

# **THE EIGHTY-ONE YEARS BEFORE**

## **Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church**

**1868 - ?**

First Congregational Church (Unitarian)

**1868 - ?**

The First Independent Congregational  
Church and Society (Unitarian)

**1895 – 1896**

The Unitarian Church of Knoxville

**1895 - ?**

The Universalist Church of Knoxville

**1917 - 1918**

The Peoples Church of Knoxville

**1921 - 1929**

The Unitarian Church of Knoxville

## **THE FIRST SIXTY YEARS OF**

### **Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church**

#### **1948**

Several Unitarians in East Tennessee ask American Unitarian Association to establish a Unitarian church in Knoxville  
Lon Ray Call (organizing minister) holds planning meeting  
September 27  
First service October 16 at Brownlow School  
Newsletter inaugurated in December, continues to present

#### **1949**

**Tennessee Valley Unitarian Church organized with 88 members from Knoxville** (24 members from Oak Ridge) at Christenberry Junior High School and affiliated with AUA **on February 6**; church schools in both congregations organized also  
Women's Alliance organized March 23  
Grant Butler (acting minister) takes over from Lon Ray Call in April  
Charter of Incorporation, State of Tennessee, signed on May 23  
American Unitarian Youth (at TVUC) and Channing Club (at UT) organized  
342 pounds of clothing collected for European war relief  
Services discontinued for summer (this year through 1958)  
Daniel Welch (interim minister) fills in for 3 weeks in September until Richard Henry arrives  
Richard Henry (first called minister) preaches first service  
October 16

### **1950**

Oak Ridge minister (Bliss) arrives; Henry serving only Knoxville church hereafter

Local chapter of Unitarian Fellowship for Social Justice organized

Property at 3219 Kingston Pike bought in April for \$5,000

James Person joins church May 21

Fellowship Day Camp (interracial) held in June

Permission for TVUC's use of a public school withdrawn by county school board September 6

Services held in 5 different places in September and October

Property at 1800 Clinch Avenue purchased; first service there November 12

Two members make loans to church to relieve severe financial problems

First WNOX broadcast of TVUC services November 26 (ran for 7 consecutive Sundays); broadcasts continued annually for over 10 years

### **1951**

Dedication of Unitarian House at 1800 Clinch Avenue (April 29)

Knoxville Metaphysical Library (1500 volumes) given to TVUC by Mrs. Edward W. Ogden

### **1952**

Ohio State University Symphonic Choir (interracial) served dinner by Alliance in Unitarian House (invited by UT to perform but refused service in campus cafeteria)

Congregation approves borrowing of funds from members for period of 5 years to cover continuing financial problems

Congregation appoints committee to study merger of Unitarian and Universalist denominations

### 1953

Unitarian House used as a hostel for out-of-town groups (generally international) and as a meeting place for local professional associations (both groups interracial)  
Bazaar in November (predecessor of Auction) nets \$530  
In address to the Junior Chamber of Commerce during Brotherhood Week, Henry calls attention to the hypocrisy of talking brotherhood and practicing segregation

### 1954

Supreme Court decision declares school segregation unconstitutional (May 17)  
Thomas Jefferson District meeting at Unitarian House. Herbert Block (*Washington Post* cartoonist) and A. Powell Davies (All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington D.C.) were speakers. TJ District meetings here regularly to present "Coffee, or the equivalent thereof will be served each Sunday after the service"  
Calvin Dash, African-American, hired as new choir director  
Temple Beth-El buys property on Kingston Pike, thus ending preliminary negotiations toward joint development of our property

### 1955

Statement sent legislators urging prompt action in carrying out decision of the Supreme Court against school segregation  
Scheduling and canceling of talk on China by Maud Russell, accused of being a Communist  
Families living adjacent to the Kingston Pike property threaten to sue congregation on the overgrown condition of our lot  
Thanksgiving conference of the Dixie Federation of Liberal Religious Youth (LRY) here November 25-27. Similar conferences here every 2 to 3 years up to present.  
Heska Amuna congregation fails by one vote in November to buy our Kingston Pike property for \$22,500

### **1956**

Junior Liberal Religious Youth organized in March  
Hubert Bebb chosen architect for proposed building in April  
Declaration of Conscience by Richard Henry concerning the violation of human rights in Clinton, TN and Hungary, published by Knoxville *News Sentinel* and signed by over 2000 people

