

Next issue deadline
Sunday, November 24

The Spire

NOVEMBER 3, 2024

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 67, No. 3

First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington, 630 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, MA 02476 • Gathered 1733

The Fair Needs YOU!

Our string of church fairs stands at 143, give or take a century. We need lots of help to make it a day of fellowship, food, and fun.

Start bringing in donations on the Sunday before the fair, November 17. We need items in good condition – the sort of things you yourself would buy – but no clothing. There will be tables to presort books, housewares, jewelry, holiday stuff, plants and garden items, toys, games, puzzles, and small furniture (please do not haul in Aunt Edna's credenza).

There's always an exception – we'd like to get electronics sooner than November 17. Please bring computers and such to Greg Ruccio's house at 93 Brantwood Road. Leave 'em on the porch. Donations must be younger than 10 years old, in clean working condition, have all their parts (especially power supplies), and include contact info. Please, no VHS players or headphones/earbuds.

The Buttery welcomes your delicious creations, individually wrapped with a list of ingredients. Bring those in the night before or the morning of the fair.

We hope to reduce the amount of donations we receive that will not sell. Please make sure your gifts are truly gifts, clean and intact.

You can sign up to work a shift at a booth or in the café, either on-line or at coffee hour. Some tasks happen at times other than fair day. If you're feeling particularly anti-social, save yourself for the epic cleanup at 3 pm when we restore the church.

Questions? Send me a note at fair@firstparish.info.

Aaron Kitzmiller
Coordinator Extraordinaire
Harvest Moon Fair



Hurricane Relief

Recent storms have caused such damage. The special collection at our October 6 service raised \$2,772 to support the UUA Disaster Relief Fund. Thank you so much for your generosity! If you'd still like to donate, please visit www.uua.org.

Blood Drive on November 6

Thanks to all those who helped with our October drive – you are literally life-savers! The next drive is Wednesday, November 6, from 11 am to 4 pm.

To volunteer, visit <https://volunteersignup.org/E9F3P>.

To make an appointment to donate, visit redcrossblood.org or call 1-800-RED-CROSS.

Parish Committee Notes

The Parish Committee (ParCom) extends gratitude to Ebiere Omoregie, our office manager, for being a champion and point person with our weekday tenant, Adventures in Montessori. From meetings to organizing spreadsheets, Ebiere has been essential in ensuring a good relationship with the school. Anne Quaadgras, Carolyn Hodges, and John Anderson have also been instrumental in shepherding a smooth transition through staff changes at First Parish and Adventures in Montessori. Thank you for all your hard work, time, and dedication!

At ParCom's October meeting we heard from the Human Resource Committee, which recommends that we add one week of paid time off to any employee who is approved for paid family medical leave. We

unanimously agreed. Many thanks to members of the HR Committee for their ongoing work and care.

ParCom also approved the hiring of an adjunct minister to step in during Rev. Erica Richmond's maternity leave next year. We are grateful to Rev. Marta Flanagan for conducting the search and for inviting Tricia Brennan to be the adjunct minister. Tricia was ordained a UU minister in 2000 and has served many congregations in the greater Boston area. She has been an adjunct minister at First Parish in the past, knows members of the congregation, and has a good feel for the First Parish community.

Thanks to all who shared opinions on the Defending Democracy working group's proposal on how to use the First Parish flagpole. Members of ParCom collected input after services over the last few weeks and held a listening session via Zoom. We empowered our Executive Committee to make a decision about the flagpole, and more information will be forthcoming. We hope the discussion will continue as we all explore and grapple with the meanings of symbols, flags, patriotism, freedom, and what it means to be a liberal religious community.

The Parish Committee will continue to have an information table in the Vestry after services. If you are wondering how to contact a committee or where to find information on the website, or have any other questions, please stop by and say hello.

In faith,
Joanna Pushee, Clerk

Giving First

Each Sunday half of our service offering goes to an organization that shares our values, chosen by our Social Justice Committee. The recipient for November is the Resource Organizing Project, which collaborates with and provides training to justice and liberation organizations throughout New England.

Holiday Concert

On Saturday, December 7, the Halalisa Singers will present "Season of Light" at 7:30 pm. The concert will feature *Carols and Lullabies of the Southwest*, star-themed American spirituals, the Nigerian carol *Betelehemu*, and a rollicking version of the Chanukah favorite *Ocho Kandelikas*. Tickets are \$25. Visit www.halalisa.org.

Moon Dance

Witch Hazel led us on a well-worn path
past garden shed with leaves of orangey yellow
cast on its roof.

Children's distant voices mingled
in the misty branches of sister's birch.
Silhouettes, shadows, sages emerged.

