THE REVIVAL OF UNITARIANISM
IN PITTSBURGH

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Introduction

UNITARIANISM, the religious faith of many dissenters, including several of the Founding Fathers, first came to Pittsburgh in 1820. The denomination was formally established in the city when Dr. John Campbell, an English Unitarian minister, was persuaded to migrate to Western Pennsylvania by a plea from his daughter who lived in Pittsburgh. Upon his arrival on June 1, 1820, Dr. Campbell found that his prospective congregation was composed of only a small band of Unitarians in addition to his daughter, Mrs. Joseph Armorer. But among the number was the famous Pittsburgh glassmaker, Benjamin Bakewell. Through Bakewell’s support and that of a few other dedicated members who followed him, the movement continued in Pittsburgh for the next 45 years, flourishing briefly at times and then becoming dormant as ministers left or church members moved away.

Pittsburgh Unitarians in those early years were active in educational efforts, sponsoring public lectures and helping to organize schools. In this they were like fellow adherents of their faith in other parts of the country. Theirs was a faith that stressed the potential of the mind and the need for rationality in religion. The zeal of the small group of Pittsburgh Unitarians was not enough, however, to keep their church alive in the difficult days of the Civil War. Faced with a dispersal of members and lacking a minister, the society finally ceased to function in the 1870’s. Some 20 years passed before it was resuscitated and the foundation laid for the present First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh.

The rebirth came during the summer 1889 when the Reverend

This article is a condensed version of a chapter from a forthcoming book entitled, Unitarianism in Pittsburgh. The author, an editorial writer on the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, is the contributor of Part I of the projected four part volume.
James Graham Townsend of Jamestown, New York, appeared in Pittsburgh and, through a newspaper ad, appealed to local Unitarians to meet him for services. After a number of meetings in private homes, the rejuvenated society rented a third floor hall on Wood Street. On December 10, 1889, the group petitioned the Common Pleas Court for a corporate charter, and when the document was recorded the following May 7 it gave the name of the new organization as the "Unity or the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh," and contained the signatures of 18 charter members. Dr. Townsend remained until June, 1891, when he returned to Jamestown at the request of his former congregation. Through his efforts Unitarianism had been reawakened in Pittsburgh. But it was through the inspiration and the work of his successor that the movement in the Pittsburgh area was given a firm foundation. This paper describes the philosophy and the church and community activities of those who successfully revived Unitarianism in Western Pennsylvania.

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An earnest young Unitarian minister from Northampton, Massachusetts, showed up in Pittsburgh early in July of 1891. He had come at the behest of D. W. Morehouse, secretary of the Unitarian Middle States Conference, who had asked him to preach for two Sundays to the congregation of the First Unitarian Church, then without a minister. The people of Pittsburgh's recently revived Unitarian society were pleased with their visitor and asked him to be their pastor. The visitor, the Reverend Charles E. St. John, surveyed the situation, was particularly impressed by the young men of the church, and decided to accept the call.¹

Charles St. John had a broad educational background. He entered Harvard College from the Worcester, Massachusetts, public schools in 1875, and four years later received his A.B. In the fall of 1880 he entered the Harvard Divinity School. He was graduated in 1883 with the degrees of B.D. and A.M. Declining a call to a church at North Andover, Massachusetts, he accepted one to the Second Congregational Church (Unitarian) at Northampton, where he was ordained and installed in November, 1883. There he remained for nearly eight years.

St. John resigned his Northampton pastorate in July, 1891, and

¹ Collected excerpts from letters of Mrs. Charles E. St. John, p. 1 (this collection and all scrapbooks mentioned herein are in Archives of First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh).
preached his farewell sermon on September 27. The next day the young minister and his wife, the former Martha E. Everett, set off for Pennsylvania.\(^2\) As the train pulled into Pittsburgh on Tuesday, September 29, the St. Johns beheld a city that represented a different world from the small New England town they had left. Smoke belched from the stacks of mills ranged along the river banks, and hung like a canopy over the green hills and valleys. The great industrial metropolis was experiencing the first of two decades of rapidly rising production, with pig iron, rolled iron, steel and meat products coming in ever-increasing quantities from its plants.\(^3\)

