

**First Unitarian Society of Denver**

**Application for Landmark Designation  
to the Denver Landmark Commission**



**Prepared by Members of the Congregation  
First Unitarian Society of Denver  
June 2016**

# First Unitarian Society of Denver



1400 N. Lafayette St.  
Denver, CO 80218  
303-831-7113  
303-831-8458 fax  
www.fusden.org

May 27, 2016

Mr. Martin Goldstein, Chair  
Landmark Preservation Commission  
Community Planning and Development  
Wellington Webb Municipal Office Building  
201 West Colfax Ave., Dept. 205  
Denver, CO 80202

Dear Mr. Goldstein:

Thank you for the opportunity to present this application for historic designation of the First Unitarian Society of Denver (FUSD), located at 1400 N. Lafayette St. This application comes to you not only with the full support of our congregation (demonstrated in a congregational vote on March 20) but also with the support of First Plymouth Congregational Church, which occupied the building prior to its sale to our congregation in 1958.

We believe our building is worthy of historic designation and have documented extensive evidence of this in the current application. Having been built beginning in 1893 by architects Ernest Varian and Frederick Stern, it is a notable historical feature in the Denver landscape, particularly given its Richardsonian Romanesque design and construction of Castle Rock Rhyolite. Sitting at the corner of 14th and Lafayette, just a block off Colfax Ave., the building is both a notable geographic landmark and a unique historical structure.

While our congregation is immensely proud of the building in which we have resided since the late 1950's, we are also proud to seek Landmark status to honor the historical connections and work of our church. Dating back to 1871, five years before Colorado Statehood, our congregation has a long list of notable members, including both men and women who were important in the early days of Colorado statehood. As we have prepared this application, we have been humbled to broaden our knowledge and understanding of the role early members of our congregation played in our community's early days.

Our congregation is perhaps most proud, however, of its long history of supporting social justice movements and the humanitarian needs of the community. From early involvement with the Ladies Aid Society and the Women's Suffrage Association in the 1800's to notable involvement in gay rights, the Civil Rights Movement, fair housing, immigration rights, and Black Lives Matter during its tenure in its current building, the congregation has a rich and important association with advocating for the rights of oppressed groups in society. This work is a cornerstone of our congregational values, and it brings us great pride to be able to honor the legacy of past congregational members who have worked tirelessly in this capacity.

First Unitarian Society of Denver considers itself to be an "urban sanctuary," anchoring liberal religion in the heart of Capitol Hill. Over the years, we have repeatedly affirmed our desire to remain in our beloved building. As we prepare to begin important repair and renovation work, we look forward to the partnership with the Landmark Commission in honoring the historic importance of our beloved building.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our application for Landmark designation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Morran".

Rev. Mike Morran  
Minister

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Hahn".

Chris Hahn  
Board President

# First Unitarian Society of Denver

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## **1. Name of Property**

Historic Name: Plymouth Congregational Church  
Current Name: First Unitarian Society of Denver

## **2. Location**

Address: 1400 Lafayette St. Denver, CO 80218  
Legal Description: L 10 & S 13.41 FT OF L 9 BLK 3 GLENCOES ADD & L 15 TO 20 INC BLK  
7 HORRS ADD

## **3. Owner Information**

Name: First Unitarian Society of Denver  
Address: 1400 Lafayette St., Denver, CO 80218  
Phone: (303) 831-7113  
Email: office@fusden.org

## **4. Applicant/Contact Person (If other than owner)**

Name: Karen Derrick-Davis (church representative)  
Address: c/o First Unitarian Society of Denver  
1400 Lafayette St.  
Denver, CO 80218  
Phone: (303) 929-0606  
Email: karenderrickdavis@gmail.com

## **5. General Data:**

### **Date of construction and major additions/alterations:**

#### Original construction:

- Southern half of building: 1893.
- Source of Information:
  - News article reporting the dedication<sup>1</sup>: The Daily News, Sunday, April 9, 1893, p.10 c.4
  - 20th Anniversary Sermon, Rev. Frank T. Bayley, Plymouth Congregational Church, 1911<sup>2</sup>
  - Denver's Early Architecture, James Bretz (Arcadia 2010)<sup>3</sup>

#### Additions:

- Sanctuary (north half of building): 1899.
- Source of Information:
  - News article about the dedication of addition: Denver Daily Times, May 14, 1899, p.6 c.1<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (News article reporting the dedication, 1893)

<sup>2</sup> (Bayley F. T., 1911, 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Sermon)

<sup>3</sup> (Bretz, 2010, Images of Denver's Early Architecture)

<sup>4</sup> (News article about the dedication of the addition, 1899)

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- Denver Republic, Monday, May 15, 1899, p.9 c.6-7

**Number, type, and date of construction of outbuildings:**

NO OUTBUILDINGS EXIST

Source of Information: N/A

**Approximate lot size and acreage:**

20,400 square feet

Source of Information:

- Denver City Assessment:  
<https://www.denvergov.org/property/realproperty/assessment/161075947>

**Architect:** Ernest Varian and Frederick Sterner

Source of Information:

- "Plymouth Church is Ready Now", Denver Sunday Times, May 14, 1899.
- Denver's Early Architecture, James Bretz (Arcadia 2010)
- Geology Tour of Denver's Capitol Hill Stone Buildings, Jack A. Murphy, Historic Denver, Inc., 1997. p.78-79

**Builder:** Unknown

Source of Information: N/A

**Original Use:** Church

Source of Information:

- News article reporting on the dedication: The Daily News, Sunday, April 9, 1893, p.10 c.4

**Present Use:** Church

Source of Information:

- Current owner/First Unitarian Society of Denver

**Previous field documentation (date and surveyor):**

- 1959, James L Bell & Co.
- 1987, Montgomery & Phillips, Inc., 7550 W. Yale, Suite 110, Denver, CO 80227, (303) 989-3383

**National Register Status and date (listed, eligible, study list)**

NOT CURRENTLY LISTED

## **6. Statement of Significance**

***Explain how the structure meets at least one criterion in at least two of the categories.***

### ***Category 1: History.***

***a. Has a direct association with the historical development of the city, state, or nation;***

Over 123 years, the church at 1400 Lafayette Street has been the home to two congregations, Plymouth Congregational Church (later merged with the First Congregational Church) and First Unitarian Society of Denver (First Unitarian).

The Plymouth Congregational Church constructed the building in two stages—in 1893 and 1899. Construction began during the year of the historic Silver Crash of 1893, with the economic conditions of that year necessitating the delay of final construction (the northern part of the building, which includes the main sanctuary) until 1899. The Congregationalists occupied the building until 1958 when they sold the building to First Unitarian.

First Unitarian has a long history of notable members and social justice work that has been important to the development of the city, with their work often having broader implications. In its early days, the congregation was involved in the Women's Suffrage Movement and had strong ties with early charitable organizations including the Pioneer Ladies Aid Society, the Ladies Relief Society, and the Associated Charities, among others. Since occupying the building at 1400 Lafayette in 1958, the congregation has been active and influential in a variety of issues, including racial justice, gay/lesbian rights, marriage equality, women's rights, and immigration justice.

First Unitarian has a historical role of serving as an incubator for nonprofit organizations dedicated to social justice issues. In the 1970s, it created a "Shared Center" in its basement and in the adjacent two homes to the north. Numerous organizations, such as the Metropolitan Church of the Rockies (a gay and lesbian congregation) and the Gay Coalition among many others, had their early organizational development in that space.

Outside of renting space to other organizations, First Unitarian has maintained an open pulpit and a policy of free expression since its inception. As noted in in the March 20, 2016 sermon by Rev. Mike Morran,<sup>5</sup> "we had a well-deserved reputation through this time as the place where groups and individuals that could find no public venue for their meetings, lectures or public presentations were welcomed. Right here in this very building." Examples of controversial speakers included a pro-Castro speaker, an anti-Viet Nam War group, and a "Play Fair for Cuba" discussion with Harry Nier.

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<sup>5</sup> (Morran, 2016, Sustaining Faith Sermon)

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***c. Has a direct and substantial association with a person or group of persons who had influence on society.***

First Unitarian (while located at 1400 Lafayette Street) has been directly and substantially associated with a number of people who have had an influence on society. Former Colorado Governor Richard D. Lamm and First Lady Dottie Lamm were members of First Unitarian during the 1960's and were married in the church in 1963.

