

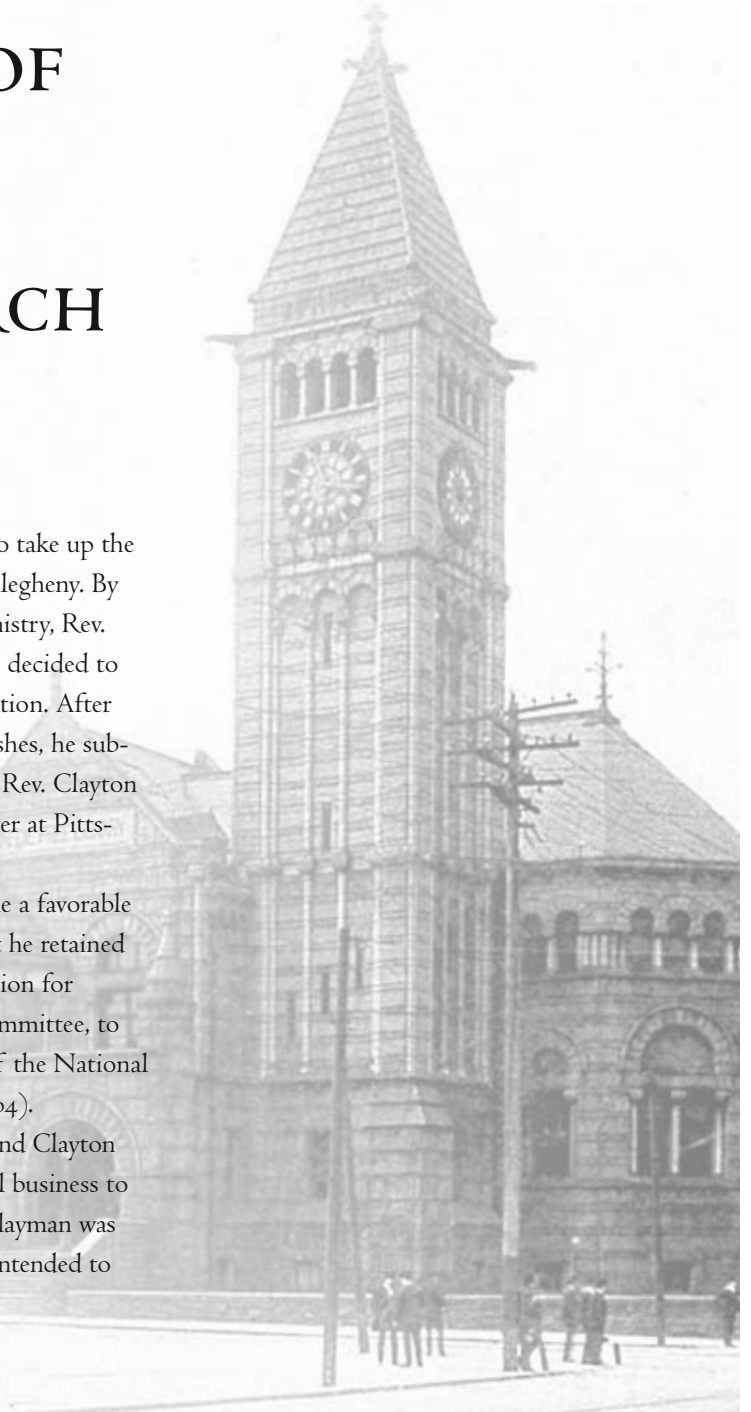
EARLY HISTORY OF THE NORTH SIDE UNITARIAN CHURCH

BEGINNINGS

Reverend Thomas Clayton arrived in Allegheny City in 1901 to take up the pastorate of the First (Pilgrim) Congregational Church of Allegheny. By the winter of 1904, after eighteen years in Congregational ministry, Rev. Clayton's theological views had modified to the extent that he decided to seek ministerial fellowship in the American Unitarian Association. After First Congregational Church released him with their good wishes, he submitted an application for Unitarian fellowship on April 27th. Rev. Clayton also began communicating with Rev. L. Walter Mason, minister at Pittsburgh's First Unitarian Church.

Rev. Clayton preached at First Unitarian in May, and made a favorable impression—even though it was observed by Rev. Mason that he retained “the tenderness...of the old faith” for the Bible. His application for fellowship was approved on June 3rd by the Middle States Committee, to take full effect six months later in accordance with the vote of the National Conference (from a notice in the *Christian Register*, June 23, 1904).

