brick Church. The omnipresent William Drew of Augusta preached at the corner stone laying ceremony and Sylvanus Cobb preached the Dedication sermon with a Methodist giving the Prayer of Dedication. In 1828 George Bates was engaged to preach for the Universalists half time and Frederick Hodson in the early thirties. In 1839 the Universalist Society had 120 members. The following several decades seem to have been rather fallow until in 1867 the artist Charles Schumacher was engaged to render the interior in trompe l'oeil (trick of the eye) painting, said to be Schumacher's masterpiece. It is hypothesized that Anson Morrill noticed his fellow Universalist and governor worshipped in a frescoed church (First Universalist at Norlands) and would have no less for his own. The Meeting House had undergone major repairs and in 1869, Mrs. Asa Gile donated the old Smith Mansion for a Universalist Vestry. By 1875 the Methodists felt they needed a separate building and placed it just below on the Union Church lot as the main church was widely becoming known as the Universalist Church. There now followed another fallow period with occasional preaching. For over ten years Yearbooks listed a steady 25 family society. Indeed in the 1893 door-to-door religious census found the Methodists in town (three societies) had 146 families and the Universalists (1 society) 46 families. Part-time ministers continued until in 1910 Readfield became a summer congregation. The Tebbetts family donated a clock for the church in 1927 and in 1947 a small trust fund to keep it running. For many years Fred S. Walker of Pawtucket, R.I. was the summer preacher as the congregation saw his first wife die and were equally fond of the second, while they watched his children grow to adulthood. The Society was last listed in Yearbooks in 1951. In 1952 all former pew owners were notified, the Universalists and Methodists signed off all claims and a community group was organized to repair and maintain the building. In 1982 the Union Church was added to the national Registry of Historic Places.

## SIDNEY

The principal crop in Sidney was hay and the Universalists grew their share of it with a typical rural church. Seldom did a Universalist minister live in town and never was a minister full-time. Sylvanus Cobb was the second Universalist to be ordained in Maine. He was on the way from Winthrop to Waterville in 1820 when "Br. Glidden" suggested he might visit a well known Universalist, Capt. Nathan Sawtelle, in Sidney. His narrative is typical of early Universalism:

The badness of the roads made riding slow and tedious. The shoes of my borrowed colt were smooth; the recently fallen snow and sleet had made the roads slippery; and the riding upon saddle was attended with some danger. I became uncommonly weary before I reached Capt. Sawtell's, and my spirits were sorely

depressed. The prospect appeared dark; and clouds of gloom hung over my mind. I saw no beings but strangers; and none ahead knew that I was coming, --or even that such a person existed. (It was a new thing to go out into a strange country, and introduce myself as a preacher of the gospel. There was no denominational paper circulating in the State through which to notify appointments or proposed tours, or even to announce to the members of societies, and the believers scattered abroad, the advent of the new preacher of the gospel. Nor was there even an older preacher in the State who could be of service to me in the way of my introduction to a field of labor.) To return to my narrative: --I inquired impatiently and looked wistfully for the residence of Capt. Sawtell. But when I had turned up into the land leading to his house, I had sad misgivings; and seeing the old gentleman withing up the stakes of his pigs' pen, with a stern countenance and a face unshaven for the week, I expected a repulse. The following colloquy ensued: --

“Is this Capt. Sawtell?”

“My name is Sawtell.”

“My name is Sylvanus Cobb. I am on my way to Waterville to spend the Sabbath, and Br. Glidden of Winthrop, advised me to call upon you.”

“What! are you a preacher?”

“I have preached a little.”

“Well, come, get off your horse and come in, and spend the night with me. You will find homely fare. But it will be good enough for you if you are a Universalist preacher.”

I can report nothing more that was said, in detail, for I was enchanted with the scenes of a new state of being. The unstudied, unpolished address of this old Saint, which was the outgushing of the genuine spirit of confidence and love, toned by emotions of joy at the appearance of a young minister of the universal and efficient Saviour, instantly dissipated the cloud from my mind, banished my distrust, and made me a lively child at home. It would be difficult to decide which of us two was made most happy by our meeting together, and by the conversation of the evening. It was a pleasant occasion to me.

Sawtelle was one of four in Sidney who helped begin the Waterville church as a regional enterprise in 1826. In 1840 he was among the founders of a society in Sidney.