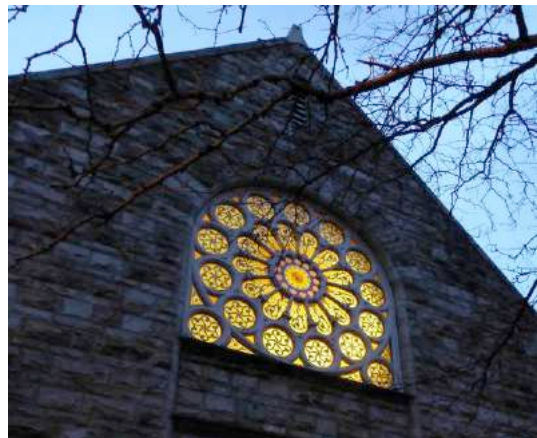
A number of church members have been involved in acts of civil disobedience in recent years. First Unitarian Minister Richard Henry was arrested in a protest related to the Viet Nam War. More recently, Lewis Thompson, Laurin Foxworth and Kate Burns were arrested for their stances in support of marriage equality for gays and lesbians. Church member Helen Wolcott, among others, was instrumental in the local Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. She was a founding member of the local Congress of Racial Equality, organized picketing in protest of unfair hiring practices, and worked for equality in education and real estate practices.

***Category 2: Architecture.***

***To have architectural importance, the structure or district shall have design quality and integrity, and shall:***

***a. Embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or type; or***

First Unitarian church, constructed in the 1890s, is one of a number of outstanding examples of buildings that incorporate vernacular Rhyolite stone crafted in the Romanesque Revival style that was developed by Henry Hopson Richardson and is known as Richardsonian Romanesque. Richardson's influence in developing a building with a strong presence through the configuration of medieval proportion, massing, and masonry is evident throughout the exterior architectural stone, roof, and window vocabulary.



*Rose Window viewed from 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue*

The building contains three important elements of architectural, craft, and materials merit. These elements are Varian and Sterner's architectural talents, the Watkins Glass Studio's historic craftsmanship, and locally-sourced Rhyolite stone from Castle Rock, Colorado.

The Stonework

Richardson's use of full-bodied, rough, exposed surface stone, cut with square edge Ashlar masonry, is prominent throughout the building. The building also expresses swelling

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shapes emphasizing corner conditions, creating shadow lines, and stressing unique and unusual sculpted shapes to emphasize doors, windows and prominent elements of the façade. Compare the masonry of the building as depicted in the photos below of First Unitarian and Trinity Church in Boston.



*First Unitarian Society of Denver*



*Trinity Church, Boston MA*

The stone material itself is a wonderful vernacular component of the church's history, as the Rhyolite stone utilized on the façade was quarried in Castle Rock, Colorado. It was a very popular building material during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Castle Rock Rhyolite is a volcanic rock that erupted from the Mt. Princeton area about 36.7 million years ago. Its geological name is Wall Mountain Tuff and its "is a very durable, high-silica material which breaks with sharp, conchoidal, or curved, fracture. It is commonly used with a rough-hewn surface that causes a constant play of shadows across the walls of buildings<sup>6</sup>." This pinkish stone began to be quarried by Swedish immigrants in the late 19th century and was utilized in numerous structures throughout the historic areas of Denver, including a number of Richardsonian Romanesque buildings in the Downtown Denver area which utilize Rhyolite stonework. Examples include the Paramount Theater, Union Station, and St. Elizabeth of Hungary Catholic Church.



*First Unitarian Society of Denver: Castle Rock*

### The Roof

A hipped roof with crossing gables was often used as a major building expression, articulated with swelling shapes or columns and a punched recessed window for natural light into the upper floor of the facility. These details are apparent in the images below of First Unitarian and the Ames Building in Boston, Massachusetts.

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<sup>6</sup> (Murphy, 1997, *Geology Your of Denver's Capitol Hill Stone Buildings*)

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*First Unitarian Society of Denver*



*Ames Building, Boston MA*

## The Windows

Wide rounded arches are a key component to the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Windows are typically expressed in a true semi-circular form and often three or more arched windows are grouped together, indicated below in pictures of First Unitarian church as well as Richardson's City Hall in Albany, New York.



*First Unitarian Society of Denver*



*First Unitarian Society of Denver*



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*City Hall, Albany NY*

First Unitarian church is a wonderful example of the stunning Richardsonian Romanesque architectural fabric in Denver, Colorado, which also includes the Denver Athletic Club, the Masonic Temple Building and Castle Marne.

The building contains other stylistically distinguishing features of Richardsonian Romanesque. It is constructed of rough-hewn stonework in massive walls, eclectic sculptural posts, recessed entryways, and a dramatic rose window. As noted in a Historic Denver guide by Robert Murphy<sup>7</sup>, it is “one of the best examples of the Richardsonian Romanesque style in Denver. Note the alternating courses of stone blocks and the impressive hand-hewn stone entrance.”

When both sections were completed in 1899, the Plymouth Church was described in a Denver Daily Times article as one of “one of Denver’s prettiest” and “most strikingly beautiful churches in Denver” with an “air of simple grandeur that can hardly be reproduced in an illustration but which readily impresses the beholder.”<sup>8</sup>



*First Unitarian Society of Denver*

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<sup>7</sup> (Murphy, 1997)

<sup>8</sup> (Denver Daily Times, May 14, 1899, p.6 c.1)

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- b. Be a significant example of the work of a recognized architect or master builder, or,**



*Watkins Rose Window on South Wall*

This Capitol Hill/Cheesman Park landmark is a significant example of the work of famous local architects Ernest Varian and Frederick Sterner. Ernest Varian designed the Zion Baptist Church beginning in 1882, and then in 1885 formed a partnership with Frederick J. Sterner. As noted in a History Colorado document,<sup>9</sup> “the firm of Varian and Sterner went on to become one of Denver’s most prominent architectural designers with many listings in the Denver Building Fees files.” Notable buildings designed by the firm include the Denver Athletic Club at 1325 Glenarm, which contains Romanesque arches, the First Church of Christ Scientist at 14th and Logan Streets, and a variety of homes throughout the Denver area. Landmark works designed by Frederick Sterner include the Daniels and Fisher Tower, the Pearce-McCall Cottage, and the Tears-McFarland House.<sup>10</sup>

The church also contains a unique and historic example of the work of Watkins Stained Glass Studio. The striking rose window on the south façade was designed

and fabricated by Clarence Watkins in 1893 and carefully restored by his great-grandson Phillip Watkins, Jr. after a major fire damaged it in 1985.

The Watkins family involvement in stained glass<sup>11</sup> began in 1761 in London and Liverpool. Clarence (aka Charles) Watkins travelled to America via ship “with his tool box in his hand and skills he had learned from his forefathers.” After working in stained glass studios in New York, Boston and St. Louis, arrived in Denver and his company was first listed as a business in the Denver Directory in 1881. The company now counts eight generations that have been involved in the stained window craftsmanship, and all work is still done by hand with little change in tools except for the use of electricity. The work of the Watkins family is featured in many Denver homes, churches, and in the iconic Brown Palace Hotel.

### Category 3: Geography

- a. Have a prominent location or be an established, familiar, and orienting visual feature of the contemporary city, or,**

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<sup>9</sup> (Colorado Historical Society, 2002, *Colorado Architects Biographical Sketch*.)

<sup>10</sup> (Colorado Historical Society, 2007, *Architects of Colorado Historical Sketch*)

<sup>11</sup> (Watkins Stained Glass Studio, 2016)

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First Unitarian Society of Denver sits at the corner of 14th Avenue and Lafayette Street. It lies in the heart of Denver's Capitol Hill, just one block south of Colfax Avenue. As noted in the East Colfax Plan, "the early development of Capitol Hill and Colfax Avenue in the 1870's and 1880's is a roster of Denver's famous and influential citizens. John Evans, Henry C. Brown, George Chilcott, A.C. Hunt, and Daniel Witter dedicated portions of their subdivisions to create the 100 foot wide Colfax Avenue that would become the "finest, grandest residential avenue between St. Louis and San Francisco."<sup>12</sup> Colfax Avenue is one of the most important historical corridors in Denver, having developed by the late 1800s as "Denver's premier, tree lined residential avenue, and home to leading citizens and pioneer families."<sup>13</sup> It was a streetcar line in the late 1800s, with its importance "illustrated by its length."<sup>14</sup>

The church lies directly adjacent to 14th Avenue, which is also an important thoroughfare in Denver. It travels one-way (west to east). With its Richardsonian Romanesque architecture and Castle Rock Rhyolite bricks, First Unitarian is a highly recognizable building along the 14th Avenue corridor. The "castle-like" building is a strong orienting element along 14th Avenue and in Capitol Hill. Although First Unitarian lies in proximity to a variety of historic districts and buildings, it is unique in its architecture for the surrounding area. While a similar architecture exists at Zion Baptist Church (933 E. 24th Avenue), there do not appear to be many structures in the close proximity to First Unitarian that share its architectural history. As such, the building is notable to passersby on 14th Avenue. In providing directions to the church, members and staff frequently find that would-be visitors are familiar with the building and have noted it in passing on prior occasions.