### **1957**

J. F. and N. McMahan (Sevierville) awarded contract in February for construction of building at 3219 Kingston Pike for \$66,400  
Robert West, TVUC's second called minister; preaches first service on April 14  
Promissory notes of a total value of \$20,000 accepted from members to meet payments to the contractor and architect  
Workshop set up in new building for members finishing the interior

### **1958**

First service at 3219 Kingston Pike January 26, dedication of building on March 23  
Unitarian House (1800 Clinch) sold, netting \$5,300 after paying off mortgage

### **1959**

TVUC joins Tennessee Conference of Unitarian Churches and Fellowships, just being organized, in January  
Congregation votes on proposed merger of Unitarian and Universalist denominations: 15 for merger, 57 against, one abstention  
Jefferson Club (UT), replacing Channing Club, is active through end of 1962. Organization of campus youth (and other young adults) continues to present day on an intermittent basis, each start-up lasting 1 to 7 years

### **(1959)**

Six summer Sunday meetings with visiting speakers (through 1961)  
Meeting of Unitarians and Universalists in Syracuse, NY approves plan for merger  
First Sunday Evening Forums initiated (sponsored by public issues committee)

### **1960**

Last congregational vote on merger: 41 for, 43 against, 3 abstentions  
West preaches on sit-ins and appoints Harry Wiersema to organize TVUC's participation  
Mass meetings regarding racial discrimination in Knoxville (September, October)

### **1961**

Letters to legislators urged in support of repealing Tennessee's anti-evolution law  
Burrill, Inc. engaged to conduct a debt retirement and the annual pledge campaign (finances still in poor condition)  
William Harrell gives church 29 acre property near Rutledge to be developed as a park in memory of C.C. Cloud  
Unitarian and Universalist denominations complete merger at the national level in May  
Theotis Robinson becomes the first African-American to be admitted to UT undergraduate school. Later attends TVUC.  
Church's cash bank balance is \$1.54 with half of the church year gone and only 1/3 of the pledges collected  
Tennessee Conference meets at TVUC and continues doing so occasionally to present day

## **1962**

Church building burglarized

West protests to Knoxville Board of Education in regard to public school assembly programs being used for religious indoctrination (March)

April 8 (Sunday) designated Bible Teaching in Knoxville Public Schools Day

First general assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association

Summer services reduced from 6 to 2, one in July and one in August; continues through 1973

Building burglarized again; sign on Kingston Pike vandalized

Garden group meets; becomes ungarden club, continues for 13 years; provides flower arrangements for services

New and used books, many from Beacon Press, sold in the bookshop; continues for about 15 years

## **1963**

Guy and Candie Carawan playing and singing in Sunday service; they take part in services occasionally for next 40 years

Daniel Welch interim minister September through January

## **1964**

Kenneth Torquil MacLean, third called minister, preaches first service February 2

*Hymns for the Celebration of Life* arrives (\$4.00 each)

## **1965**

Continuing segregation of UT Hospital (in violation of 1964 civil rights act) criticized

Social action committee active in areas of open housing and news reporting of both Knoxville newspapers

Harvest bazaar a great success, raising \$1,015.77

### **1966**

Coffee House, a social gathering for games and visiting on Friday or Wednesday evenings, held off and on with various name changes, to the present  
Congregation's offer to buy Spengler property next door is rejected  
Construction begun on church school addition in June (contract for \$60,000)  
Building burglarized again  
Dedication of new church school addition  
Knoxville School Corporation using class rooms during the week; rooms rented out to various schools or kindergartens for following 40 years

### **1967**

Permanent name tags made available  
Youth advisory committee (YAC) planning a sex education course for youth  
Unitarian Fellowship Organization (UFO) organized for junior high youth  
Groups of European youth hosted in homes. Eventually referred to as "40 Swedes," at least one group arrives each year through 1978  
25 year sentences for 5 black men commuted by governor after appeal by MacLean and others

### **1968**

Intense controversy in UUA general assembly and congregations over funding for the fight for Black empowerment and self-determination, continuing through 1971  
Poor People's Campaign pauses overnight in Knoxville on way to Washington, DC; TVUC arranges for cots and 3 meals for each of the 500 guests  
Social action committee working to get more adequate recreation in the poorer neighborhoods of Knoxville

### **1969**

Encounter groups offered, continuing for several years  
Robert West, former minister at TVUC, elected president of  
the UUA (1969–1977)  
Creative worship committee produces interesting Sunday ser-  
vices from time to time; evolves into present worship  
committee