Where were the bats? I saw them. I didn't.
Who was watching us?
Roaming fox and fisher cats.

Bittersweet vine was holding on
to memories of woodcocks mating,
and junipers feeding flocks and flocks of
cedar waxwings all summer long.

We listened to Quaking Aspen
for she always has something to say.
Paid homage to survivors, three-hundred-year-old
Great, Great Grandmother Oak
and her dear friend Holly.
Grandfather American Elm,
Great Blue Hydrangea.

As we entered the darker woods, sounds of sirens,
airplanes, cars, trucks and trains faded fast.
We heard the chilly wind and crickets,
Saw with our feet; roots, ruts, bones.

Under a rib of clouds,
mindfully walked the slippery slope,
tip-toed, galloped, over bridge of Troll to the valley
where the largest hawk we had ever seen
slept, as did squirrels. Yesterday at noon,
one coyote howled, as loud as a pack.

Chokecherry came with a basket of red berries,
her branches entwined with Franklinia.

Grinding corn at the stone, we sang it. Sang it
until a door opened in the Huntress Moon.
Hecate came down to join our feast,
bringing milk, chocolate, insects and moles.

Now returned to our dreaming dens,
our shoeprints linger there,
amongst our offerings of nuts and cake
where whispering spirits waltz.

Carol Wintle



Reflections

That Old-Time Religion

After our first minister, Samuel Cooke, ended his 40-year ministry by joining the choir eternal in 1783, the Parish Committee once again had a hard time attracting a successor. In 1786 two hot prospects declined because the parish was poor in both money and members, and encumbered by debt. But Thaddeus Fiske, a 1785 Harvard graduate, accepted.

Thaddeus was born in 1762, to Abigail and Capt. Jonathan Fiske of Weston, whose families had been in the colony for generations. The captain's father was Nathan Fiske IV, born in 1701, and there would be a Nathan Fiske V, a Nathan Fiske VI, and a Nathan Fiske VII, who became a minister.

Thaddeus was from a noted family and relatively prosperous, so he was undaunted at the prospect of joining a troubled parish. In 1788, at age 26, he began his ministry. After five years the church once again had a settled leader. He also became a member of the Board of Overseers of Harvard in 1788 and served until 1828.

To help retire the debt, Thaddeus drew only a small part of his salary. His enthusiasm and preaching attracted members and the church began to grow.

At the Arlington Historical Society website one can read a memoir written in 1904 by George Wellington, when he was 75. George was christened by Rev. Fiske in 1827 and he remembered "the Dr." well. (Thaddeus was granted a doctor of divinity from Columbia College in New York in 1821.)

Wellington wrote of Fiske, "Now being a settled minister, his next thought was for a wife and so on June 17 1789 he married Miss Lucy Clark of Lexington." Lucy was a daughter of Rev. Jonas Clark of Lexington, who was very active in the Patriot cause. Her grandfather was Rev. John Hancock, the minister of First Parish in Lexington before Clark.

Thaddeus bought land and soon a parsonage was built on the spacious lot. Wellington recalled, "The whole of his

ground was covered with fruit trees and shrubbery, with a row of shade trees just inside of the wall along Pleasant Street from the street to the Spy Pond."

In the first year Thaddeus very nearly died from a fever. It returned a few months later and he missed five Sundays. But he recovered, and in 1790 Lucy presented him with a son, Horatio Hancock Fiske.

The next year they had a daughter they named after

her mother, but little Lucy did not survive her first year. She was followed by Elmira in 1792. They had no more children, but their house was nevertheless filled with youngsters due to Thaddeus' strategy for supporting his family without his full church salary.

He wrote, "For more than 20 years I took to board and

instruct children and youths, as many as I could conveniently accommodate. Some I prepared for admission into college and others for useful stations in life. Thus I assisted in training them up in the way they should go — in the old paths and the good way in which the Puritans of New England, our fathers and ancestors, walked." These boarders were all male.

Wellington recalled that "Mrs. Fiske was a good kind-hearted woman whom I much respected but I must confess that I stood much in awe of the dr. He had the old idea that children should be seen and not heard." Rev. Fiske seemed very old to young George, who called him "not a man that children would be attracted to." One wonders about the experiences of the youths who lived with him and received his lessons. Lucy probably made them feel at home.