### **7. Architectural Description**

***Please provide a statement for each of the following:***

- a. Concisely describe the structure and its surrounds. Include building size, shape, # stories, materials, style and site terrain.***

The church was originally built for the still-thriving Plymouth Congregational Church: the south wing and chapel in 1893, and the north auditorium wing in 1899. Its seven-year development is emblematic of a well-known economic disaster in the U.S. and Colorado: the Panic of 1893, also known in Colorado as the Silver Crash of 1893. Due to the recession caused by the events of 1893, the congregants of Plymouth Congregational had to regroup and refinance, completing the large auditorium/sanctuary on the north in 1899. Upon its completion, it was one of only two grand stone churches in east Denver between Ogden Street and Montclair. Few significant stone buildings in Denver, other than the Colorado State Capitol itself, were completed during this decade.

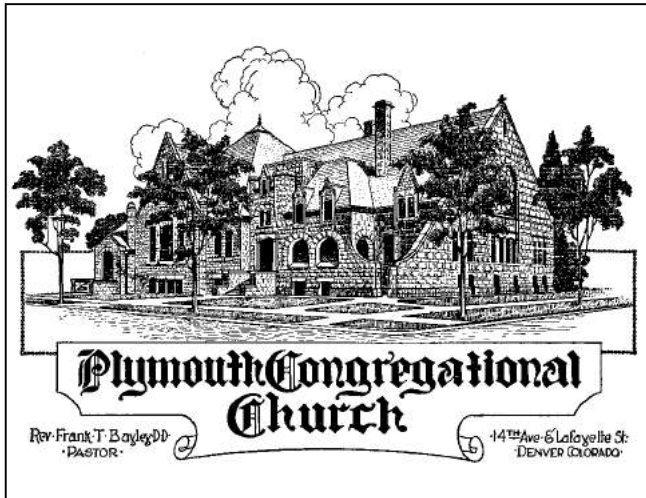
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<sup>12</sup> (Blueprint Denver, 2004, East Colfax Corridor Plan)

<sup>13</sup> (Blueprint Denver, 2004, East Colfax Corridor Plan)

<sup>14</sup> (Blueprint Denver, 2004, East Colfax Corridor Plan)

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*Early depiction of Plymouth Church*

First Unitarian Society of Denver's church is 23,988 sq. ft. in size and is composed of three floors. It includes a full basement reflective of the first floor shape, and a partial second floor, as the 2-story sanctuary takes up approximately 1/2 of the second floor volume. The rectilinear shaped footprint of the building is covered with roof that is a combination of hip and intersecting gables very indicative of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The main structure of the building is constructed with Rhyolite stone bearing walls and an interior floor structure of combined wood and steel.

The original worship space was built with a raked floor depicting an Akron Plan design popular in the late 1800's. The raked floor has now been changed to a flat floor after the devastating fire that took place in 1985. The roof structure is also predominately wood with major supporting steel, rigid framing members. Site elements are made up primarily of entry pavers, sidewalks, and adjacent alley paving. As the building takes up approximately 85% to 90% of the site, site features are very minimal but currently include double stairs and a ramp, both of which were added after the 1985 fire. In 2007, an elevator was added along the alleyway to accommodate handicapped accessibility to all levels in the building.



*Phillip Watkins restoring the Rose Window in 1986*

- b. Architectural description including mention of major features, uncommon or unique design features, ancillary structures, and important landscape or site features. Also describe interior spaces with extraordinary design features (if any).***

First Unitarian's church is a prime example of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture in Denver, Colorado. The church is built with the rough sawn ashlar cut Rhyolite stone which is native to Colorado and was a very popular building material in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The Richardsonian detailing is reflected throughout all of the exterior elevations of the building utilizing the heavy medieval stoned element combined with a hipped roof with cross gable reflecting deep set windows designed with wide round arches in a true semi-

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*Original stained glass window*

circular shape, ornamental posts, and a buttress. The south elevation includes a stunning rose window facing 14th Avenue, which is not only a common Richardsonian element, but was designed by a local stained glass window company, originally built by Clarence Watkins and later repaired after the fire in the 1980s by his great-grandson Phillip who still practices this trade today.

The interior space was renovated after a major fire in 1985. While the interior renovation replaced traditional design with contemporary design, the interior retains and blends some of the old with the new, most notably the rose window in the chapel, the still-active original organ pipes in the sanctuary, a few remaining original stained glass

windows, the small choir room below the organ, and a stained glass window, “Good Samaritan,” originally installed in Unity Church at 19th and Broadway (First Unitarian’s previous church building) and moved to 1400 Lafayette St. Except for these elements, the interior does not have historic features. On the exterior of the building, the original doors donated by Gov. William E. Sweet remain.



*Good Samaritan Window*



*Original doors that remain on building*

***c. Describe character-defining features; identify the key visual aspects that make up the character of this building.***

The strong presence of the Richardsonian Romanesque stone detail anchors this building on the corner of 14th and Lafayette, catching your eye with the deep set windows, combined with hipped roof and cross gable complementing the strength of the rough-cut Rhyolite stone exterior walls. The magnificent rose window on the south elevation attracts

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passersby as the intimate, delicate stained glass contrasts the heavy medieval stone detail on that elevation, and in the evening glows from the cut stained glass designed and installed by Watkins Stained Glass, which still operates in Englewood, Colorado.

The overall character of the structure is one of rugged solidity, with its rusticated stone and two complementary west-facing sections conveying an impression of both stone church and small castle. It's corner location on a major street (14th Avenue), yet having an entryway on the quieter side street (Lafayette), enhances its status as a landmark in the Capitol Hill and Cheesman Park neighborhoods.

***d. Describe location and setting including physical context and relationship to neighborhood and other historic structures.***

### Location and Neighborhood

First Unitarian is located on the east edge of Capitol Hill and the northwest corner of Cheesman Park neighborhoods. The surrounding architecture is diverse – many duplexes and Victorian residences along Lafayette Street, shops and restaurants on Colfax, and Denver squares, brick apartment buildings, and high-rise condos within 2-3 blocks. The neighborhood is high density residential. It is one of the early residential developments of the city dating back to the mid 1800's and contains many significant architectural examples of the 19th Century.

### Proximity to Historic Structures and Districts

First Unitarian lies within one block of four historic structures, none of which are churches. These include:

- The Hamilton Apartment Building at 1475 Humboldt
- The Colonnade at 1210 E. Colfax Ave.
- Wolcott School at 1401 Marion St.
- The Doyle-Benton House at 1301 N. Lafayette St.

A variety of other historic structures are within one mile, but only one church. They include Morey Middle School, St. John's Episcopal Church and the Ogden Theatre, among others. Nearby historic districts include: the Wyman Historic District, which begins 2 blocks east of the Church; the Park Avenue Historic District, just a few blocks to the north; the Swallow Hill Historic District, which lies several blocks to the northwest; and the Humboldt Street Historic District two blocks to the south.

### Registered Neighborhood Organizations

A variety of neighborhood associations are active in the area in which the building is located. These include: Capitol Hill United Neighborhoods; Colfax on the Hill; the Colfax Business Improvement District; the Wyman District Neighborhood Association; and the Uptown on the Hill Association. These associations exist in part to preserve the integrity of

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the Capitol Hill and East Colfax areas.

***e. Describe major alterations to the exterior of the structure and dates of major alterations, if known. Describe any plans to alter the exterior.***

1. The first change to the building came in 1899 when the sanctuary (north section) was built utilizing the concept of an Akron Plan. An Akron Planned church is a square worship space with a raked floor at the main aisle that proceeds down one diagonal towards the pulpit. The three major gable ends of the building reflect the massive triple round top windows on each gable into three of the four sides of the worship space, with the fourth side opening up into the former worship space which was at that time converted into classrooms and now is a community room. This is expressed on the exterior of the building not only through the three large gable ends but also by the enlarged building footprint on both the west and east elevations.



2. In about the 1920s (exact date unknown), the porch on the west side of the building was enclosed, as illustrated in the photos below.



*First Unitarian Society of Denver: Prior to enclosure of porch*

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*First Unitarian Society of Denver: After enclosure of porch*

3. A side entry door and stair located in the southwest corner of the building was modified at some time, reflected in one of the half round circle top window fenestrations being replaced with stone. In 1986, a new entrance was developed into the basement, directly below this former side entry area, which still exists as a basement exit today.
4. The major modification to the interior came in 1986 after a major fire destroyed much of the interior. At that time the historic front entrance was modified with a large curved wall and stairs projecting in a north/south direction, in contrast to the original stairs, that projected straight west from the front entrance. In addition, a handicapped ramp was added to the building along the west elevation, directly below one of the gabled ends of the worship space, blocking a series of garden level windows located directly under the three circle tops on the north end of the west elevation. Also, at this time when this work was done, original stairs that went down to the lower level at the southwest corner of the 1899 worship space addition were enclosed with masonry and are now blocked by the entry stair modifications and handicapped rail. The original Akron Plan floor plan, the raked floor and the barrel vault inside the worship space were modified as the seating area was reduced in size. The additional space along the south and west sides of the original 1899 sanctuary was repurposed to include new handicapped toilets, a kitchen, and space for administrative offices on the first floor along the west side.