Rather than seek a Unitarian pulpit in another city, Reverend Clayton decided to stay at Allegheny. He obtained a position in a local business to support his family in the interim, and although his salary as a layman was purported to be more than he earned as a minister, he clearly intended to return to the work of ministry.





Allegheny Post Office from Ober Park

A LIBERAL PRESENCE

In 1905, Rev. Clayton began the planning necessary to organize a Unitarian society in Allegheny City. Working with Rev. Mason, a first meeting was arranged for the evening of Sunday, December 5th. A group of Allegheny residents sympathetic to liberal religion was invited and they were joined by Rev. Mason and members of the First Church congregation. The meeting was held in Allegheny's Carnegie Music Hall on East Ohio Street. At that first gathering, tentative plans were discussed, several names were added to a covenant book and services were scheduled for subsequent Sunday evenings.

At the meeting on January 21, 1906, the group formed a temporary organization to comply with an Allegheny City ordinance requiring that the auditorium be rented only to organized religious bodies. Reverend Clayton was appointed Treasurer, and Elizabeth Hampson, M.D., Secretary. The name *Second Unitarian Church* was chosen. The meeting was continued three days later at Dr. Hampson's residence on Monterey Street, where a temporary Board of Trustees was elected, including Dr. Robert H. Gilliford as President.

On May 6, 1906, Dr. Gilliford called the meeting of the Second Unitarian Church to order and Rev. Charles E. St.-John, Secretary of the American Unitarian Association, made a brief address in which he assured the group that the AUA and its officers would support their efforts. A motion was made by Rev. Clayton and seconded by founding member, W. R. Negley, to make the temporary organization "regular and permanent." Forty-three charter members were enrolled.

The presence of a new Unitarian Church did not go unnoticed in the other Allegheny churches. Rev. Charles Blodgett of the North Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church (Allegheny United Methodist) made the front pages of the newspaper on November 8 and 12, 1907 when, as part of his campaign to enforce the blasphemy laws, he attacked Unitarian ministers. Indeed, he specifically singled out "certain men who preach in Carnegie Hall, Allegheny." Rev. Clayton, being one of the ministers referred to, submitted a strong reply, which was also published in the newspaper.

BUILDING A CHURCH

The Sunday evening Services continued to be held in the Carnegie Hall, with members of the First Unitarian Church attending and lending their support. Carnegie Hall could not serve the congregation indefinitely, so in December 1906, a lot was purchased at the corner of West North Avenue and Resaca Place (through the efforts of Dr. Gilliford) for the purpose of erecting a church building.

In the spring of 1907, the congregation incorporated in the Commonwealth as the North Side Unitarian Church, and secured the services of architect Robert Maurice Trimble. For Trimble, whose family was active in Allegheny City politics and business, this would be the first of a series of important local commissions. Drawings were presented to, and approved by, the congregation in September 1907. Dr. William Judson Riggs, as a member the building committee, worked over the next two years to promote the new church building.

At the Annual Congregational meeting in March 1909, the “New Church” project was discussed, the “blueprints” displayed, and an appeal made by Reverend Clayton for contributions to the building fund. Dr. Riggs stated that the construction contract would be “let out” about the first of July. Unfortunately, Dr. Riggs died on May-31st and never saw the church building that he helped to make a reality.

Ground was broken for the new church on July 8, 1909. The building permit, issued in Pittsburgh (Allegheny City having finally been annexed in 1907 after years of resisting the takeover), was recorded July-22. The permit indicated that there would be built a stone church with slate roof, sized 41-feet wide by 73 feet deep, one story in height, J.-M.-Poorbaugh as builder, and all at a cost of \$15,000 (bringing the total, with property, to \$25,500).

The Services dedicating the new church building took place on a cold Sunday, February 6, 1910. The guest speakers at those Services included Rev. F. A. Tischer of Homestead; Rev. George H. Badger, Secretary of the American Unitarian Association; Rev. Mason of First Church; Rev. F.C. Southworth, President of Meadville Theological School (Unitarian) and Rev. Albert C. Dieffenbach of the North Side’s Church of the Ascension (Reformed) representing the liberal churches of Pittsburgh.

THE NEW MINISTER

Shortly after the church was dedicated, Rev. Clayton tendered his resignation. During the time that the church sought a new minister, church organizations did much to keep the congregation vital. The newly-formed Women’s Alliance engaged in active fund raising, including bake sales in the Allegheny Market House at Federal and Ohio Streets.