### **1970**

Discussions on the draft, including conscientious objection  
Service committee organized in April to assist people in need  
in Knoxville; phased out after FISH implemented  
60 members and friends share Thanksgiving dinner at church  
(continues into the 90s)  
Protesters at the Billy Graham Crusade arrested, tried, and given  
unusually severe sentences

### **1971**

Sustained efforts by several task forces to achieve desegrega-  
tion in city schools and peace in southeast Asia  
MacLean preaches at Mansford Street Unitarian Church (Lon-  
don, England) June through December while Mansford's  
regular minister Peter Hewiss fills TVUC's pulpit  
Beacon Press publishes *Pentagon Papers*  
Singles group organized; similar groups come and go up to  
the present

### **1972**

TVUC participating in community projects through the Kingston  
Pike Ecumenical Council (churches along Kingston Pike)  
for about 6 years

### **1973**

Congregation authorizes hiring Jack Jones to conduct the 1973-1975 finance campaign  
Dinners for eight organized; continues for more than 20 years  
John Buehrens, TVUC's fourth called minister, preaches first service July 15  
Sermons being recorded on cassettes

### **1974**

Celebration of congregation's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with 6 days of events in February  
Extended families program launched in April  
First pilgrimage of junior high youth to Boston; continues every 2 or 3 years to present  
Summer services every Sunday evening, preceded by pot-lucks

### **1975**

Social action committee agitating in support of the "Bottle Bill" and manning the recycling center at K-Mart  
Food co-op sells produce after the Sunday service; discontinued in 1982 because of the issue of sales tax  
150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of American Unitarianism May 25  
Men's discussion group organized  
Sunday morning public forums; continues to present

### **1976**

Group home for former mental patients organized by task force of social action committee; becomes a non-profit corporation  
84 people attend retreat on Memorial Day weekend at Standing Stone State Park; retreats continue to present day

### **1977**

Patricia Bowen summer minister  
Program council activated  
Flute ensemble and folk music groups organized, playing for occasional services  
FISH team organized, delivering food on the fourth Wednesday of each month; continues to present

### **1978**

Social concerns task forces: women's rights, Tennessee environmental legislation (bottle bill), arms race, FISH  
Participation in Medic group blood program (continues to current day)  
Adventure auction (continues to present)

### **1979**

Congregation celebrates 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary; Richard Henry preaches  
Ann Tyndall summer minister  
Wednesday evening potlucks (summer only)  
Sunday evening services (in addition to Sunday morning) begun in September  
Neighborhood groups organized; replaced in 1982 by extended families  
UUA acquires camp and conference center near Highlands, NC ("The Mountain")  
Art deco menorah given to church (passed on to Arnstein Jewish Community Center in 1984)

### **1980**

Vietnamese family (Mais) "adopted" by church  
Positions of custodian and church administrator expanded to full time

### **(1980)**

Christine Robinson summer minister  
Services every Sunday all summer  
TVUC conference on growth and development at The Mountain  
Mary Nelson ordained to the Ministry of Religious Education  
Quilt exhibit on sanctuary walls. Other exhibits from time  
to time evolve into continuous art shows by 1990

### **1981**

Right-to-choose phone chain instituted (to persuade legislators  
to preserve the right to an abortion)  
Recyclable newspapers collected in “paper shack” with proceeds  
of their sale supporting social concerns committee projects  
First holiday open houses, continuing to present

### **1982**

Peter Hewiss interim minister February through May  
Knoxville World’s Fair  
Robert Swain, fifth called minister, preaches first service on  
August 24  
Two services each Sunday morning (early one more contemplative,  
informal) September through December of this year

### **1983**

*Perceptions*, “a monthly magazine of opinion, creativity, and  
news,” published February 1983 to March 1991

### **1984**

Report of Karp and Associates regarding TVUC’s growth options  
Central America refugee project collecting clothes and household  
goods for refugees in Costa Rica

**(1984)**

Two services each Sunday morning (more or less identical)  
September through December of this year  
Michael Boblett intern September through March

**1985**

Congregation votes to upgrade and expand existing facility and  
explore the possibility of establishing a new congregation  
Michael Boblett returns for his ordination  
Hunter family agree to sell their property  
Six Dinners for Eight held, with 32 couples and 17 singles  
Exploration of properties in west Knoxville for a new congregation