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5. The stained glass in the rose window was completely blown out during the fire of December 1985. As part of the renovation of 1986, Watkins Glass Studio (the same company that installed the original) restored the glass to replicate the original.
6. In 1998, a renovation took place in the church basement to convert previously unused space into usable classroom space.
7. The final major modification to the building came in 2007, when an elevator was added to the building located on the south end of the east elevation to accommodate handicapped accessibility for the entire building.



*Elevator addition, 2007.*

### ***Describe any plans to alter the exterior:***

First Unitarian has a capital campaign underway, and if successful, exterior repairs and renovations will include restoring or replacing the heavily deteriorated handicapped ramp,

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repointing and other stonework restoration, and redesigning the entryway to a new open stairway reminiscent of the original entry of 1899 with a small grass plaza area. A Master Plan has been developed for the church by Eidos Architects; however, final schematics and design development have not yet taken place.

***f. Include a statement describing how the building currently conveys its historic integrity. For example does it retain its original design, materials, location, workmanship, setting, historic associations and feeling?***

Overall, the integrity of the building is strong. It is in the same location and retains the setting of a church in a dense urban residential neighborhood. Although one of the entrances, on the west elevation, was altered to include a curved wall, two sets of steps, and a handicapped ramp, the overall design, materials, and workmanship are readily apparent. A rear elevator was added in 2007; however, it is not highly visible and was constructed of a brick that is compatible in color with the historic building. The continued use as a worship space and similar setting to the period of significance helps retain a strong sense of feeling and association.

### **8. History of the Structure and Its Associations**

***Please provide a statement for each of the following:***

***a. Describe the history of the structure and its associations with important individuals, groups, events, or historical trends.***

#### **Plymouth Congregational Church**

Plymouth Congregational Church built the building at 1400 Lafayette Street between 1893 and 1899. The relatively long, 7-year period of construction is attributable to the Silver Crash of 1893, when President Grover Cleveland oversaw the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, causing reductions in the price of silver (from .83 cents to .62 cents per ounce in one 4-day period). The Panic of 1893 severely impacted Colorado, as the economy was heavily reliant on mineral extraction and the silver industry. During this time, numerous banks in Denver collapsed and real estate values dropped.<sup>15</sup> Original architects Balcom & Rice<sup>16</sup> were contracted Sept. 1, 1892<sup>17</sup>, with subsequent design and completion of the building by Varian & Sterner in 1899.

Plymouth Congregational Church<sup>18</sup> was originally known as Park Avenue Congregational Church. The congregation formed in 1884



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<sup>15</sup> (Denver, 2015, The Mile High City from Historic Landmarks & Historic Districts webpage)

<sup>16</sup> (Plymouth Notes, 1893)

<sup>17</sup> (Zeller, 2016, personal interview)

<sup>18</sup> (First Plymouth Congregational Church, Our History, 2016)

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and built its first church at the corner of 17th Avenue and Ogden St. In 1891, the congregation hired the Rev. Frank T. Bayley and soon thereafter renamed itself as Plymouth Congregational Church in honor of Rev. Bayley, who had previously preached at a "Plymouth" church. Rev. Bayley served as pastor of the Plymouth Church for 27 years until his death in 1917, was one of the best known clergymen in Colorado and was considered the "savior" of the Plymouth Church, for when he moved from Maine in 1891 the situation was desperate for the small, struggling congregation. Within two years of his arrival, Plymouth Congregational Church grew and was able to build the "chapel" at 14th Avenue and Lafayette Street and several years later, the "auditorium" wing.

Plymouth was not the first Congregational Church in Colorado. In 1863, William Crawford arrived in Denver to establish a Congregational church, subsequently establishing First Congregational Church on October 9, 1864 with 12 charter members. Rev. Norman McLeod was the first pastor of this congregation, which built its first building in 1869 at the corner of 15th and Curtis Streets and its second building in 1881 in the 1600 block of Glenarm Place.

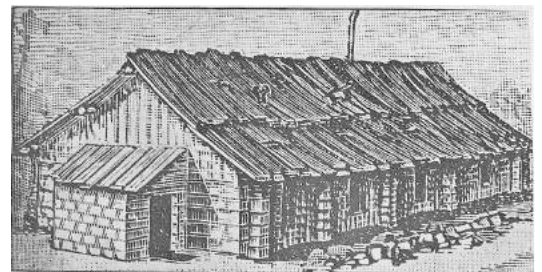
In 1929, both the Plymouth and First Congregational were struggling for members and the two churches merged to become First Plymouth Congregational Church in the building at 1400 Lafayette Street. Plymouth Congregational Church remained in the building until November 1958, at which point it moved to a new facility at the corner of Hampden Avenue and South Colorado Blvd.

### First Unitarian Society of Denver

First Unitarian Society of Denver purchased the 1400 Lafayette property in 1958 and has occupied the building ever since. While the Plymouth Congregational Church website notes concerns about parking availability as a reason for leaving central Denver, First Unitarian has maintained a commitment throughout the years to remain an "urban sanctuary" in the heart of Denver.

First Unitarian is the oldest Unitarian congregation in Colorado; it began in 1871 when Harvard Divinity School graduate Rev. L.E. Beckwith preached to a small group of Unitarians in a Denver District Court Room. The incorporation of the church was 13 years after the City Of Denver was founded and five years before Colorado statehood.

In the fall of 1871, the congregation began to meet in a schoolroom at the Methodist Seminary (now the University of Denver) but after two Sundays they were asked to leave, given objections to their theology. This began a series of locations, including Pastor Beckwith's parlor near 17th and California, in the 3rd story hall of Crow's Block on Halladay St. (now Market), the Baptist "dug-out" on the corner of Curtis and G (now 16<sup>th</sup>) Streets, and the law offices of Belden and Powers (both



## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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of whom were members of the church). During its first 2.5 years, the congregation used seven different venues - largely because its views were perceived to be too controversial for many of its hosts.

The controversial views of the church related in large part to the social action work undertaken by its members. By 1893 (when the 1400 Lafayette building was being constructed), the Unitarians had already made the news on multiple occasions for such bold moves as utilizing female ushers, teaching vocational skills to girls, and educating boys who worked during the day. In 1896 to 1910, the congregation advocated for prison reform against the imprisonment of children.

On February 23, 1873, the congregation took official action to look for a property and build for a sum not to exceed \$10,000. The Subscription Committee could not raise that much money and settled for \$5,000 instead. Four lots at 17th and California were purchased for \$2,500 and a lovely church seating 225 people was dedicated on December 28, 1873. However, success was short-lived and in the 1878-79 church year their expenses exceeded income by \$1,000. The trustees then voted to turn the "social, religious, and especially financial matter into the hands of the ladies of the church, whose zeal, fidelity, faith, courage and executive ability had long since been fully proved." They then advised the "ladies" to sell the property, pay the debts and "consider the effort to establish a Liberal Church in Denver a failure."

The Ladies Aid Society, led by Augusta Tabor, then spearheaded a variety of fundraisers for the church, including an 1893 excursion via train to Colorado Springs, Manitou, Garden of the Gods and Glen Eyre for \$5 per ticket. Tabor also hosted a Strawberry Social at her boarding house and then gave much of her fortune to the Unitarian Church. "Following the divorce, Augusta Tabor used her fortune to benefit many Denver institutions, including the Unitarian Church and the Pioneer Ladies' Aid Society."<sup>19</sup> Tabor's donation helped the congregation to purchase the Unity Church at the corner of 19th and Broadway in 1886 for \$42,358. This new building seated 1,000 people and was home to the congregation until it purchased the building at 1400 Lafayette in 1958. At this time the church was alternately called First Unitarian and "The Unity Church."

### 1985 – The Fire

On December 8, 1985, in the midst of a capital campaign to renovate the church, a fire extensively damaged much of the roof structure and the interior of the building. The congregation subsequently decided to continue with its renovation plans and stay in the current building. For two years, while repairs were underway, the congregation rented space at the former home of B.M.H. Synagogue, Temple Center, at 16th and Gaylord. On May 10, 1987, the first service was held in the renovated church and the formal dedication service was held on May 24, 1987. The choir presented a Dedication Cantata composed by Elizabeth Sellers, the music director.

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<sup>19</sup> (The Denver Post - Perspective Section, 1992)

## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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***b. Describe specific historical associations including why this structure has direct association with the individual, group, event, or historical trend.***

From its beginnings, First Unitarian Society of Denver was involved in a variety of social justice issues and its history is intrinsically linked with key social aid organizations. A summary of some of these associations follows:



### The Pioneer Ladies' Aid Society

The Pioneer Ladies' Aid Society is the first known charitable institution in Colorado. Elizabeth Byers (wife of Rocky Mountain News founded editor William Newton Byers) and a group of women concerned about the "many left penniless and homeless in the mad scramble for the riches of the earth"<sup>20</sup> founded the organization in 1860.