Reverend Charles E. Snyder was called to be minister from the church in Franklin, Pennsylvania, and was installed in January 1911. Rev. Dr. Samuel Eliot of the AUA came from Boston to officiate. Church membership was 70 adults when Rev.-Snyder arrived, and it is a testimony to his great abilities that in 1916 membership was listed in the 200s.



Allegheny City’s Carnegie Library and Music Hall from Ober Park



CARNEGIE LIBRARY



The new church building: Above, Trimble's watercolor rendering of the proposed building in 1907; Below, the church as completed in 1910

In early 1914, William “Billy” Sunday, the former baseball player turned evangelical Presbyterian minister, came to Pittsburgh on his revivalist tour. A tent tabernacle was set up in Oakland which was packed to capacity every day of his seven-week stay. A particular target of Sunday’s preaching was the Unitarian movement. During a previous revival in the West, Sunday actually had incited the residents of one town to run the Unitarians out.

Anticipating the evangelist’s arrival in Pittsburgh, Rev. Snyder began a series of sermons which packed the North Side church to the doors. It was reported that he never spoke flippantly of Mr. Sunday—and never referred to him as Billy—but that his sermons were caustic and to the point. One such sermon bore the title *The Diplodocus & Mr. Sunday*. The result of Rev. Sunday’s revival work was not what he had anticipated, for both the North Side and First Unitarian Churches experienced a great increase in their membership from the episode.

Rev. Snyder was also a popular speaker outside of his pulpit and during the summer of 1915 he was invited to lecture in the Chautauqua circuit around Pittsburgh. After several speaking engagements, he arrived in Washington, Pennsylvania and began a series of lectures, which were reviewed favorably in the local press. It was then discovered that he was a *Unitarian* minister. The management was given notice that unless they dropped him from the circuit, the “simple people from the countryside,” under instructions from their ministers, would withdraw their patronage from the program. Rev. Snyder was forced to cancel and returned to Pittsburgh.

During Rev. Snyder’s ministry the church was an open forum where the congregation heard from socialists, Suffragettes, Theosophists, Spiritualists and many others—all in the spirit of free inquiry. A number of the leading Unitarian ministers spoke from the pulpit as well.

Rev. Snyder tendered his resignation on May 20, 1917 to take up the work of the First Unitarian Church of Sioux City, Iowa. His last sermon at the church was titled *Comrades of God, Fight On! Fight On!* The farewell banquet in his honor was held at the Fort Pitt Hotel, and was attended by representatives from City Council, The University of Pittsburgh, and various other civic organizations. Most importantly, ministers representing several denominations attended, testifying to the measure of acceptance and respect that Rev. Snyder had earned for himself, the Unitarian movement, and the North Side Unitarian Church.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Thomas Clayton

Thomas Clayton was born in London, England on October 2, 1854. He attended Wesleyan College, and Richmond College Seminary where he studied for the Methodist Episcopal ministry. Shortly after completing his studies in 1885, Mr.-Clayton came to the United States. He was ordained a minister in September 1885 by the Methodist Episcopal Conference in Berea, Ohio, but resigned in 1886. Rev. Clayton then entered the Congregational ministry, where he served several churches, including Zanesville, Ohio (1887–89); Huntington, West Virginia. (1889–90), Berlin, Connecticut (1890–95); and Binghamton, New York (1895–1901); before coming to Allegheny City. He assumed the pastorate of the First Congregational Church of Allegheny on August-4, 1901. The church was located at the southeast corner of Manhattan and Franklin Streets in Manchester.

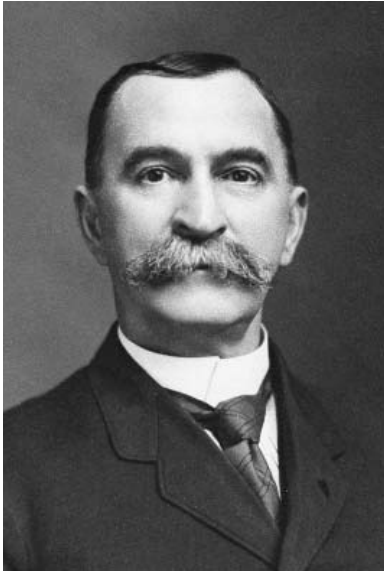
In the spring of 1904, Rev. Clayton corresponded with the American Unitarian Association concerning fellowship in the Unitarian ministry. The First Congregational Church released him from his pastorate on March 9th. His Unitarian fellowship application, dated April 27, 1904, is accompanied by a letter in which Rev. Clayton acknowledges the momentous nature of his decision—he doubts that he could ever again preach in a regular Congregational pulpit. Rev. Clayton did preach in the pulpit of Pittsburgh's First Unitarian Church in May, and left a favorable impression with the minister, Rev. L. Walter Mason, D.D.