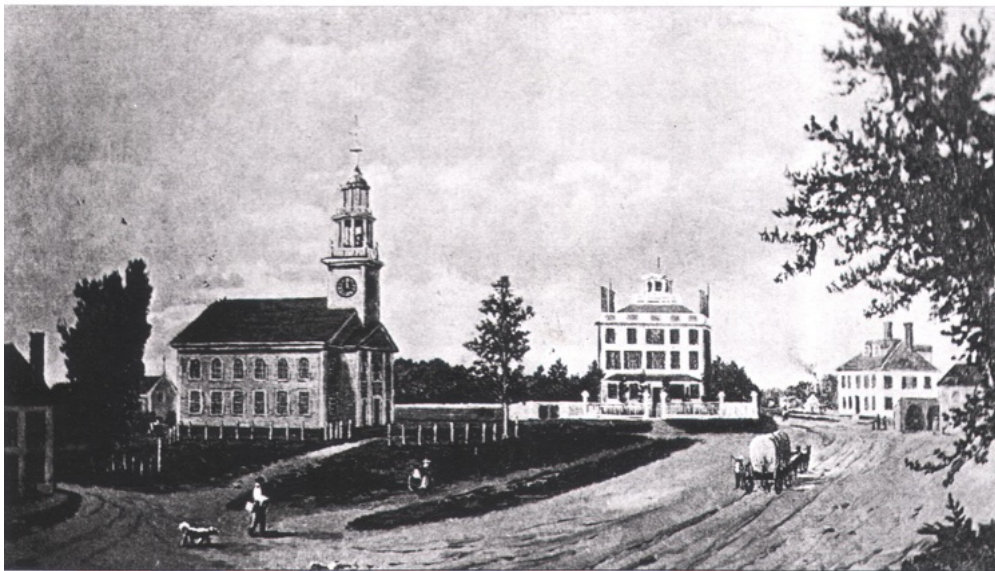
In 1799 a business opened in town that had a tremendous effect on its fortunes. Amos Whittemore had patented a machine for making "cards" to comb

cotton and wool, aligning the fibers so they could be spun into thread. Scraping raw cotton or wool with these wire-studded paddles was the vital first step in producing woven cloth. Amos' brother, William, formed a company to



manufacture the cards and its success lifted the entire town into prosperity. The effect on the church was profound. Members could afford to be generous, and the debt began to shrink in a most satisfying way.

By 1804 the church was doing so well that a new meetinghouse was built, and because there were sufficient funds “no man was hurt thereby.” The old building was sold and moved to Pleasant Street to become a private residence. The new church has 92 pews in the sanctuary and 14 upstairs. It cost \$12,175, funded by the rental of 106 pew boxes. There was a three-faced clock tower with a weathervane.



This picture shows the second meetinghouse in 1817, when the surrounding roads were still dirt, heavily rutted by wagon wheels and scented with horse manure. The mansion in the middle is the Robbins estate, in its original location. When the Robbins family donated Town Hall, they moved their house back from the road to make room for it and give it pride of place.

The new church had neither organ nor piano. Singing was led by violin, viol, flute, and French horn. Back in 1790 the church had first acquired an instrument to accompany hymns, a bass viol. There seems to have been dissatisfaction with the quality of the singing, for in 1804 the church established the Northwest Parish of Cambridge Singing Society, noting that “the spirit of music in public devotion is become somewhat languid, and its genius seems about to withdraw.”

In 1807 Menotomy became West Cambridge, and the church took another in a series of names. It was now the First Congregational Parish of West Cambridge.

The meetinghouse saw the wedding of Rev. Fiske’s daughter in 1811. Elmira married Joseph Adams; the groom was 28 and the bride 19. Tragically, Joseph died in 1814. The couple were only together for three years and had no children.

In 1812 the Whittemore card business moved to New York, a blow to the town’s economy. Horatio Fiske had become a successful businessman, with partners in Boston. In 1818 he married Letitia Whittemore, the daughter of inventor Amos. In 1819 they had a daughter who died, followed by a son who passed in 1822. In 1823 a daughter was born, named Elmira,

probably after her aunt. In 1825 they had another daughter, Caroline.

Thaddeus faced increasing dissent as some church members adopted new ideas about Unitarianism – the oneness of God – and Universalism, the idea that people were not predestined as saved or damned, but universally blessed with God’s grace. His sermons became increasingly focused on doctrine, forcefully defending the old ways. Attendance fell.

In 1817 three women of the church started a Sabbath School, much to Rev. Fiske’s dismay. He would not allow them to meet in a room in the church, so they gathered their students in the vestibule. These women were Eliza Bradshaw, 33; Rebecca Whittemore, 21; and Eliza Tufts, just 15.