The Pioneer Ladies' Aid Society was intricately linked with First Unitarian and is responsible for saving the Congregation in the late 1870s when financial troubles motivated male members of the church to disband the society. At that point, the ladies organized fundraisers, took in sewing, and rented the building to other groups to raise funds for the solvency of the church. First Unitarian archives indicate a historic Baldwin Stove that was transported to and from fundraisers to provide warmth for such gatherings.

One of the founders of the Pioneer Ladies' Aid Society was Unitarian Congregation member Augusta Tabor, the iconic wife of Horace Tabor and notable businesswoman in early

Denver history. Tabor ran a boarding house and spearheaded a variety of fundraisers for the church, including a Strawberry Social on her property and a series of excursions via train to Colorado Springs, Manitou Springs, Garden of the Gods and Glen Eyre, and later to the Royal Gorge (all of which are reported to have cost \$5 per traveler). Following her divorce, Tabor "used her fortune to benefit many Denver institutions, including the Unitarian Church and the Pioneer Ladies' Aid Society."<sup>21</sup> Her donation is credited for helping the group "build a new Unitarian church in Denver."<sup>22</sup>

Helen A. Dailey (nee Woodbury), was a longtime member of the church and served as President of the Ladies Aid Society. As noted in an obituary published in *The Trail: A Magazine for Colorado*, "She was honored with the presidency of the South Side Ladies Aid

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<sup>20</sup> (The Denver Post - Perspective Section, 1992)

<sup>21</sup> (History Colorado, Augusta Tabor)

<sup>22</sup> (History Colorado, Augusta Tabor)

## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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Society. Her loss will be keenly felt in the Unitarian Church where she was beloved for her devotion to the work of that church.<sup>23</sup>

### The Ladies Relief Society

The Ladies Relief Society was a nonsectarian organization founded in 1874. Emily Parmalee Belden, a prominent member of First Unitarian, was one of the incorporators of this society. Per a Denver Times article, “Few women have taken a larger part in Denver’s literary and charitable activities. She was one of the founders of the Old Ladies Relief Home and long a member of the Fortnightly Club.”<sup>24</sup>

### The Associated Charities

The Associated Charities, also known at the time as the Charity Outreach Society, was founded in 1887 by a “Denver woman, a priest, two ministers, and a rabbi” as the “first association set up to meet community needs by funding many charities while significantly reducing the number of appeals.<sup>25</sup> The organization served as an agent to collect funds for local charities, coordinated relief services, counseled and referred clients to cooperating agencies, and made emergency assistance grants. During its first year, Denver raised \$21,700 and created a movement that would spread throughout the country to become the United Way. More than 125 years later, United Way remains one of the most powerful ways for individuals and corporations to make an impact on local health, education, and social service needs. Today the organization lists 2.9 million volunteers and 10.3 million donors.<sup>26</sup>

While none of the Associated Charities’ founders were members of First Unitarian, one was, interestingly, the minister of First Plymouth prior to its occupation of the building at 1400 Lafayette. The Rev. Myron Reed, associated with Plymouth, was the first president of the Associated Charities.

First Unitarian was, however, intrinsically involved in the early years of this organization. As noted in the report of the association’s second annual meeting on November 24, 1889<sup>27</sup>, Rev. Samuel Eliot, minister of First Unitarian from 1889-1892, served as Vice President of the organization. Benevolent societies noted to be cooperating with the Associated Charities during that year included the Ladies Relief Society and the Unity Church Society, also known as First Unitarian given its location in the Unity Church at 19<sup>th</sup> and Broadway.

### Woman’s Club of Denver

As noted in a Historic Denver Guide<sup>28</sup>, educated upper-middle-class women founded the Women’s Club of Denver (WCD) in 1894 with early meeting taking place at the Unity

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<sup>23</sup> (Bishop, 1908, *The Trail: A Magazine for Colorado*)

<sup>24</sup> (*The Denver Times*, 1902)

<sup>25</sup> (Mile High United Way website)

<sup>26</sup> (United Way: Our Work, website)

<sup>27</sup> (Report of the Annual Meeting of the Associated Charities of Denver, volume 2, 1890)

<sup>28</sup> (Goldstein, *Denver Women in Their Places*, 2002)

## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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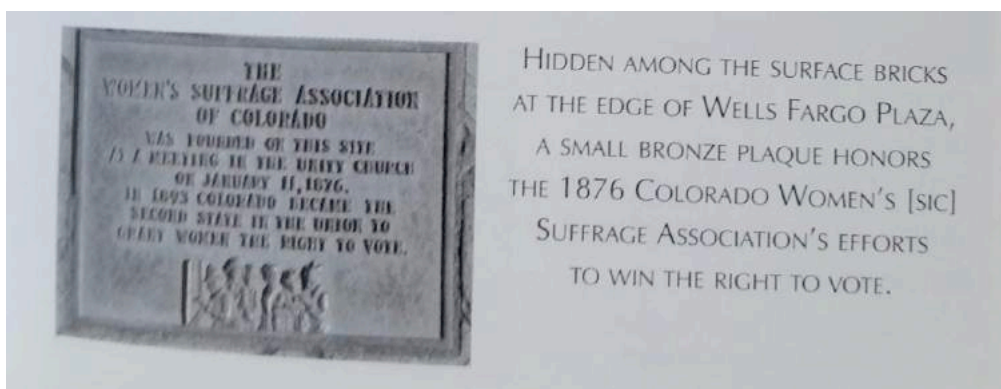
Church at 19th and Broadway until the group erected a three-story brick clubhouse at 1347 Glenarm Place in 1902. Club founders were Sarah Platt Decker, Dr. Mary Barker Bates, and Ella Strong Denison. This group was considered to be the “backbone of the Denver and State Federation of Women’s Clubs.”<sup>29</sup>

Members gathered to hear nationally known lectures, learn public speaking and organizational and business skills. Over the years, this group “sponsored traveling libraries, free clinics and dispensaries, day nurseries, homeless shelters, and adult education classes, as well as successfully lobbying for an eight-hour workday law for women, pure food laws, a state employment bureau, Mesa Verde and Rocky Mountain National Parks, electoral reform, the State Home for Dependent Children, mothers’ pension (welfare benefits) and Judge Ben Lindsey’s innovative Juvenile Court.” The group is noted to have rented space at Unity Church pending the construction of its own space;<sup>30</sup> reportedly paying \$100 per month in 1898.<sup>31</sup>

### Women’s Suffrage Association of Colorado

On January 10, 1876, a convention was held in the Unity Church to promote Women’s Suffrage. Suffragists built the non-partisan Equal Suffrage Association with the involvement of women’s organizations, churches, political groups and farmer’s alliances. The group’s rallying cry was “Let the Women Vote! They can’t do any worse than the men have!” The women’s suffrage referendum passed by an overwhelming majority on November 7, 1893<sup>32</sup>. A member of First Unitarian, J. Warner Mills, wrote the enabling act.<sup>33</sup>

A plaque at today’s Wells Fargo Plaza in Denver, former site of the Unity Church, honors the Women’s Suffrage Association of Colorado<sup>34</sup>. It notes, “the Women’s Suffrage Association of Colorado was founded on this site in a meeting of the Unity Church on January 11, 1876. In 1893, Colorado became the second state in the union to grant women the right to vote.”



***Women's Suffrage Plaque honoring the Unity Church***

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<sup>29</sup> Goldstein, *Denver Women in Their Places*, 2002)

<sup>30</sup> (Thayer, 1898, Memorial Library)

<sup>31</sup> (Work done by the philanthropic department of the Woman's Club, 1898)

<sup>32</sup> (Women of the West Museum, Colorado: Populism, Panic and Persistence)

<sup>33</sup> (Stone, *History of Colorado* Volume 3)

<sup>34</sup> (Goldstein, *Denver Women in their Places: A Guide to Women's History Sites*, 2002)

## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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The church took other stands for women's rights. In 1893, the Denver News reported that: "Rev. Haskell has made a departure in Church custom in Denver and six charming and blushing young ladies now escort the congregation to the seats. It was voted a success even by the bashful young man from the News who was given a front row seat."<sup>35</sup>

### Education

First Unitarian played an important role in the development of a number of educational institutions in the City. During its time in the Unity Church, the congregation hosted a sewing room where ladies of the church taught girls to sew, and evening classes for boys who had to work during the day and could not otherwise attend school.