In 1905, Rev. Clayton & Rev. Mason began to promote the idea of a Unitarian society in Allegheny. The first organizational meeting was held in Allegheny's Carnegie Music Hall on the evening of December 5, 1905. This led to the founding of the Second Unitarian Church on May 6, 1906, with Rev. Clayton as its minister

Thomas Clayton served as pastor at what was subsequently called the North Side Unitarian Church until February 15, 1910. He spent most of the remaining years of his ministry as pastor of the Unitarian Church in Fresno, California, where he was named Minister Emeritus in 1928. Rev. Clayton died at his home in Berkeley on January 16, 1930.

Robert Henry Gilliford

Robert H. Gilliford was born in Fawn Township, Pennsylvania, November 9, 1849. He was graduated from Westminster College and taught school for five years in East Deer Township. After attending the Medical College at Charleston, South Carolina in 1874, he came to Allegheny City to set up his practice. For seven years he was on the surgical staff at Allegheny General Hospital, and for three years was the Poor Physician for the Western District of Allegheny City.



Dr. Robert Henry Gilliford

Dr.-Gilliford served as a member of the Common Council from the old Sixth Ward (northern half of Manchester) for two years, and was a member of the Select Council from the same Ward for nine years (City of Allegheny). During his time in government, he was known as a municipal reformer. Early in his service, he advanced the cause of riders in a series of street car system reforms. When he became chairman of the Auditing Committee he immediately instituted the first major City audit in seventeen years, which resulted in the return of substantial funds from dishonest City contractors. He brought a suit against the City and School Board over lost interest income from invested funds, which was won before the State Supreme Court. In 1885, he introduced the first resolution for the investigation of the water supply of Allegheny, and helped prepare the report that resulted. Dr. Gilliford was a serious advocate for honesty and fairness in city government and enjoyed a great reputation.

Dr. Gilliford also served as President of the Bank of Secured Savings and the American Fire Insurance Company. He was a member of the Allegheny County Medical Society, the Pennsylvania State Medical Society and of the AMA. He was also a Charter Member of the North Side Unitarian Church, and served as its first President. He continued to serve on the Church's Board of Trustees for many years.

R.H. Gilliford married Alice Laughlin (1854–1920) in 1878. He died on March 28, 1919, and was survived by his wife.

William Judson Riggs

William J. Riggs was born on August 11, 1849 in Library, Pennsylvania, the son of Rev. Edward Riggs. He attended Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia and returned to practice medicine with his older brother, David, in Allegheny City. The brothers were well known to the people of Allegheny, and when David retired, the younger Dr. Riggs continued their practice. W.J. Riggs was also an active member of the Allegheny County Medical Society.

Dr. Riggs died on May 31, 1909 shortly after his brother, and was survived by his wife, Brilla Dawson Riggs, and two daughters. He was a Charter Member of the North Side Unitarian Church, where he also served as Trustee.

Charles E. Snyder

Charles E. Snyder, Litt.D., LL.D., was born at Hollowville, Columbia county, New York, on October 13, 1877. In 1884 he moved with his parents to a farm near Martindale, Columbia County, where he attended the rural schools. He graduated from the high school at Chatham, New York, in 1895, received a certificate for college work from the University of the State of New York in 1900, and graduated from the State Normal College, at Oneonta, New York, in 1901. He then prepared for the ministry at the Meadville Theological School, Meadville, Pennsylvania.

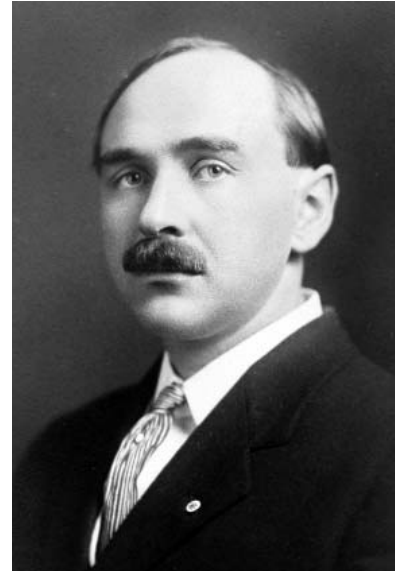
He began teaching in the district schools at Garfield, New York, in 1895, remaining there two years; was at Hollowville, New York (1896–98), Copake Falls, New York (1898–99), was principal of the Uniondale School, Hempstead, Long Island (1901–03), and was senior master of the Lakewood Boys' School Lakewood, New Jersey (1903–08).