To man the busy factories, a steady stream of immigrants flowed in. St. John looked upon this conglomerate community as a promising field for his endeavors. In the cities of Pittsburgh and Allegheny, with their 340,000 people, there were 300 churches and only one of them Unitarian. Boston had 25 Unitarian churches.\(^4\)

"Unity Hall," a second floor room in the old University Building at the southwest corner of Ross and Diamond, was the Unitarians' meeting place at this time, and the scene of St. John's installation as pastor on October 6.\(^5\)

At the time St. John began his work in Pittsburgh there were about 40 families in the new Unitarian society. But the congregation on October 4, the day of his first sermon in Pittsburgh, had numbered only 30.\(^6\) After the morning service of November 15, St. John initiated a weekly Bible class, and on December 6 he added Sunday evening services as another new activity aimed at building support. Twenty-five persons, half of them strangers, attended the first evening service. On December 13 the pastor led the first of several neighborhood meetings designed to generate interest.\(^7\) He hopefully recorded that during the first two months of his pastorate congregations numbered as many as 80 on pleasant Sundays.\(^8\)

Several times during these early months of making himself known in the community, St. John, though he was liberal by orthodox standards, found himself on the conservative side of a theological

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2 Ibid., p. 1; Christian Register, May 17, 1900.
4 Letters of Mrs. St. John, pp. B, 1; Northampton (Mass.) Herald, July 20, 1891.
6 Annual Report of Middle State (Unitarian) Conference, 1892.
7 Scrapbook No. 1, pp. 2, 4, 5.
8 Ibid., pp. 1, 2, 3.
argument. He attended meetings of the Pittsburgh Secular Society and spoke on the necessity for a belief in God.9

But these sentiments were expressed after the community had already had an opportunity to hear the new Unitarian minister plead from his pulpit for freedom for man "to earn his living, freedom to worship God in his own way, freedom to think by the laws of his own mind, freedom for a modern and rational use of Sunday." He called for open minds ready to accept new truths for old errors.10

In what was perhaps its most revealing gesture to the community, however, the Unitarian society on Monday, April 11, opened a free reading room in rented quarters next to the hall in which services were held. The room was supplied with daily newspapers and leading magazines given by individuals.11

Actually the reading room was but a beginning on a larger objective envisioned by St. John. His plan looked toward the establishment of an institution akin to the London "People's Palace," a place containing a library, a gymnasium, a billiard room, a pool-room, a dining room where good meals would be served at a reasonable rate. Religious teaching would be available for those who wanted it. The idea was to attract the many younger people who never entered a church door. As the pastor was to explain at a Unitarian conference later that year, the church could make no impression on the multitudes slipping away from it unless it succeeded in convincing them that it was engaged in manful and strenuous work. He added that the church should offer manual training and sewing courses as well as reading rooms, declared that the church should never be closed nor crowded out of the business section of the city by encroaching business concerns.12

As the Unitarians stepped up their activities in the spring of 1892, they soon realized that other projects would have to wait while they concentrated on erecting a church building. The society felt that its growth was being impeded by the limitations of its place of worship. On December 4, 1892, the Unitarian meeting place was moved to 77 Sixth Avenue, near Grant Street. Meanwhile the campaign to build a church had already begun with the canvassing of members of the Pittsburgh society and the raising of some $3,000.

During the next year St. John carried the building fund appeal

9 Ibid., pp. 5-6, 7, 10.
10 Pittsburgh Dispatch, January 18, 1892.
11 Scrapbook No. 1, p. 10; Scrapbook No. 2, p. 6; Letters of Mrs. St. John, p. 4.
12 Pittsburgh Press, May 25, 1892; Philadelphia Ledger, November 18, 1892.
from Pittsburgh to Unitarian churches scattered across the northeastern section of the country. Counting boldly on growth, the Pittsburgh Unitarian society purchased for $10,000 a 180 by 100-foot lot on the west side of Craig Street near its intersection with Fifth Avenue. The building contract for the new church was signed on April 19, 1893, and on October 3 of the same year dedication services were held in the modest yellow and white frame structure. With its furnishings, the L-shaped building, designed to seat 400 people in the main auditorium and 100 in the side parlor, had cost the Unitarians about $10,000.13