**1986**

Summer forums on Central America  
Westside UU Church officially established August 31 (meeting temporarily at Farragut High School); Dillman Sorrells, first called minister, arrives in February, 1987  
Burglars take much equipment from church office and damage several different areas of building.  
Church and minister's offices moved to Unitarian House  
Security system installed  
Fund established to help provide abortions for indigent women with medical and/or psychiatric problems; continues  
Congregation officially confirms study of peace issues; groups supporting peace initiatives active for past decade  
Members helping in Overground Railroad, transporting refugees on a leg of their journey from Central America to Canada

**1987**

Building committee consulting with architects and asbestos removal firms in anticipation of expanding facilities

**(1987)**

Blount County UUs (BUG for Blount Unitarian Group) meeting occasionally; later renamed Smoky Mountain Unitarian Universal Group (SMUUG)

**1988**

Alvaro, Roselia, and Alvaro (Jr.) Morales, refugees from Guatemala, arrive as our sanctuary family; sanctuary committee continues, evolving into Central America issues committee  
Alliance for a Better Tomorrow (ABT) organized with support from the social concerns committee

**1989**

Regular Wednesday evening potlucks begin  
Endowment fund established, information on charitable giving and estate planning available  
Congregation celebrates 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary with Richard Henry, Ken MacLean, and John Buehrens participating

**1990**

Trevor Blondal approved as chaplain January until September  
Campus fellowship gives chalice to church  
Pastors for Peace collects goods for Cuba and/or Central America; continues to present  
Peter Samson interim minister September through June

**1991**

Congregation changes name from Tennessee Valley Unitarian Church to Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church  
Kroger certificates for sale, continue to present  
Lynn Thomas Strauss, sixth called minister, preaches first service September 2

### **1992**

Guatemalan Fiesta helps our refugee family pay their political asylum legal expenses; later evolves into Fiesta Latina  
Drama summer camp for children  
Informal groups hiking in state and national parks; hiking groups continue to present  
Committee for endowment fund established

### **1993**

“Love Delivers” meals delivered to persons with AIDS and their children  
Alliance for a Better Tomorrow (ABT) is reorganized into the Knoxville Interfaith Network (KIN), still supported by social concerns committee (to present)  
Congregation officially becomes a Welcoming Congregation  
Two services each Sunday morning (meditation at 9, regular at 11) September - May (1993-1995). January – June (1997-1998)  
John Buehrens, former minister of TVUUC, elected president of UUA (1993 – 2001)  
Dedication of new hymnbooks, *Singing the Living Tradition*

### **1994**

Women’s Table starts meeting in January; continues to present  
Anti-racism conference held  
Committee appointed to negotiate with buyers of our property and sellers of potential property site for new church

### **1995**

Informal recorder group organized  
Camp Neighborhood (summer camp) with St. Lukes’s Episcopal Church 1995-1998

**(1995)**

UU Revival (Oak Ridge UUC, Westside UUC , TVUUC) on Westside's new property in Farragut; held again in 1996  
Congregation votes (1) to sell present church property (3219 Kingston Pike) to Calvary Baptist church for \$1,250,000, (2) to purchase the property at 2931 Kingston Pike for \$675,000, (3) to proceed with the selection of an architect, and (4) to hire a fund raising consultant

**1996**

Program council re-created  
All church picnic on new property in April  
Ground breaking for new church building (2931 Kingston Pike) November 3

**1997**

Sacred circle dance group meeting monthly; moves to new location in 2008  
TVUUC a pilot in Journey to Wholeness (anti-racism program)  
Caring committee active; continues to present  
New logo chosen (chalice with tongues of flame)  
Move from 3219 to 2931 in December by TVUUC members and friends using one big rented truck and privately owned trucks  
Re-affirmation of wedding vows on December 31: last ritual in 3219 building

**1998**

New pews installed  
First service at 2931 on January 11  
Drumming circle organized

**(1998)**

Dedication of 2931 on May 3 at 3:00 p.m.; Gwen and John Buehrens, and Ken MacLean participate  
Newsletter goes to bi-weekly publication  
Archaeological dig near Kingston Pike entrance: excavation of earliest cabin site on Kingston Pike built in 1793 by William Bell, a former revolutionary war soldier

**1999**

Congregation celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Robert Swain and Chris Buice participating

**2000**

Frog Fest provides inter-generational activities and raises funds; continues for 3 years  
Storm (tornado?) damages light scoop and destroys several trees, one falling on a parked car  
Joan Kahn-Schneider interim minister September through June  
Members begin tutoring children at Lonsdale Elementary School as part of TVUUC's commitment as a Congregation of Promise; continuing  
Hops and Hope 5K run and dinner raises money for FISH; continues to present

