


A Self-Guided Tour of Unity Church by Richard Hill



Memorials to two who died in World War I include that of **George Shepard** (1896-1918), for whom the local American Legion post was named, first Easton boy killed in the war and **Oliver Ames** (1895-1918) of the "Fighting 69th," who was killed by a sniper in France.

The memorial to the left of the church entrance is to **Sarah Ames Witherell** (1814-1886), sister of the donor of the church.



The Rose Window over the south door is by **Charles Connick** in 1925 in memory of **Rebecca Caroline Blair Ames** (1835-1893), wife of **Frederick Lothrop Ames**. This window is in the Renaissance style of stained glass with but a single layer that admits light as long as there is light in the sky. In 1925, Charles Connick wrote of his window: "The central theme of this window is the protecting and sustaining power of divine love... In the central medallion of the "Rose Window," is the prince of guardian spirits, the arch -angel, Raphael, leading the young Tobias, who has a fish in his hand. This has reference to the apocryphal book in the Old Testament called Tobit. The story tells how Tobit, a pious Jew of the tribe of Naphtali while a captive in Ninevah, fell into disfavor through some of his customs.. He was unfortunate enough to lose his eyesight in an accident. So he sent his son, the little Tobias to Media to recover a loan which he had made to a compatriot there.

While his son was on the journey, he was accompanied by Arazias, really the Archangel, Raphael. During the course of this journey, he killed a monster fish in the Tigris, preserving his heart, liver, and gall. While in Media, he married his cousin. During the attendant festival, he secured the loan, and the three returned to Ninevah, where Tobit's sight was restored by means of the fish gall. This subject has been used in art throughout the ages to represent the Christian, the true believer, guided and guarded through his life-pilgrimage by the angelic monitor and minister of divine mercy and protection.

On either side of this group are the angels of spiritual sustenance, carrying the symbols, bread and wine. As elements of the border immediately around this central medallion, are six seraphim, red, and as many cherubim, blue symbolizing Divine Love and Wisdom, and twelve stars for the twelve expressions of Divine Love in the human heart. Two other groups of twelve stars in the triangular openings of the tracery, and in the four bottom lancets echo the same thought. An additional seraph was placed at the very top of the window in order that there might be seven in all. This very conscious attempt to have seven is doubtless for two reasons: first, in the attempt to bring in the sacred number seven, which played such an important part in pre- Christian history, and second, to symbolize the seven gifts of the spirit, mentioned by Isaiah.

Built in 1875 at a cost of \$100,000, Unity Church was designed by Gothic Revivalist **John Ames Mitchell** (1845-1918), nephew of donor, **Oliver Ames** (1807-1877). and donated to the Unitarian Society of North Easton in 1875. Historian and first Unity Church Minister, **William Chaffin** wrote, "the stone, a native seinite was quarried a few hundred feet south of the church, the rear walls, a hard dark trap rock taken from a dike near the quarry." Rarely mentioned in church descriptions is the extensive use of the quatrefoil which seems to be a prominent motif appearing in the steeple, the truss work, the doors and windows. It surmounts the steeple and is carved into the walls. It focuses a central window and adorns every pew.



The exterior with its tall, graceful spire presents a multitude of faces. From the south, the rose window and porte cochere lend an upward lift. The rather horizontal view from the back still leads the eye aloft to the multi shaped slate and the iron tracery atop the roof. A view from the north places one in a land of make believe with the pagoda like cupola balancing the mass of the sanctuary.

The neighboring parsonage, now officially "The Holly House" in honor of retired minister **Holly Bell** was designed by **William Robert Ware** and **Henry Van Brunt** in 1878 in a Gothic Revival Style with gingerbread like jig saw patterns. This spacious and comfortable home is now the church office and our religious education center.



The Village Cemetery was begun in September of 1875. It contains five acres within a seven foot high stone wall. It is carefully laid out in drives and walks. The eastern end with its curving walks that follow the contours of the land has evidence of having been designed by **Frederick Law Olmsted**. Here are the Washington Monument like shaft of **Congressman Oakes Ames**, the weeping woman over **Governor Oliver Ames**, the bronze orchids of Oakes and **Blanche Ames**, the St. Gaudens oak leaves around the stone of **Frederick Lothrop Ames**, and the yacht and plane of his grandchildren. There are a stone tree trunk, a trumpet, and the boulder marking **Reverend William Chaffin**. The oaks, rhododendrons, lilacs, and flowering bushes surround the diverse stones. And atop "Misery Hill," are glacial scour marks that record the passing of the last ice age.