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After two years of strenuous promotional effort, St. John was now able to give more attention to personal, theological and civic affairs. St. John was a man whose broad interests were to assure him a place in the cultural leadership of the city. He was one of only two ministers who were members of the exclusive Junta Club, an organization of some 30 of the community's intellectual and business leaders who met monthly to discuss theses by members. As small as his church was in comparison to many, St. John's activities from the first were noted by the newspapers. In 1895 he wrote a series of five articles for the Pittsburgh Leader in which he challenged many conventional beliefs. Among other things, he supported the theory of evolution at a time when some of the leading Protestant and Catholic clergymen of Pittsburgh were accepting it only with theological reservations; he called attention to the inconsistencies, "myths" and "historical errors" in the Bible; he denied that Christians had a monopoly on truth.14

Faith, he said, is not "a blind trust in something that has been told to you . . . Faith is a well-reasoned, clear-eyed, far-seeing heroism of the spirit. Faith is abiding by one's convictions and

13 Letters of Mrs. St. John, pp. 6, 7, 8, 9; Scrapbook No. 1, pp. 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; Scrapbook No. 2, inside front cover, p. 13; Christian Register, December 15, 1892; September 21, October 2, 12, 19, 1893; December 14, 1894; Pittsburgh Dispatch, September 25 and December 17, 1893; Scrapbook No. 3, pp. 10-12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21; American Contractor, April 22, 1893; Pittsburgh Post, October 2, 1893; "Order of Services for the Dedication of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh, Pa., Tuesday, October Third, and Wednesday, October Fourth, 1893," in St. John Scrapbook No. 2.

going whithersoever the truth leads. What force has truth among us save as it vitalizes human action?" 15

His view on the universe was in keeping with the prevailing intellectual outlook of his time: "We live in a universe which from eternity to eternity is shaped by absolute precision and orderliness. This everlasting order is an expression of the character of God . . . The great purpose of life is to live in harmony with the eternal order." 16

But St. John did not limit himself to theological abstractions. He saw it as the duty of the pulpit "not only to cultivate the religious life of the community, but also to proclaim the great principles which underlie its social life." In a sermon on the city administration of Pittsburgh in 1895 he mentioned reports from respected sources that contractors profited by not fulfilling their obligations to the city, that policemen accepted protection money from houses of prostitution, that corruption was involved in the giving of franchises to street car companies, that private citizens and businessmen had to pay bribes to an unofficial "ring" in order to get fair treatment from the city. As a cure for misrule, the minister advocated separation of the city administration from national politics and from the party system.17 When he turned his attention to politics on the national level, St. John condemned bossism as reflected in the parties.18

Through such representative expressions of his point of view, St. John made the Unitarian Church better known in Pittsburgh. But his intellect was only one of the elements that shaped the character of his religious society, a society emphasizing as it did (and does) the freedom of each individual to be guided by his own conscience. St. John's intellect was the magnet which drew together many individuals who were to make significant contributions to the life of the church and the community.

There was James Otis Handy, a chemist who played a leading role in bringing about the purification of Pittsburgh's water supply.19

Miss Mary Semple, one of the incorporators of the church, visualized in 1895 a program for Pittsburgh that would mark her

15 Ibid., September 10, 1893.
16 Christian Register, November 24, 1898.
17 Pittsburgh Dispatch and Pittsburgh Times, December 9, 1895.
18 Union and Advertiser (Rochester, N. Y.), November 11, 1896.
19 Pittsburgh Dispatch, December 29, 1895; Mrs. L. Walter Mason, Unitarianism in Pittsburgh and the Story of the First Church (Pittsburgh: First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh, 1940), pp. 47, 48.
as a progressive citizen even today. She urged small parks for the community, beautification of its hillsides, a war against smoke and squalor, the formation of improvement clubs in suburban municipalities.\(^{20}\) She took an active part in settlement house work.\(^{21}\) Reporting on the organization of the Free Kindergarten Association of Pittsburgh and Allegheny, she noted that its object was to rescue little children from the bad influences of the street, to turn “the sunshine of love and care on their young lives,” and thus to save youngsters who otherwise might be started toward criminality before starting school.\(^{22}\)

