

Fleming, Barbara, et al (2022). *Seeking the Truth in Love: The First 125 Years of Foothills Unitarian Church*, Fort Collins: Foothills Unitarian. pp. 323

An example of a good local institutional history with useful appendices and notes; well arranged in three chronological parts: 1879-1969, 1970-2014, and 2015-2022. The 125-year timeline sets an easily read of the pattern in the life of a Colorado Unitarian (-Universalist) Church. Achieved what it set out to be as a full and detailed history. The work was composed as a committee involving a local historian, a professional historian, and voluntary editors and composers. Barbara Fleming is a well-known Coloradoan local studies historian. Adam Thomas is an Associate Professor in History at Colorado State University.

Foothills Unitarian in Fort Collins is a particularly important study for professional historians of 'American Religion'. It is that is one of the few local 'Protestant' congregations outside of large cities which has sustain a historical line; from being late nineteenth century rural site – indeed a western outlier – to a modern suburban site of a small city status. The transition on the timeline is important in teasing out Unitarian-Universalism of it intellectual traditions. The Foothills' tradition is of Unity-Unitarian, and had no formal ties with the Universalist tradition until 1961 with the formation of the Unitarian-Universalist Association (UUA). The historical congregation also had formal connections with Congregationalism. The congregation began as the Unity Church in 1898. There was also the Universalist Society of Fort Collins formed in 1879.

From 1883 to 1886 Unitarian 'fellowships' (less formally organised than 'churches') were created in the area between Longmont and Fort Collins. In 1900 the local Unity church formally joined the American Unitarian Association (AUA), and a church building was dedicated in 1905. The building mortgage was paid fully in 1923. The congregation suffered a decline in the period 1926-1931, and recovered as the re-designed First Congregational Unitarian Church, which was a merger between the Unity Church and the First Congregational Church. A split occurred in 1959 between the First Unitarian Society who disagreed with the trinitarian outlook emerging among the remaining members of the First Congregational Church. Two years before, the United Church of Christ was formed by the consolidation of the Congregational and Evangelical Reformed Churches. The suggestion is the influence of the 1950s Neo-Evangelical resurgence had successfully brought a return to mainstream Christian orthodoxy. This then suggests that the UUA amalgamation, in 1961, was a counter-move of the dissent Christian movements who eventually universalised, taking in ideas of Post-Christianity, religious unity, and value pluralism (making it possible that traditional ideas of Unitarian Christianity could be still retained in the pluralistic amalgamation). Between 1961 and 1964 the First Unitarian Society became the local Unitarian Church, which in 1969 formally established as the Foothills Unitarian Church.

Most of its membership and organisational growth occurred from 1972 to 1989. Activities emerged as a local church tradition, such as the medieval faire, retreats, services auction, and the bookshop. In 1984 a Social Action Committee was formed which took the congregation into the contemporary UU mode (described above). At the same time the religious education program began. The following year the periodical formulation of UUA principles for the local congregation (its own adaptive language) was first put into place. In 1988, a few years later, the building mortgage was again fully paid out (from the 1923 event).

These key characteristics mentioned in the last paragraph made Foothills Unitarian Church, one of the most successful American UU churches:

- Traditional social activities including book selling (and hopefully reading thereof);
- A major social justice program across a host of 'Social Action' initiatives;
- A well-funded and professionally organised religious education programme, catering also for adult learners;
- Intellectual gravitas to re-formulating UUA principles with both constancy and language reflecting UU sociological change;
- Professional financial management with the wisdom from budgetary concerns.

The events and legacies of 9-11, the backlash to the Obama presidency, the Trump presidency, and Covid-19, also impact into these characteristics, by presenting critical and urgent challenges and gaining moderating and useful local responses.

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Australasian Unitarian Unitarian-Universalist churches and fellowships dream of a track-record of a Foothills Unitarian Church. However, as my scholarship shows, histories like that of the Foothills Unitarian Church expresses American religion in the country of American culture. For Australian culture, the UU side of American religion does not much sense in the population while the ART (American Revivalist Tradition) side of American religion is fairly dominant. This is because the majority of Australians, outside the hold of orthodoxy, would prefer to be irreligious than re-invent organised religion. The concepts which make up American religion creates great suspicion for Australians. New Zealanders are somewhere between Australians and Americans.

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