In 1845 the Universalists built their meeting house in Sidney Center near the Town Hall. In 1851 a Sunday school was founded. Yearbooks are difficult to trust at times. In 1872 there were 14 families, 80 in the Sunday school and a minister. In 1873 there were 40 families and no minister. By 1876 the church was dormant. Then in 1881 they had a half-time minister. Subsequent entries claim from 25 to 40 families with quarter-time to half-time preaching. In 1893 the Maine door-to-door religious census listed 65 Universalist families in Sidney. Beginning in 1899 the church was listed as a summer congregation until its last listing in 1910 as dormant. In 1937 the meeting house burned.

## VASSALBOROUGH

The nineteenth century saw a good deal of Universalist preaching but no organized society. From the 1830s through the 1880s Universalists preached occasionally in the Village, in Riverside, in North Vassalborough, in East Vassalborough and in

Vassalborough Outlet. The town had two union meeting houses, school houses and a Grange Hall. Names included C. S. Hussey, Eldridge Pollard, George Thomas, F. W. Baxter and George Robbins. The Maine Bible Society door-to-door religious census found 2 Unitarian and 34 Universalist families.

#### VIENNA

The town began with the name, Goshen, becoming Vienna later. It was a Methodist stronghold at the turn of the nineteenth century. Restless with Methodist discipline a group separated, calling itself “the Christian Band.” Among the separatists were some holding Unitarian views. The 1893 the door-to-door census found 1 Unitarian and 18 Universalist families.

#### WATERVILLE (1)

While Thomas Barnes (“father Barnes”) gave a sermon in West Waterville as early as 1802 it was not until Sylvanus Cobb was invited to Waterville to be its resident minister (1820-1828) that a society was formed. The Eastern Association of Universalists met in Waterville in 1823. A sermon by Hosea Ballou (“father Ballou”) rallied some on the edge of the movement to the cause, notably Jediah Morrill, prominent lay leader for the next half century. Three years later in 1826 the society organized as a church (the first in Maine) with 20 male members eleven from Waterville, 4 from Sidney, 4 from Fairfield and 1 from Winslow. From this beginning a society was organized in Sidney in 1840 and another in Fairfield in 1840. Waterville began then as a regional church and returned to that orientation in recent decades.

Sylvanus Cobb supplemented his income by preaching in a wide circuit east of Waterville, the first Universalist minister to preach east of the Kennebec River. Towns regularly visited included Albion, Unity, Washington, Union, Appleton, Hope, Camden, Lincolnville Center, Duck Trap, East Thomaston (now Rockland), West Thomaston, Warren, Bristol, Wiscasset, Bath, Bowdoinham and Dresden. Seventeen Universalist Societies eventuated from this circuit. He also made a missionary tour further eastward, through Searsmont, Palermo, Montville, Belfast, Hampden, Cranberry Harbor, East Machias, Eastport, Calais and into St Stephens and St. Davids, New Brunswick. When Cobb accepted a call to the Malden, MA, First Parish, Maine lost one of its most energetic missionaries. Quite remarkable is the process documented by Cobb that he only spoke in places where he was first invited to preach. In 1854 he returned to the State to attend the Maine Convention meeting in Norway. The meeting had been rather flat and the sermons had been “finely written essays. . . but there had been not one particle of that gospel power that moves the soul to joy, and lifts the heart up nearer to God and heaven.” Ezra Beal was presiding and looking at his watch saw it was still early. He invited Cobb to speak. Cobb then electrified the gathering for an hour with an “old fashioned” Universalist sermon.

In 1832 the Waterville congregation dedicated its present meeting house with George Bates of Turner preaching the dedication sermon. Their building is a finely proportioned example of the transition from classic revival to early wooden gothic with pointed windows and tower arches. An organ was added in 1852. The congregation sustained

five resident ministers between 1833 and 1873 after which preachers were shared with other societies nearby in Oakland, Fairfield and Bangor. The church closed twice in the 1870s. This tenuous period is generally credited to the organization of the Unitarian Society in Waterville in 1859 which soon grew to considerable strength and influence. In addition a secondary school founded by the Universalists, the Waterville Liberal Institute, founded in 1835, was closed in 1857 as the public schools were expanded in the town. Then in 1894 when the church was severely damaged by fire, paradoxically the congregation rallied, turning the building to face south into the triangle, digging a cellar beneath it, adding three new memorial windows and purchasing a new organ. The Unitarian Society extended the hospitality of use of their worship space during construction. A strengthened congregation then went into a plateau and in the mid 1920s seemed to lift to another plateau for two more decades. In the midst of this the Unitarian society federated into the Universalist church with its last minister, Larence Abbott, as minister during 1935 and 1936. The merger does not seem to have had much effect. From 1935 to 1990 the congregation experienced a gradual decline. With the ministry of Severn Towl the congregation has attracted new families and developed a new balance of programming for all ages.