### Supporting Gay Rights

The First Unitarian congregation first became involved in advocating against homophobia in the 1950s when it became involved with the Mattachine Society. Founded in 1950, this group was one of the first gay rights groups in the country<sup>36</sup>. In 1959, the group held its annual convention in Denver and eventually occupied one of the two houses owned by the congregation just to the north of the church building.

The year 1973 was a turning point in gay rights in Denver. That year, a City Council hearing took place regarding the alleged discrimination by Denver police of gay men. At that time, a large bus dubbed "The Johnny Cash Special" was used to entrap gay men in Denver's Civic Center, a known gay "cruising area." This resulted in the arrest of 24 men and the galvanizing of the Gay Coalition, a group that has its roots at First Unitarian and that exists today as The Center, located within a block of the church on Colfax Ave. As described on the Center's website,<sup>37</sup> a civil lawsuit, "Gay Coalition of Denver vs. Denver" gave the coalition access to police records, where they discovered that 98% of those arrested for "offer of lewd conduct" were gay men. In October 1973, the Gay Coalition arrived en masse (about 300 people) at a City Council meeting, resulting in the repeal of two laws regarding loitering and cross-dressing. A later court decision determined that police could not enforce criminal laws in a discriminatory manner against gays.

In June 1974, the Gay Coalition organized Denver's first "Pride" event (a "gay-in" at Cheesman Park) and in 1975 the first Gay Pride Parade.<sup>38</sup> First Unitarian members were involved in these events and continue to participate in Pride Fest on an annual basis.

In 1975, First Unitarian Rev. Dick Henry wrote a Denver Post editorial defending the first gay weddings held in the church. In the editorial, he notes the longstanding relationship with the Metropolitan Community Church of the Rockies (MCCR). MCCR was a gay and

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<sup>35</sup> (Colorado Prospector, Sept. 1982, p.7)

<sup>36</sup> (Mattachine Society, Wikipedia)

<sup>37</sup> (History of The Center, 2013, website)

<sup>38</sup> (Marcus, 2013, Pridefest: A History of Denver's Gay Pride Celebration)



## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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lesbian congregation that, under the leadership of Rev. Charlie Arehart, shared office space with First Unitarian and worshiped in the Rose Chapel from September 1973 until it purchased its own building in 1979.<sup>39</sup> As he stated in the editorial, “...an expression of our respect for this persecuted minority’s way of life and our conviction that a person’s sexual orientation is a private matter which should be of no concern to another.”<sup>40</sup>

In continued advocacy for equal rights, First Unitarian began hosting an annual Standing on the Side of Love worship service on the west steps of the Colorado State Capital in 2006 to advocate for Civil Marriage as a Civil Right and has held this service every year since then. This public religious advocacy for marriage equality, which grew to include the participation of many Front Range churches, was a key galvanizing force for all those in

*Standing on the Side of Love 2015*



Denver and Colorado who were advocating for marriage equality. Although Colorado enacted the Colorado Civil Union Act in 2013, the Standing on the Side of Love service continued to take place annually until September 2015, when same sex marriage was legalized in Colorado and the entire country. Today, the service continues but is focused on racial equality and immigration justice.

First Unitarian members have conducted acts of civil disobedience in an effort to promote gay rights. In 2007, Kate Burns and Sheila Schroeder conducted a sit-in at the Denver marriage license office, refusing to leave until they were issued a license. They were arrested; a video of the event is available at <https://youtu.be/9Q0-TtYZyhw>. In 2009, First Unitarian members Lewis Thompson, Laurin Foxworth, and Kate Burns were arrested when they protested the court decision to uphold Proposition 8 (banning same-sex marriage) in California. They were fined and the congregation raised money to pay this fee.

The congregation’s work for equality for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer populations is recognized by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), of which First Unitarian is a member. In 2001 the congregation was designated as a “Welcoming Congregation” and in 2007 became the first Unitarian Universalist congregation in the nation to obtain the “Beyond Welcoming Congregation” designation.

### Supporting the Civil Rights Movement

During the 1960s, the church became the local home for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Church members Ruth Steiner, Jane Wasson, and Helen Wolcott, were founding members of the Denver Chapter of CORE. In 1962, the group conducted its first strike campaign at the Denver Dry Goods Store on the 16th Street Mall. The General Manager at

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<sup>39</sup> (MCCR History, 2016, website)

<sup>40</sup> (Henry, 1975, Letter to the Editor, The Denver Post)

## First Unitarian Society of Denver

the time reportedly said that he would “spend \$1 million before he hired a black sales person”<sup>41</sup> but did begin integrating the sales staff after the non-violent protest. CORE Members subsequently picketed at Safeway and King Soopers in 1963, resulting in an announcement in local newspaper a few days later that the stores were hiring.



In collaboration with the wife of Rev. Wendall T. Liggins of Zion Baptist Church, the group implemented “housing testing” and “employment testing” to uncover the practice of Red Lining in Denver. White CORE members and the Rev. Mrs. Liggins would separately seek to rent a property, for example, only to be met with different information on the availability of the said property. “Mrs. Liggins was always elegantly dressed in a beautiful mink stole, and we would wear plain clothes.”<sup>42</sup> The church raised funds and paid the fines of protestors involved in these activities.

Other activities of the church dedicated toward racial integration included the development of the Black Affairs Committee to promote racial integration, and the development of the Black Caucus. During the late 1960s, the congregation owned a property in the mountain near

Allenspark called Point of Pines and at one point it was essentially handed over to the Black Caucus in order to create a commercial entity that the Black Caucus could manage.

In 1965, members of the church marched across the Pettis Bridge in Selma, Alabama, and later that year held a rally on the steps of the Colorado State Capitol for James Reed, a Unitarian Universalist minister who was killed in Selma. First Unitarian members have been involved in the MLK Marade since it began. This parade is now considered to be one of the nation’s largest celebrations and marches in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.



<sup>41</sup> (Raabe, 2016, Personal Interview)

<sup>42</sup> (Raabe, 2016, Personal Interview)

# First Unitarian Society of Denver

## Promoting Fair Housing

The 1960s also saw involvement of the church in the Fair Housing movement, with the initial Fair Housing office housed in the church building. In 1966, the Fair Housing Center was created at First Unitarian with volunteer staffing by the congregation.

After Congress passed Housing Bill 221H, giving nonprofit organizations an opportunity to rehabilitate houses for low-income families at a low rate of interest, the congregation created the First Unitarian Re-Hab Housing Corporation. It worked closely with Metro Denver Fair Housing to oversee renovation of five homes and ensure the selection of families that qualified to assume the mortgages. Church members involved in this effort included Floyd Tanaka, Dorothea Spellman, Helen Wolcott, Gwen Thomas and others. In the fall of 1969, after hundreds of hours of devoted volunteer work, five families were settled into their new homes.



## Protesting the Vietnam War

In October 1971, Rev. Richard Henry of First Unitarian Society, his wife, and another congregant were among 40 who were arrested as they protested the Vietnam War with the group Vietnam Vets Against the War. They were arrested for attempting to march in the Veteran's Day parade. The official charges, "two traffic misdemeanors: using the street when a sidewalk was available and failure to obey a lawful order of the police." The minister called out other clergy for not risking jail or fines to protest the War. The protesting veterans "stood in the street singing America the Beautiful with their hands behind their heads, prisoner-of-war fashion" and "the police started making arrests."<sup>43</sup>

## Immigration Policy--The New Sanctuary Movement

### **A Denver Church Joins a Nationwide Movement to Provide Sanctuary to Undocumented Immigrants**



A focus on immigration rights began in the congregation in 2012. By June 2014 the congregation voted by a 2/3 majority to become a New Sanctuary Project. As the first church in Colorado to pass such an initiative, First Unitarian quickly became a leading partner in the Metro Sanctuary Coalition of Denver. On October 21, 2014, Mexican-born Arturo Hernandez Garcia moved into the church and did not leave the building again until July 2015—after nine months in sanctuary. During the time

that Arturo resided in the church, the congregation provided personal, practical and political supports, regularly lobbying federal authorities to drop deportation orders against Arturo. The congregation also educated the community on immigration and sanctuary through multiple workshops and meetings. Arturo left sanctuary on July 20, 2015 after learning that his case would no longer be an enforcement priority. By housing Arturo Hernandez Garcia, First Unitarian brought national attention to the need for humane immigration reform.



### Black Lives Matter

In February 2015, after much congregational discussion, the church voted to put a Black Lives Matter banner on the side of its building in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. The church became actively involved in this issue, hosting several Black Lives Matter 5280 and Freedom Riders meetings as well as attending interfaith services at AME Shorter in the fall of 2015. In 2015, the Black Lives Matter banner and building were vandalized with red paint and a glass door shattered. The congregation did not remove the banner and continues to support the efforts of Black Lives Matter and the Freedom Riders.