William P. Flint, a Westinghouse engineer, who was later to become a trustee and president of the board, was in 1896 president of the crusading Citizens’ League.\(^{23}\)

Once they had established a permanent physical home after years of wandering from one place in the city to another, Pittsburgh Unitarians were in a position to devote more of their time to putting their religious tenets into practice. As they began their third year under St. John, their constituency had climbed to nearly 300.\(^{24}\) With this much strength, Unitarians could begin to make their weight felt among Pittsburgh churches.

St. John was quick to attack signs or demonstrations of intolerance toward other denominations. On one occasion he chided Presbyterians for their hostile attitude towards Catholics and observed that the Catholic Church was the only Christian church that “has ever deeply affected the minds and hearts and conduct of great masses of lowly people.”\(^{25}\) Speaking to the Pittsburgh Christian Patriotic Association in 1896, St. John rebuked the group for a derogatory remark about Catholics by one of its officers.\(^{26}\)

By 1896, Pittsburgh Unitarians had had a chance to prove that, whatever their theological views were, they were good neighbors. A few months after St. John came, women of the church, inspired by one of their number who was a native of Russia, sponsored a Russian tea and then a New England lunch for the benefit of famine-stricken Russian peasants.\(^{27}\) In their own city, too, Unitarians did

\(^{20}\) Pittsburgh Post, May 1, 1895.
\(^{22}\) Pittsburgh Post, May, 1895.
\(^{23}\) Scrapbook No. 1, p. 53; Pittsburgh Dispatch, July 25, 1895.
\(^{24}\) Pittsburgh Post, October 2, 1893.
\(^{25}\) Christian Register, June 6, 1895.
\(^{26}\) Pittsburgh Times, January 6, 1896.
\(^{27}\) Pittsburgh Dispatch, May 27, 1892.
their share to aid those in need. As the business depression reached an acute stage in December 1893, there were more than 5,000 Pittsburgh families reported as requiring assistance. St. John spoke at a public meeting on how to meet the crisis. Unitarians were called on to contribute toys and other articles for the poor. The congregation started a fund to aid its own needy members as well as others in the city.\textsuperscript{28}

The church at Craig and Fifth, however, was a center for more than the nourishment of material needs. It sponsored lectures and concerts and implemented the formation of organizations that promoted both cultural and civic projects. Novelist George W. Cable, who had been a Harvard college mate of St. John's, appeared several times in Pittsburgh under church auspices and read from his works.\textsuperscript{29} Elbert Hubbard spoke at the church; Frederick Vermorck gave an address on Balzac; Professor H. W. Rolfe lectured on Oxford.\textsuperscript{30} On April 3, 1895, the Reverend Watari Kitashima, a native of Tokyo and minister of a Unitarian church in New Jersey, lectured on Japanese customs and commented on the Sino-Japanese war then occurring.\textsuperscript{31}

A series of "book talks" by St. John and others was held in 1894 and 1895, with such titles as \textit{Trilby} and \textit{The Deluge} up for discussion. Ethelbert Nevin was one of several musicians who performed in the church.\textsuperscript{32} The Mendelssohn Quintette Club held a series of concerts there.\textsuperscript{33}

The secretary of the Philadelphia Municipal League, speaking in the Pittsburgh Unitarian Church, urged adoption of a corrupt practices act and other governmental reforms.\textsuperscript{34} The Men's Patriotic Guild held discussions of election laws, civil service reform, and sponsored a debate on women's suffrage.\textsuperscript{35}

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In one particular program of direct social action to improve community conditions, the contribution of St. John and of members of his church was outstanding. Their effort to get Kingsley House