Some accounts say that the reason Thaddeus opposed the Sunday School was because he wanted to continue to educate the children by himself in the parsonage. This is an understandable misinterpretation, because he did educate many children there, but these were his boarders, not a gathering of the offspring of church members each Sunday. Wellington’s memoir explains why Rev. Fiske was so opposed to Sabbath Schools in general, quoting Thaddeus:

“Sabbath Schools were formerly unknown; it is not more than five years since they have been introduced. Before this every family ran a Sabbath School. On every Sabbath, after the close of religious exercises of public worship, and returning to their respective

places of abode, parents and heads of families gathered the children and youths around them, to say their 'Catechism.' Now parents avail themselves of the excuse for their neglect of family religious instruction that they send their children to Sabbath School and there their duty ends."

Thaddeus thought that Sunday Schools undermined parental obligations. Nevertheless, the two Elizas and Rebecca prevailed, and the church has had a Sunday School ever since.

In 1822 town residents founded the Universal Society of West Cambridge. Fiske's sermons became increasingly depressing. Wellington recalled that Fiske often exchanged pulpits with Dr. Osgood, the minister in Medford, "a bright, wide-awake man." After the afternoon service their paths would cross as they headed home. Osgood would inquire, "What kind of an audience did you have?" It turned out that the congregation swelled whenever Osgood was the preacher and shrank in the gloom of Rev. Fiske's offerings. Wellington noted, "The poor doctor's sheep were going away."

After 40 years of ministry, Fiske resigned in 1828. He was 66 years old.

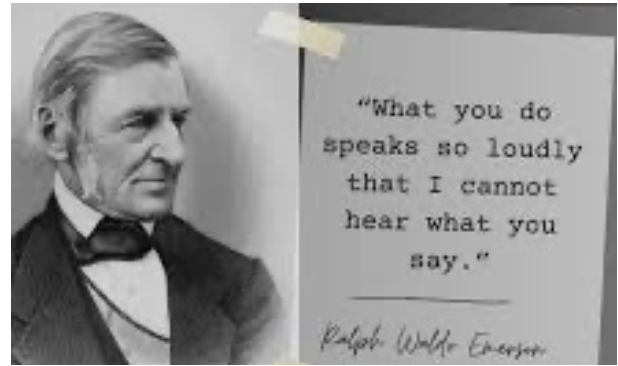
The next year Horatio died suddenly, at age 39. His widow, Letitia, was just 29. Their daughters, Elmira and Caroline, were six and four.

George Wellington wrote that Horatio's death was a severe blow to Thaddeus, "and much more to his daughter whose mind became affected and her last years were spent in the insane asylum." Elmira, widowed at 22, was 37 when Horatio died, and apparently could not cope with another loss.

Thaddeus remained in town and was very interested in his replacement, the church's first Unitarian minister, Frederick Hedge. Hedge, 23, the son of a Harvard professor, did not share Fiske's disdain for Sunday Schools, and he strengthened the Sabbath School Teacher Association.

George recalled that at first Sunday School was held at 9:30 am, but after 1836 it met at 1:30 for an hour, between the two services. The first service lasted from 10:30 to 12:30. After a break for a meal, the children had to endure the second service, very quietly, under the stern eyes of Miss Bradshaw, from 2:30 to 4:30.

Hedge helped form the Cambridge Anti-Slavery Association. As a friend of Concord resident Ralph Waldo Emerson, he absorbed Transcendentalist ideas about the essential unity of creation, humanity's



innate goodness, and the ability to gain a personal knowledge of God with no intermediaries needed for spiritual insight.

After Universalist members tried, unsuccessfully, to take over the church, Hedge's days were numbered. When he resigned from his six-year ministry there were only about 40 members.

In 1835 came David Damon, another Unitarian, and membership rebounded. Thaddeus, now in his 70s, would sometimes attend and sit in the pulpit beside him, on friendly terms.

Alone in their big house, Thaddeus and Lucy's memories began to slip. One morning George saw Rev. Fiske heading for church, dressed for the pulpit, but it was not Sunday. His mother sent the lad to intercept the old fellow, who was befuddled to hear that it was not the Sabbath. A few years later Letitia and her daughters, Elmira and Caroline, took the old couple to live in Charlestown and "kindly cared for them to the end."

In 1854 Elmira Fiske Adams died at 62. It had been 25 years after her brother's death sent her into a spiral that landed her in an asylum. Lucy died the next year, at age 88. Thaddeus died eight months later at 93.



George Wellington wrote that Rev. Fiske was an 18th-century man who could not change and accept new ideas, and who thought the world was getting worse. George wrote that he himself thought each generation was better than the last, noting

that in the old days ministers of different denominations would scarcely greet each other on the street, much less share one another's pulpits. George quoted Rev. Damon in a memorable sermon: "Can two walk together unless they are agreed? Certainly not! Unless they are agreed to walk together."

Diane Taraz Shriver
Spire Editor



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The Spire

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