After completing studies at the Meadville Theological School, he became pastor at the First Unitarian church in Franklin, Pennsylvania, which he served from 1908 to 1911. From 1911 to 1917, he was minister at the North Side Unitarian Church. In 1917, Rev. Snyder resigned to take up duties in Sioux City, and then Davenport, Iowa.

Rev. Snyder was secretary of the Iowa Unitarian Association, was a director of the Western Unitarian Conference from 1918 to 1925; was a member and chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Federation of Religious Liberals, and was a member of the fellowship committee of the General Conference of Unitarian Churches from 1921 to 1924. Rev. Snyder also served as a Director of the American Unitarian Association.

In 1904, Mr. Snyder married Miss Sara M. Reeder, of Big Flats, New York, and they were the parents of three children, namely: Robert Gordon, born in 1905, Betty Beach, born in 1908, and Barbara Ives, born in 1912 while Rev. Snyder was minister at the North Side Unitarian Church.

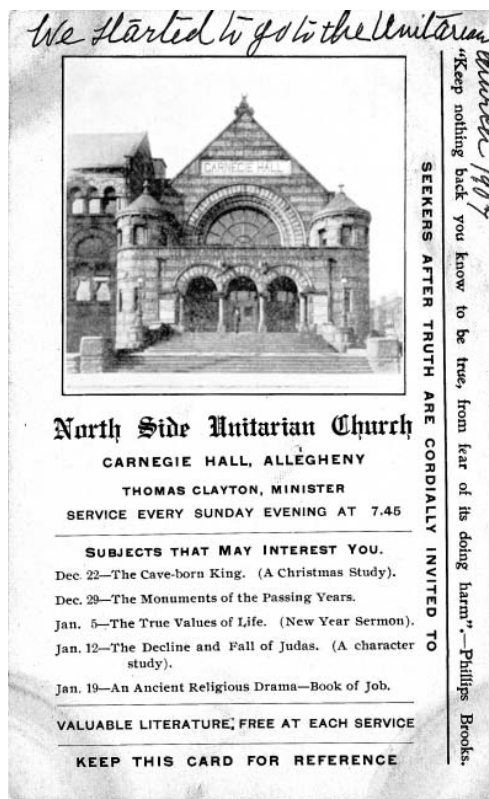
A man of forceful individuality, a cordial and friendly manner, and intensely optimistic outlook, he was a welcome member of any circle which he entered. He was known for his influence, his accomplishments, and his fine public spirit.



Rev. Dr. Charles E. Snyder

MINISTERS

- Rev. Thomas Clayton
1906 – 1910
- Rev. Charles E. Snyder
1911 – 1917
- Rev. Roy B. Wintersteen
1917 – 1922
- Rev. George R. Gebauer
1922 – 1928
- Rev. Frank Edwin Smith, Interim
(Associate Minister at First Church)
1928 – 1929
- Rev. Warren P. Blodgett
1929 – 1934
- Clarence C. Klein (Lay Leader)
1934 – 1938
- Rev. Maynard Van Dyke
1938 – 1943
- Rev. Hugh W. Weston
1943 – 1946
- Rev. Robert W. Lawson
1946 – 1949 (Emeritus 1969)
- Rev. John E. Evans
1949 – 1952
- Rev. Francis M. Ruland
1952 – 1953
- Walter J. Brethauer (Lay Leader)
1954 – 1965
- Rev. Jesse R. Cavileer
1966 – 1985 (Emeritus 1992)
- Rev. Wendy Colby
(Part-time, with UUCNH)
1985 – 1988
- Rev. Dr. Arthur J. McDonald
Director of Social Advocacy
1991 – 1997
- Minister
1997 – 2003
- Rev. David Lutz, Interim
2003 – 2004
- Rev. David V. McFarland
2004 – present



“We started to go to the Unitarian Church.” Postcard, circa 1907, advertising the newly-formed congregation. The congregation was meeting in Allegheny’s Carnegie Music Hall, Sunday evenings at 7:45.

SOURCES

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