### An incubator for Social Justice

In the 1970s, First Unitarian created a “shared space” in its basement and in the two houses to the north of the church. A variety of the organizations were those that could not find space elsewhere given controversial views. Per church records, some of the agencies using the space included:

- Abortion referral and Counseling Service
- American Youth Hostel
- CoPIRG
- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
- National Organization of Women (NOW)
- American Friends Service Committee
- Social Service agencies including: Intensive Community Treatment Center (Youth Services Division of Division of Corrections) and Denver Department of Social Services / Child Welfare,
- Gray Panthers
- A variety of educational organizations including: Rocky Mountain Applied Scholastic School, Denver Free University, Colorado University Denver Center,

## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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Rocky Mountain Law School, Munoz-Mott Language School, East High School Summer Seminar, and Community College of Denver.

- A variety of substance abuse groups including: Midtown AA Group and Ft. Logan Mental Health Center Outpatient Alcohol Treatment
- Creathons Community Theatre
- National Lawyers' Guild
- Learning for Living
- Common Cause
- American Issues Forum
- Rocky Mountain Center on Environment
- Colorado Contemporary Chorale

### Free Pulpit

First Unitarian has long maintained a tradition of a free pulpit and a policy of providing a forum for unconventional views and has on multiple occasions become a target of vandalism and community outrage as a result of this. The church was vandalized with red paint in 1965 in response to a Free Cuba discussion, and again in 2015 shortly after hanging a Black Lives Matter banner on the side of the building. A 1973 editorial by Rev. Dick Henry responded to a public outcry about an event hosted at the church. In defense of being accused of anti-semitism for leasing its facilities to a group that was interpreted publicly as being "Pro-Arab" and/or Anti-Israeli," he noted that: "Especially when urgent issues divide us, it is the responsibility of free institutions to see that thought and its public expression remain free."<sup>44</sup>

Examples of controversial speakers that have been hosted at First Unitarian include the following:

- **Harry Nier** - In 1965, Harry Nier, a local, lifelong socialist and secular Jew with a particular love and knowledge of Fidel Castro's Cuba, spoke at First Unitarian on an adult form on "Fair Play for Cuba." After the building was vandalized with red paint<sup>45</sup> the church's insurance company cancelled its insurance policy, claiming that the Unitarian Church was too controversial and thus a high risk.<sup>46</sup>
- **Alaska Senator Mike Gravel** - In 1972, Alaska Senator Mike Gravel who read into the public record of the US Senate the Pentagon Papers of the Vietnam War, spoke at First Unitarian. The event was co-sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

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<sup>44</sup> (Henry D. , 1973, Letter to the Editor,The Denve Post)

<sup>45</sup> (Rocky Mountain News, Dec. 12, 1965, p.5)

<sup>46</sup> (Mills, From Gold to Golden)

## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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### Notable Events, Speakers and Groups

The founding and early development of First Unitarian Society of Denver directly involved a variety of people who were influential in Denver, the State of Colorado, and nationally.

*Church founders and early Board of Trustees members, as noted in the First Unitarian archives:*

- **Freeman B. Crocker** (1828 – 1890) was a member of the Board of Trustees that incorporated First Unitarian. He was the first Arapahoe County coroner in 1861, served on the Board of County Commissioners for Arapahoe County, was the Treasurer of Arapahoe School District number 2, and president of the Board in 1874. In 1889, he was appointed to first Board of Public Works with another Unitarian, DC Dodge.<sup>47</sup>
- **John Dailey** (1833-1908) was on the Board of Trustees for the church nearly continuously from its founding through 1901. He was one of the signers of the invitation to Beckwith to preach in Denver and replaced one of two trustees who resigned right after recording the Charter. He was a founder of the Rocky Mountain News<sup>48</sup> and assisted in publishing the first four editions. In 1877 he was elected as Arapahoe County Treasurer, and in 1887 as Chief Deputy County Clerk. He served on the Park County Board of County Commissioners under Mayor Van Horn and was involved in laying out Chaffee and James H. Platt parks and improving City Park.
- **Honorable Lewis C. Ellsworth** (1832-1904) served on church Board from 1873 to 1878 and was a member of the State Constitutional Convention when Colorado was admitted as a state to the union. Ellsworth Avenue in Denver is named for him.
- **Brigadier General Irving Hale** (1861-1930) served on the First Unitarian Board of Trustees from 1895 to 1903, including service as Board President. Camp Hale is named for him, as is Hale Parkway in Denver.
- **Henry Treat Rogers** (1846-1922) served on the First Unitarian Board from 1895 to 1896, 1901 to 1902, and 1916 to 1918. He was President of the Denver and Colorado Bar Associations, a founder of the Denver Country Club and the University Club, and served on national Unitarian committees with Chief Justice William H. Taft.

*Early members notable in the City and State, as noted in the First Unitarian archives:*

- **Dr. Minnie C.T. Love** (1856-1947) was a physician who began a tent hospital in City Park for children at the beginning of the Spanish American War. She was a member of the Colorado State Legislature, a Denver School Board member, and a signer of

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<sup>47</sup> (Hall, 1891, History of the State of Colorado)

<sup>48</sup> (Rocky Mountain News, Wikipedia)

## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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the incorporation of the Children's Hospital at 2221 Downing Street.

- **Augusta Tabor** (1833-1895) was a founder and Vice President of the Pioneer Ladies' Aid Society. She ran a boarding house where she hosted many fundraisers for the church. She successfully ran businesses, owned real estate, and managed her own money when women were rarely involved in financial matters. She was one of the richest business people in Denver and donated much of her money to the Unitarian Church.<sup>49</sup> Tabor was inducted into the National Mining Hall of Fame and the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame in 1991. Her funeral was held at First Unitarian on February 8, 1895.
- **Otto Mears** (1840-1931) is credited with laying the foundation for today's highway system via the Million Dollar Highway that he built between Durango and Ouray.
- **David Douglas Belden** (1821-1897) was a long-time member of the church and served on the Advisory Board for the Ladies Relief Society. He served as Mayor of Omaha, in the Nebraska legislature, and as Denver City Attorney. From 1865 to 1869, he was Superintendent of the Smith & Parmalee Gold Company on the Gregory Lode, during which time the Gregory Lode was the greatest gold producing mine in Colorado. In 1867 he was elected from Gilpin County to the upper branch of the legislature; during his term he had the casting vote by which the capital of Colorado was removed from Golden City to Denver. The Belden mine in Eagle County was named for him.
- **Emily Parmalee Belden** (1826-1902) was one of the original incorporators of the Ladies Relief Society on October 28, 1874. According to the Denver Times on March 6, 1902, "few women have taken a larger part in Denver's literary and charitable activities."
- **Harem Pitt Bennett** (1826-1914) served as a delegate to Congress from the Colorado Territory twice, as Postmaster from 1869-1874, and as a Senator in the first General Assembly in the new state of Colorado.
- **Fred Dick** (1852-1920) was Superintendent of Schools in Trinidad, Co and in 1888 became Superintendent of Schools for the State of Colorado.
- **John Cotton Dana** (1856-1929) was Denver's first librarian and directed the Denver Public Library from 1889 to 1898, pioneering the concept of "open stacks." He served as president of the American Library Association in 1895-1906 and is recognized in the Library Hall of Fame.<sup>50</sup>
- **Frank Damrosch** (1859-1937) was a member and the first Music Director of First Unitarian. He was supervisor of music of the Denver Public Schools and went on to

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<sup>49</sup> (History Colorado, Augusta Tabor)

<sup>50</sup> (John Cotton Dana, 2016, Wikipedia).

## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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become a noted American conductor, composer, educator, and co-founder of the Julliard School.

- **DC Dodge** (1937 – 1978) was the first freight and ticket agent for Denver and the Rio Grande Railroad (D&RG) and is responsible for extending that railroad to Ogden, Utah with General Palmer (the director of the RR). He is credited with the conversion from narrow gage to standard gage throughout Colorado. Notably, when the D&RG was sold, Palmer and Dodge are reported to have divided \$1,000,000 of the amount received among former employees of the system, down to the humblest.
- **William Columbus Ferril** (1855- unknown) was an editor of the Denver Republican and the Rocky Mountain News. He wrote an article, published in the Kansas City Journal in 1889, outlining plans for a centennial exposition to commemorate the Louisiana Purchase in 1903, ultimately resulting in the hosting of the World's Fair in St. Louis in 1903. Ferril was the curator of Colorado Historical and Natural History Society 1896-1910 and an owner and editor of the Rocky Mountain Herald.
- **Rev. Samuel A. Eliot** (1862-1950) was pastor of the First Unitarian Church from 1889-1893. Eliot was President of the American Unitarian Association from 1900 to 1927, significantly expanding the Association's activities and consolidating denominational power in its administration. Eliot served as Vice President of the Associated Charities in Denver early in the formation of that organization.
- **Jared Warner Mills**<sup>51</sup> (1852 – 1907) is perhaps most notably known for preparing the 1893 referendum on Women's Suffrage, marking the first time women's suffrage passed by a popular vote in any of the United States. Mills also drafted an 1897 act abolishing capital punishment that was adopted by the legislature (and later rescinded), was a president of the Colorado Direct Legislation League, served as President of the State Board of Charities and State Board of Pardons. Mills was also the sole prosecutor in the successful conviction of Alfred Packer.
- **Dr. William Smedley** (1836- 1926) was the first president of the Denver Dental Association and President of the Colorado State Dental Association. He was also President of North Side School District 17, which ultimately became part of Denver Public Schools.
- **Carle Whitehead** (1877-1955) was raised in the church and went on to represent black men in anti-discrimination cases. The ACLU established the Carle Whitehead Memorial award was established in 1953.