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid.}, December 17, 1893; Scrapbook No. 1, pp. 24-25, 290, 291.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Pittsburgh Dispatch}, November 24, 1893; \textit{Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette}, February 1, 1894; poster, Scrapbook No. 2.
\textsuperscript{30} Scrapbook No. 1, p. 55; posters, Scrapbook No. 2.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Pittsburgh Press}, April 2, 1895.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Pittsburgh Dispatch}, October 9, 11, 1894; \textit{Pittsburgh Times}, October 30 and November 5, 1894; posters, Scrapbook No. 2.
\textsuperscript{33} Program in St. John Scrapbook No. 2.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Pittsburgh Dispatch}, November 2, 1894.
\textsuperscript{35} Posters, Scrapbook No. 2; \textit{Pittsburgh Dispatch}, April 8, 1894.
off to a successful start was out of all proportion to their numbers in the city. Though the Reverend George Hodges of Calvary Episcopal Church was the leading founder and moving spirit behind Kingsley House, St. John and his congregation were active from the first in many ways. Hodges, moreover, actually left Pittsburgh shortly after the founding.  

The idea of a social settlement in Pittsburgh came to Hodges after a trip abroad in 1890 when he spent some days at Toynbee Hall in London. In America settlement projects were in their early stages. The Neighborhood Guild and Women's House on Rivington Street in New York, Andover House in Boston, and Hull House in Chicago, were newly available models for the Pittsburgh project. Hodges during the fall of 1893 called together several community leaders, including St. John, to discuss his plan. He broached the idea in a sermon and elicited financial support. He asked the Reverend Morgan M. Sheedy, a Roman Catholic; the Reverend E. M. Donehoo, a Presbyterian; and St. John to serve with himself, as directors of the effort and as recruiters of a company of men and women who would agree to be annual contributors.  

Hodges chose Kingsley House as the name for the settlement, a designation intended to honor the memory of Charles Kingsley, the English novelist, poet and preacher of the social gospel. As Hodges visualized the project, it would provide study and recreational opportunities for the working people of the neighborhood. Its resident staff would make friends with the neighbors, find out the conditions under which they lived, such as housing and sanitation, their hours of work, their pay in relation to their needs, the number of churches and saloons—information which, in Hodges' words, would provide "a moral map of the Twelfth Ward."  

Kingsley House, at 1707 Penn Avenue (in what is now known as the Strip district), opened its doors on December 23, 1893. The head of the house was Miss Kate A. Everest, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin, holder of a Ph.D. and formerly a pupil of Jane Addams. As the site for the settlement, its founders had deliberately selected a spot in close proximity to several large iron and steel mills, glass and cork factories, and various smaller indus-

36 Hodges, George Hodges, p. 125.  
37 Ibid., pp. 107-108; Kingsley House and the Settlement Movement, ed. by John C. Weaver (Pittsburgh, 1933), pp. 13-14; Pittsburgh Dispatch, September 10, 1893.  
38 Hodges, George Hodges, pp. 110-113.  
39 Pittsburgh Dispatch, April 9, 1894; Hodges, George Hodges, p. 109; Scrapbook No. 1, p. 24.
tries. The population of the area consisted mostly of mill workers, most of them common laborers, with Irish Americans predominating, but with Germans, Russians, Austrians and Poles making up a substantial percentage. Many of the dwellings were old and neglected, with damp cellars and defective sewage facilities. They were overcrowded and in some cases whole families lived in basements. Disease was common. With no compulsory school law in effect, many of the children couldn't read and write and a great many boys from 8 to 16 worked in the mills. Most of the families were poor.40

In January, 1894, Miss Mary Lyman of the Unitarian Church organized a sewing class and then became director of the settlement’s sewing school. Concerts were directed by several Unitarians, among them Miss Mary Semple and Miss Alice Holdship.41 Several members of the Men’s Patriotic Guild at the church volunteered for evening work.42

To raise money for the settlement project, Miss Everest gave a series of lectures on Nineteenth Century History at the Unitarian Church during the fall and winter of 1894. St. John helped to enlist leading Pittsburgh women as patronesses and spoke before the opening lecture.43 Upon the organization of the Kingsley House Association, St. John became a member of the board of directors and of the executive committee, posts which he held for several years. He also served on the committee on residents.44