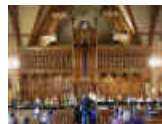
William Ladd Chaffin (1837-1923) became the minister of the Unitarian Society of North Easton on January 1, 1868 and remained until his death in 1923. His 55 years of service to this church is longer than



any minister in this denomination has served a single parish. He was a Victorian "Renaissance Man:" geologist, botanist, historian, biographer, author, genealogist, educator, and theologian. His 838 page 1886 History of Easton is remarkable. A memorial to Chaffin and his wife, **Rebecca Huidekoper Chaffin** is on the right side of the church next to the door leading to the former chapel, now the Chaffin Room in his honor. Rebecca (1840-1922) is recalled as a kindly, happy, busy nurturing woman.



Originally heavily stenciled, with colorful walls, the front of the original church focused on a quatrefoil window containing the white dove of peace. Above is a large cross with an angel at its base. Angels playing musical instruments project from the ends of the front beams. The 1875 E. and G. G. Hook and Hastings eighteen stop pipe organ dominated the right of the church with its brightly stenciled pipes in a black walnut case.



The church interior was redesigned in 1895 by Henry Vaughan and the ornate frieze or pulpit screen including twenty-two oaken seraphim (Angels who play music), a memorial to **Frederick Lothrop Ames** (1835-1893) was carved by **John Kirchmayer** (1860-1930), an artist employed by Irving and Casson and W.F. Ross. Born in Bavaria, and educated at the University of Munich, Kirchmayer was called "one of the most remarkable sculptors of wood..." in a 1930 Boston Globe article. His friend, architect **Stanford White** called him "a big, raw boned, heavily bearded Bavarian." Other works of Kirchmayer can be found in the Rogers Unitarian Church of Fairhaven, Massachusetts, the Chapel at St. Paul's School in Concord, NH, All Saints Church in Ashmont, St. Patrick's Church in New York, and the Chapel of the United States Military Academy at West Point.



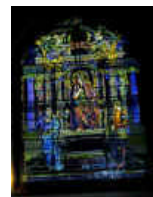
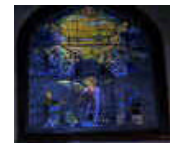
To the left of the pulpit is an arch designed by **Henry Hobson Richardson** (1838-1886) holding a bust of Unity Church's donor, **Oliver Ames** (1807-1877). This bust was carved by Truman Howe Bartlett, a noted sculptor of Abraham Lincoln and instructor of modeling at MIT. Bartlett also did the bust of Oliver Ames (1779-1863) on Oliver Street and the bust in the Ames Free Library.

To the left of the bust is a memorial to **Oliver Ames** (1779-1863), founder of the North Easton shovel empire that financed the church and several other buildings in town.



Directly across the transept from Oliver's bust is the memorial to his wife, **Sarah Lothrop Ames** (1812-1890). This tablet is a copy of the memorial by Queen Victoria to her uncle, the King of Hanover in the chapel of St. George's Windsor, England. It was Sarah who endowed the music trust fund which presently finances all of the music at Unity Church. This fund has since been improved by Mary Ames Frothingham, Nancy Ames, Elise Ames Parker, William Parker, and David Ames.

The transept windows are both of **John LaFarge** (1835-1910). The west window, "*Angel of Help*", donated by **Frederick Lothrop Ames** (1835-1893) was installed in 1886 in memory of **Helen Angier Ames** (1836-1882) his only sister who had died suddenly at age 46. Helen had been a pioneer and staunch supporter in the move to build a library in North Easton. Painter, muralist, and stained glass artist LaFarge created a double design using a background of broken glass jewels fused together and bending light from a deep blue to a fiery yellowish white, he placed a jeweled sarcophagus rising to heaven amidst a team of angels. Below he centered an Angel of Help emptying her pitcher into vessels of "Need" and "Sorrow." This angel is central to the theology of this church in its efforts to reach out to all in need. Art historian Henri LaFarge in 1981 called this window, "my grandfather's masterpiece." as it exploits every technological means to artistic expression. This window was restored by Victor Rothman in memory of David Ames in the fall of 2001.



The east window, LaFarge's largest was commissioned by botanist **Oakes Ames** (1874-1950) and his cousin, the Broadway play producer, **Winthrop Ames** (1870-1934) in memory of their grandfather, **Congressman Oakes Ames**, and their fathers, **Governor Oliver Ames** and **Oakes Angier Ames**. Here LaFarge has enthroned the "*Figure of Wisdom*," a woman who he based on a Madonna, making her human with her halo becoming the back of her chair. The verse from Proverbs 3:15-17 surrounds the window. "Wisdom is more precious than rubies and all the things that thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand and in her left riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace." The elderly gentleman, an allegorical figure for "Length of days" is from a Donatello relief and the young warrior, an allegory of "riches and honor" is from a Mantegna painting. The underside of the warrior's tunic is exposed in a rich blue. "Only my grandfather would have thought of that," remarked **Henri LaFarge** as he photographed the window in 1981. This window was restored by **Victor Rothman** in 1998.