**2001**

Spectrum Café for GLBT teens and their friends opens April 7 (first and third Saturday nights); continues to present  
Five pulpit banners by Jimmie Benedict given by family of Chris Benson  
Newsletter and church directory available by e-mail  
Chris Buice, seventh settled minister, preaches first service August 5

### **(2001)**

Knoxville churches respond to September 11 World Trade Center disaster with an interfaith service at the Mosque  
Crosses on pews transformed into chalices  
TVUUC plugs into green power  
Small group ministry organized  
East Tennessee Interfaith Alliance established (major meeting at TVUUC November 8)  
Stainless steel chalice dedicated December 9

### **2002**

Congregation affiliates with Interweave (national UU organization supporting GLBT community)  
First Wednesday night fellowship meal; continues to present September 11 (2001) event remembered in anniversary interfaith service at Heska Amuna Synagogue  
Back exit on to Painter Avenue opened  
CD of Theresa Pepin playing the B. Rule organ produced (available for purchase in March, 2003)  
First PALS (Performing Arts and Lecture Series) concerts  
Auction raises over \$18,000  
East Tennessee UU Cluster formed (TVUUC, Westside and Oak Ridge UU Churches) to exchange ideas, work for common goals, and identify sites for future UU congregations

### **2003**

Cabaret kicks off the Canvass  
Harp singing annually, open to everyone  
Two list-serves available, one for official church announcements and one for everything else  
Jake Bohstedt Morrill ordained by our congregation in June  
“Big hole” (soil collapse) develops at the northeast corner of the building

## **2004**

Homeless meals project provides meals for the Volunteer Ministry Center once a month  
Joe Chait our student intern during the summer months  
The Morales family, supported by TVUUC in 1987 as our “sanctuary family,” is granted permanent legal residency  
Memorial garden dedicated November 7

## **2005**

RAM (Remote Area Medical) supported annually with money and volunteers at clinics  
Special collection sends Lonsdale Elementary School fifth graders to River Ridge Environmental Camp (\$1759 in 2008)  
Week day rental of church school rooms discontinued, making all rooms in the building available for congregational use 7 days a week  
Record breaking rummage sale raises \$8,360.  
Sunday sermon available on Monday via the internet

## **2006**

Congregation becomes an Interfaith Hospitality Network host, providing meals and overnight accommodations for homeless families 4 weeks a year. Name later changed to Family Promise.  
Second Sunday potlucks introduced  
Suffrage memorial on Market Square unveiled; 19<sup>th</sup> century Unitarian Lizzie Crozier French is prominent, and our full church name is on the memorial  
Blount County UUs having monthly services  
Sunday morning format includes 2 services August through May  
Four boxes of gifts sent to Donald Williams, Jr. in Iraq; included items for Donald and his friends and for children in Iraq

## 2007

Alliance book sale nets \$2,800

Two-week musical theatre workshop for youth culminates in performance of *Chaos in the Kingdom* by Cary Masters

## 2008

Summer musical theatre workshop involves children in 2 weeks of intensive work on a full-scale production of *Annie*

Man carrying gun in guitar case enters sanctuary on July 27 and starts shooting, killing Greg McKendry of TVUUC and Linda Kraeger of Westside UUC and wounding 6 others before being disarmed and held for police

Second Presbyterian Church hosts a candlelight service July 28 where an overflow crowd is addressed by UUA President William Sinkford

UUA trauma response team spends 10 days handling the immediate after-effects of the July 27 incident

Amazing outpouring of concern and support from many Knoxville churches and from other UU churches world-wide

Circle of friendship groups meeting for meals and conversation

Foothills Unitarian Universalist Fellowship becomes officially independent October 19 with 53 charter members. The Fellowship joins the East Tennessee UU Cluster

This time line contains general information, mostly gathered from the church Newsletters, of the congregation's first 60 years. Additional information may be found in the Annual Reports and Minutes of the Board of Directors.

Readers wanting more information about the religious education program, the Alliance, the music program, areas of social activism, or the churches that preceded TVUUC, should consult the booklets dealing with those topics.

**THE FIRST SIXTY YEARS**  
**of**  
**TENNESSEE VALLEY**  
**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH**

**A Timeline**

**by**  
**Karen Yarbro**

**Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church**  
**2931 Kingston Pike Knoxville, TN**  
**January 2009**