#### WATERVILLE (2)

Former president of Colby College and minister of Waterville's First Baptist Church, David Sheldon had left the Baptists while serving a church in Bath for a brief four year ministry with the ill-fated Unitarian Church in Bath. In 1859-60 he delivered two sermons in Waterville and in 1862 became the first minister of the First Unitarian Society. In 1866 they constructed a major church building typical of the period with Edward Everett Hale delivering the Dedication sermon. Nearly all the pews were sold with donations in addition of a pulpit Bible by Colonel Greene of Winslow, a clock inside by J. Crooker to keep the minister on time and a steeple clock by Samuel Appleton to keep parishioners on time with a bell to seal the deal donated by Alben Emery. The major donor however was Sarah Ware. First she donated a "sweet voiced" Hook and Hastings organ in 1881. Then in 1888 she purchased a parsonage for the minister. Finally she gave the "Ware Parlors," a vestry building replete with frescoing by the well known Strauss Brothers in Boston. After the decade of the 1880s the congregation was none the worse for Ware. Indeed it is difficult to fathom what went wrong. One symptom of weakness may be indicated in the length of ministerial tenures: 16 ministers for 75 years. Unitarians have tended to be more dependent upon a continuity of preaching than the Universalists. In 1893 the door-to-door religious census found 84 Unitarian and 92 Universalist families in Waterville, not a weak base upon which either church could build.

#### WAYNE

It is very possible the Universalists owned a share of a union meeting house in Wayne as we read in the Kennebec County History that the Baptists built a meeting house "with another denomination." In 1818 the Universalists organized a Union Society including in it the towns of Wayne, Readfield and Winthrop. There was enough of Universalism in the town to bring the annual meeting of the Eastern Association to Wayne. Sylvanus Cobb gave the sermon, subsequently printed in 1825. In 1833 we find C. Smith, a

Universalist minister (probably the Comfort Smith mentioned in the History of Winthrop) and again in 1850, T. J. Carney, both living in Wayne Village. In 1838, in the column "Appointments," we find George Thomas preaching in Wayne. In 1893 the Maine door-to-door religious census found 3 Unitarian and 29 Universalist families living in Wayne.

#### WINSLOW

Winslow's Unitarian story began and ended very early. In 1794 the town built a meeting house and the following year ordained Joshua Cushman to be the town minister. He had served in the Revolution for four years, with General Washington at Valley Forge and was present at the surrender of Burgoyne in Yorktown. Usually graduates of Harvard were reluctant to head for the Maine frontier. Joshua Cushman was a pioneer in church covenants as well and Winslow had a Unitarian start. It took the inhabitants nearly 20 years of sermons to notice and act upon the problem. In 1814 the town voted \$1,200. for Cushman not to preach, dissolving his contract as town minister. He went on to serve in the legislatures of Massachusetts and then Maine and three terms representing the Kennebec District in the U. S. Congress. A century after Cushman's ordination there were still 8 Unitarian families in Winslow as well as 15 Universalist families found by the 1893 door-to-door religious census conducted by the Maine Bible Society.

#### WINTHROP

Part of the Union Society organized in 1818 with Universalists in the towns of Wayne and Readfield, by 1836 they were able to organize their own First Universalist Society in Winthrop with G. W. Quinby as part-time minister. In 1838 the congregation ordained Giles Bailey, the same year they dedicated their own meeting house "opposite the Methodist Chapel." For a half century the congregation continued uneventfully until in a fallow period they found the Unitarians in charge in the Universalist meeting house. Activity was fairly intense with the new name, Church of the Unity, for about 7 years with 4 Unitarian ministers (Thatcher, Burrington, Gilmore and Pugsley), 1887-1894. A Unitarian straggler, A. E. Russell, came along in 1903-4 with high hopes but left after a year for "greener" fields for his labors. The church was not listed in Universalist yearbooks between 1891 and 1898 but reappeared in somewhat weakened condition, again with part-time ministers until from 1906 on it is listed with both "dormant" and "supplies" or "Superintendent" as ministers. At last in 1925 the listing disappears. The podium traveled for use of the town moderator at town meetings. The building was used as a movie theater. Unitarians and Universalists accused each other of "stealing" a church. The Unitarian rationale was "Universalist apathy." The Universalist rationale was simply that the church was in one of its periods of "occasional" preaching. Understanding the dynamics of rural church life has never been a Unitarian forte. The 1893 door-to-door religious census found 24 Unitarian and 53 Universalist families in Winthrop.