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While some Unitarians were taking a significant part in conducting a settlement to aid mill workers, others began an inquiry that was to affect the health of the whole city. One Unitarian in particular, James O. Handy, became interested in the problem soon after hearing a paper on the water question at a meeting of the Engineers’ Society of Western Pennsylvania in 1891. The society began investigating. By 1895 interest in the city’s water supply had taken the shape of a campaign for purification. Popular atten-

42 Scrapbook No. 1, p. 24.
43 Poster, Scrapbook No. 2; letter from the Rev. Charles E. St. John, chairman of the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of Kingsley House, November 5, 1894, Scrapbook No. 2; Pittsburgh Dispatch, November 18 and 20, 1894; Scrapbook No. 1, pp. 37, 38, 39.
44 First, Second, Third and Fifth Annual Reports of Kingsley House Association.
tion was focused on water as a result of a *Pittsburgh Dispatch* editorial drive against high rates.

With city officials, in the spring of 1895, beginning to feel the pressure from health campaigners, Public Safety Director E. M. Bigelow sent samples of Pittsburgh water to scientists at Harvard, Yale and the Western University of Pennsylvania, and then sought to use their reports to prove that the water supply was safe. The *Dispatch* consulted Handy, who by this time had made a thorough inquiry into the subject of polluted water. Handy analyzed the professors' reports and pointed out that they had disclaimed expert knowledge of the Pittsburgh situation and that they had only certified that the water was chemically pure, not that it was free from bacteria.  

On June 16, 1895, the day after his statement appeared in the *Dispatch*, Handy spoke from the pulpit of the First Unitarian Church. Churches had been urged by the Women's Health Protective Association to observe "Sanitary Sunday," but not many of them did. St. John welcomed the opportunity to introduce Handy and his cause. Emphasizing the correlation between impure water and disease, Handy cited the history of typhoid epidemics in Europe and America before the purification of water supplies. He pointed out that Pittsburgh had the highest typhoid mortality rate of 54 American cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants—115 deaths for every 100,000 persons. He recommended the use of the sand filtration method which had been successful in other places.

As if to underscore Handy's warning, typhoid epidemics began that year in Freeport, Springdale and Tarentum and followed the course of the Allegheny River until they reached Pittsburgh and Allegheny. There were scores of victims, and people hesitated to drink city water. Late in August the *Dispatch* reported that there had been 300 typhoid cases and 18 deaths in that month alone.

Handy's address led to the organization of the Citizens' League with William P. Flint as president and Handy as secretary, both officers being members of the Unitarian Church. Most of the League members were also connected with the church. After sending to

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46 *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, June 15 and 17, 1895; *Pittsburgh Times*, September 10, 1895; Scrapbook No. 1, p. 44.
47 *Pittsburgh Post*, August 28, 1895; *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, December 29, 1895.
48 *Pittsburgh Times*, September 10, 1895; *Christian Register*, October 3, 1895.
Lawrence, Mass., for plans for an experimental sand filter being operated there by the Massachusetts State Board of Health, the Citizens' League in August set up an experimental filter on the grounds of the Unitarian Church. The filtering device was a cylindrical tank, 6½ feet high and 6 feet 9 inches in diameter, with concrete walls 2 inches thick. The river water from the city's conduits was introduced into a catch basin at the top and filtered through 4½ feet of washed sand which rested on 7 inches of gravel at the bottom of the tank.\footnote{49 Pittsburgh Post, August 28, 1895; Pittsburgh Dispatch, December 12, 1895.}

On September 22, Handy and his associates began daily bacteriological tests of the unfiltered and filtered water. The raw water from the city's Highland Avenue reservoir turned out to be heavily laden with bacteria; the filtered water, after the sand had settled, proved to be 99 per cent free of bacteria.\footnote{50 Pittsburgh Medical Review, December, 1895; Pittsburgh Dispatch, December 12, 1895.} The experiment was publicized as a lesson for the city. The \textit{Dispatch} told how tens of thousands of residents could reach the free, pure water by public transit. Many citizens, particularly those in the neighborhood, filled containers at the stream flowing from a pipe at the corner of the church.\footnote{51 Ibid., October 28 and December 29, 1895.}

