

Ann Arbor in 1865



Main Street - 1861

Photos from the collection of the Ann Arbor District Library

Ann Arbor in 1865.

This mini-history provides the setting, the time and place where **OUR STORY** begins....

It was a dark and stormy era of American history. A very bloody Civil War had just ended, the US president who led the country thru that war had just been assassinated and the chaotic Reconstruction Era was underway. The issue of slavery had divided people all over the country, including here in Michigan.

"Mercy to the South. Death to Slavery!" was the rallying cry at the May, 1862 Western Unitarian Conference held in Detroit. Most Unitarians stood strongly against slavery. The writings and actions of Unitarian minister and abolitionist Theodore Parker were a great influence on Abraham Lincoln. If you by any chance don't recognize the name Theodore Parker I would suggest that you google him after the service. Or walk down the hall... His portrait is hanging in our library, just next to the Jackson Chapel where you will find a wonderful display about the slavery era, provided to us by member Doug Kelley. This HISTORY DISPLAY CASE-- is, another NEW feature to watch for this year... More displays are coming.

Ann Arbor was still very much a frontier town in the 1860s. The scenery was farmland and orchards, dirt streets and horse drawn carriages. The university had about a thousand students and officially began intercollegiate sports competition in 1865, winning its first three baseball games. Football would not be introduced for another 14 years. Hot topics at the university included whether to admit women... later referred to as the "dangerous experiment". The town of Ann Arbor had no city police, no public libraries, no public schools, but it was working its way up to 49 saloons! The small number of churches in town had regular sermons on the evils of drunkenness. The town was steadily growing with an influx of Civil War veterans enrolling in the university.

Slavery and the Civil War had left their marks on society in Ann Arbor. In 1837, an Anti-Slavery society was founded here supported primarily by Quakers and Wesleyan Methodists. In 1848 the Congregationalist church was formed when they split off from the Presbyterians because the minister there would not renounce slavery.

There was an active crossing of two Underground Railroad lines in Ann Arbor, helping slaves escape to Canada.

One of the very effective "conductors" of the Underground Railroad in Michigan was a liberal Quaker-born Ann Arbor pacifist named Robert Barclay Glasier. Robert Glasier contributed to

the history of Ann Arbor in another very significant way. In May of 1865 Robert Glasier, his brother Richard & Richard's wife Emma joined with 37 other Ann Arbor liberals who were " desirous of securing to ourselves and our families the advantages of religious instructions and fellowship " and together they signed the Articles of Association of the First Congregational Unitarian Society of Ann Arbor, Michigan. Their timing was good. The early members of this congregation asked the American Unitarian Association to send a minister to lead them as they worshiped as Unitarians and continued to play active roles building the public schools and libraries of Ann Arbor. The American Unitarian Association saw a great missionary opportunity to reach out to the largest university in the country and mold the minds of the great men who would become the leaders of the American West. Who should they send to Ann Arbor?

Their dilemma has been described as follows:

"The first qualification of even a liberal minister, then, was a full and comprehensive knowledge of the Bible. If he could interpret it well enough to avoid ruffling the delicately balanced but deeply rooted prejudices, he had some chance of inoculating the people to his doctrines.

"Then, too, there must be a gift of oratory without which no minister in the middle of the last century could hope to hold any important pulpit.

"In Ann Arbor the problem was intensified by the presence of more than a thousand students at the great State University. These must be reached by a minister of extraordinary power and personal charm. A man must be found who would be admired by the students and at the same time carry the Unitarian message to them.

Such a man was Charles Henry Brigham*", scholar, great orator, **intense** workaholic and the first minister of our congregation.

... And that is how **Our Story** begins.

**From a history of the congregation written by Rev. Joseph H. Crooker early in his ministry, probably about 1902. It was published, but the only known copy is in the church files in the University of Michigan Bentley Library*

Mini-History Presented 9/28/14 by Sandy Simon