Further impetus for the water campaign was provided by the formation on October 7 of a Civic Club for municipal reform. At a well-attended organizational meeting at the Twentieth Century Club, St. John, Handy, and Miss Everest of Kingsley House made the principal addresses. John A. Brashear was chosen president; Handy was elected one of four vice presidents.\footnote{52 Ibid., October 8, 1895; Letters of Mrs. St. John, p. 19.}

Despite the proof provided by the filtration experiment, Pittsburgh Public Safety Director Bigelow was still not convinced that the city's water supply was especially unclean. Nor was he convinced that it was the cause of the typhoid fever epidemic.\footnote{53 Pittsburgh Dispatch, October 6, 1895.} In December an imposing lineup of physicians and scientists, including Handy, failed to persuade the Water Committee of Allegheny Select and Common Councils of the necessity for counteracting the disease hazard from contaminated water. The committee defeated a resolution calling for a vote of the people to authorize a $500,000 bond issue to complete the waterworks and give the city a pure supply.\footnote{54 Ibid., December 12, 1895.} The officials had not even been moved by Allen Hazen, former
head of the Massachusetts experiment, who visited Pittsburgh and declared that the city had positively the worst water supply of any city in the country and vouched for the effectiveness of the model filtration plant at the Unitarian Church. He ventured the surmise that opposition might stem from the fact that selfish interests had a stake in patented but less effective purification processes, whereas the sand filtration method was unpatented and was anybody's property without cost.55 There had already been a report of persecution of Handy's employers because of the chemist's advocacy of purification.56

The water purification campaign nevertheless continued. Handy spoke before various organizations and wrote on the subject for the Pittsburgh Medical Review and the Engineering News. At its annual supper in January, 1896, the Unitarian Church devoted a great deal of attention to the effort. In 1898 Handy was still keeping the interest of professional groups alive. The next year, 1899, a system for purifying water was finally authorized. But the first filtered water was not delivered until 1907. The typhoid death rate, which had been as high as 157 per 100,000, immediately began to drop and finally fell to 2 or 3 per 100,000.57

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While it was in progress, the water campaign naturally made the Unitarian Church better known in Pittsburgh. St. John had come to the Western Pennsylvania city regarding it as presenting a challenge like no other place in the United States. Largely through his efforts, Unitarianism took firm hold in Pittsburgh, while in some other areas the denomination was seeing churches unattended and Unitarian pastors going without pulpits.58

Such a showing inevitably came to the attention of national leaders of the denomination. At its 75th annual meeting, held in Boston in May, 1900, the American Unitarian Association chose Charles E. St. John as association secretary.59

After nine years, the St. Johns found it hard to leave Pittsburgh.

55 Ibid., December 12, 1895.
56 City and State (Philadelphia), July 18, 1895 (clipping from publication not further identified, Scrapbook No. 2, p. 70).
58 Letters of Mrs. St. John, p. 1; Christian Register, June 21, 1894.
59 Boston Herald, May 23, 1900; Scrapbook No. 1, p. 98; Letters of Mrs. St. John, p. 28.
From the struggling society of 1891, the church had now grown to a membership of 165 and a total constituency of more than 300. Attendance on Sunday ran as high as 148. Its $4,500 annual budget was raised entirely in Pittsburgh. And the only debt was $5,400 owed to the Church Loan Fund.\(^6^0\)

In the interest of denominational progress, the congregation accepted St. John’s resignation at a special meeting on June 8.

While regretting the loss of their pastor’s dynamic leadership, the congregation would nevertheless feel assured that the Unitarian movement had found a significant place in the community and would continue to contribute to its religious, intellectual and civic life.

\(^6^0\) *Ibid.*, p. 28; *Christian Register*, May 17, 1900; Scrapbook No. 1, p. 92.