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<sup>51</sup> (Pomeroy, J. Waerner Mills of Denver)



## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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*Recent notable members of the church, as noted in the First Unitarian archives and in common knowledge among church members:*

- **Gov. Richard (Dick) Lamm** (1935- ) was a member of the church and married Dottie Lamm at the church in 1963. Lamm is listed on the “Colorado 100” Honor Roll, 1992” which is designed to honor people who have made significant contributions to Colorado and made lasting impressions on the state and its people. His advocacy for environmental protection, quality of life and the right to die with dignity are some of the controversial issues that made him famous.
- **Wayne Knox** (1927 - ) served in the Colorado House of Representatives from 1960-1962 and from 1975-1996.
- **Antonia Brico** (1902-1989) was the first female conductor to receive international fame. She was a member and Music Director at First Unitarian during the 1950s.
- **Samuel B. Lancaster** (1944-2013) was a composer, pianist, conductor and Music Director at First Unitarian. He was Music Director at St. John’s Episcopal Church and the Colorado Children’s Chorale, and a pianist for the Denver Symphony Orchestra.
- **Helen Wolcott**<sup>52</sup> was a leader in racial integration efforts in Denver, leading picketing efforts at Denver Dry Goods and other establishments in Denver. Wolcott was a founding member of Denver’s Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) Wolcott worked with the Park Hill Action Committee (PHAC) to end housing discrimination against blacks, was instrumental in ending segregation in the Cub Scouts, and was involved with Citizens for One Community, a group that supported integration in the schools.
- **Richard Henry** was minister of First Unitarian from 1957-1977. He received the Distinguished Service Award in Human Relations, awarded by the Park Hill Action Committee in 1966. In 1967, the Beth Joseph Congregation’s Men’s Club awarded the Annual Human Relations Citation to Henry. He served on the Board of Directors of the Unitarian Service Committee and was on the board of directors of Planned Parenthood and the ACLU.
- **Lewis Thompson, Laurin Foxworth** (deceased) and **Kate Burns** actively protested discrimination in gay marriage in 2007 and 2009. In 2007, Kate Burns and partner Sheila Schroeder conducted a sit-in at the Denver marriage license office, refusing to leave until they were issued a license. In 2009, First Unitarian members Lewis Thompson, Laurin Foxworth, and Kate Burns were arrested when they protested the court decision to uphold Proposition 8 (banning same-sex marriage) in California.

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<sup>52</sup> (Schroeder, 2016, Park Hill’s Historic Struggle for Integration)

## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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*Notable members of Plymouth/ First Plymouth Church during its occupation at 1400 Lafayette (1893-1958), as recorded in the First Plymouth archives:*

- **Congressman Byron Johnson**—Interest in housing for senior citizens began at First-Plymouth in the 1940s. In the mid-1950s, as FP was considering whether to expand or move, the desire to move forward on housing for seniors was gaining steam. One of the key participants in making it happen was Congressman Byron Johnson who helped overcome some of the hurdles at the federal level. The first occupants moved into Kentucky Circle Village in 1960. The Village was a collaboration between several different church congregations.
- **Frederick C.L. Schmid** was treasurer at Plymouth Church in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was often admonishing the congregation to keep up on their pledges so the church could pay its bills. He started selling radios (a new device at the time) out of his barbershop at 1205 E. 13<sup>th</sup> Ave. He later opened the Fred Schmid Appliance store eventually growing to 22 stores before closing down in the 1990's.
- **Hazel (Rhoads) Gates** was a member of Plymouth Church in the early 1900's and a sister to Harry Mellon Rhoads, a famous early Denver Newspaper photographer. Hazel married Charles C. Gates at Plymouth Church on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1910. Charles purchased the Colorado Leather and Tire Co. in the early 1900's, which later became the internationally known Gates Rubber Company.
- **Judge Booth M. Malone** was a member of Plymouth Church who came to Denver in 1892 to become an Assistant District Attorney. He was later elected to District Attorney and had a reputation as being one of the most brilliant prosecutors in the State of Colorado. In 1900, he was elected judge of the Denver District Court where he was described as being a strong, fair-minded and just judge.
- **Governor William E. Sweet** was the Sunday School Superintendent at Plymouth Church in the early 1900's. He operated a successful investment banking business and later became involved with the YMCA movement. He was elected Governor of Colorado in 1922 for a two-year term and was defeated for a second term by the KKK backed Clarence Morely. In 1940, Mr. Sweet was elected Moderator of the Congregational Christian Churches, a position he held until his death in 1942. In 1940, Sweet and his wife, Joyeuse, donated colorful stained-glass windows for the Sanctuary in honor of his mother. Sweet also donated the historic front doors to the church.



## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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- **Allan M. Culver & family** was involved in real estate in the late 1890's and later became a safe deposit officer at the International Bank & Trust. Mrs. Culver was associated with the YWCA. The Culver's donated the pipe organ for the Plymouth Chapel in memory of long-time pastor, Rev. Frank T. Bayley. When the Plymouth building was sold to the Unitarian congregation in 1958, the Culver children arranged for the organ to be moved to the Chapel at the new First-Plymouth church.
- **Dr. and Mrs. Harry Packard** were medical missionaries in Persia in the early 1900's during a time of extreme strife in the country. Mrs. Packard (Frances) was the daughter of Pastor Rev. Frank T. Bayley. A bronze plaque honoring their service was installed at the church in 1915.
- **Finlay L. MacFarland** was an automobile dealer, president of the Civic and Commercial Association, and President of the Denver Water Board in 1918.
- **Silas G. Pierson** is listed as Vice President and Treasurer for the Colorado Fuel & Iron Co. with an office in the Boston Building, Denver.

**d. *Describe other structures that have similar associations and the relationship/comparison of this structure to these other structures.***

Other Denver landmarks designed by Varian and Sterner include<sup>53</sup>:

- McNeil House, 930 Logan St. (Richardsonian Romanesque, 1890)

Other buildings of similar architectural style and/or using rhyolite stone include:<sup>54</sup>

- Central Presbyterian Church, 1660 Sherman St. (Richardsonian Romanesque, 1892)
- Treat Hall, Johnson & Wales Campus, 1800 Pontiac St. (Richardsonian Romanesque, 1890)
- Zion Baptist Church 933 E 24th Ave. (Romanesque Revival, 1893)
- Kittredge Building, 511 16th Street Mall (Romanesque Commercial, 1890)
- Iliff School of Theology (Richardsonian Romanesque)
- Duning-Benedict House, 1200 Pennsylvania (Richardsonian Romanesque)
- MacKay House, 3559 Alcott St. (Castle Rock rhyolite, 1891)

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<sup>53</sup> (Denver Landmark Commission, 2016, website)

<sup>54</sup> (Denver Landmark Commission, 2016, website)

First Unitarian Society of Denver

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9. Owner Consent to Designation:

I / We, the undersigned, acting as owner(s) of, the property described in this application for landmark designation do, hereby, give my consent to the designation of this structure as a Structure for Preservation.

I understand that this designation transfers with the title of the property should the property be sold, or if legal or beneficial title is otherwise transferred.

Owner(s): Michael Moraga [Signature] Date: 5-31-16

Owner(s) Christopher [Signature] Date: 5/31/16

If the owner does not consent to designation, please describe the reasons for recommending designation:

It is strongly suggested that if the owner does not consent to designation the applicant should meet and discuss application with owner prior to filing an application. Provide a statement describing efforts that have been made to contact the owner to talk about designation and possible alternatives if owner does not consent to designation:

Applicant(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(please print)

Applicant(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(signature)

Applicant Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(please print)

Applicant(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(signature)

Applicant

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(please print)

Applicant(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(signature)

Applicant Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Three applicants are required if the designation does not have owner consent. All three

## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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### **10. Resources**

- First Unitarian Society archives
- Denver Public Library Western History Collection
- First Plymouth Congregational Church Archives

### **11. Photographs**

**Attach at least four (4) 5x7 or larger color photographs showing the views of the property from the public right of way(s) and any important features or details. If available, attach copies of historic photographs of the structure.**

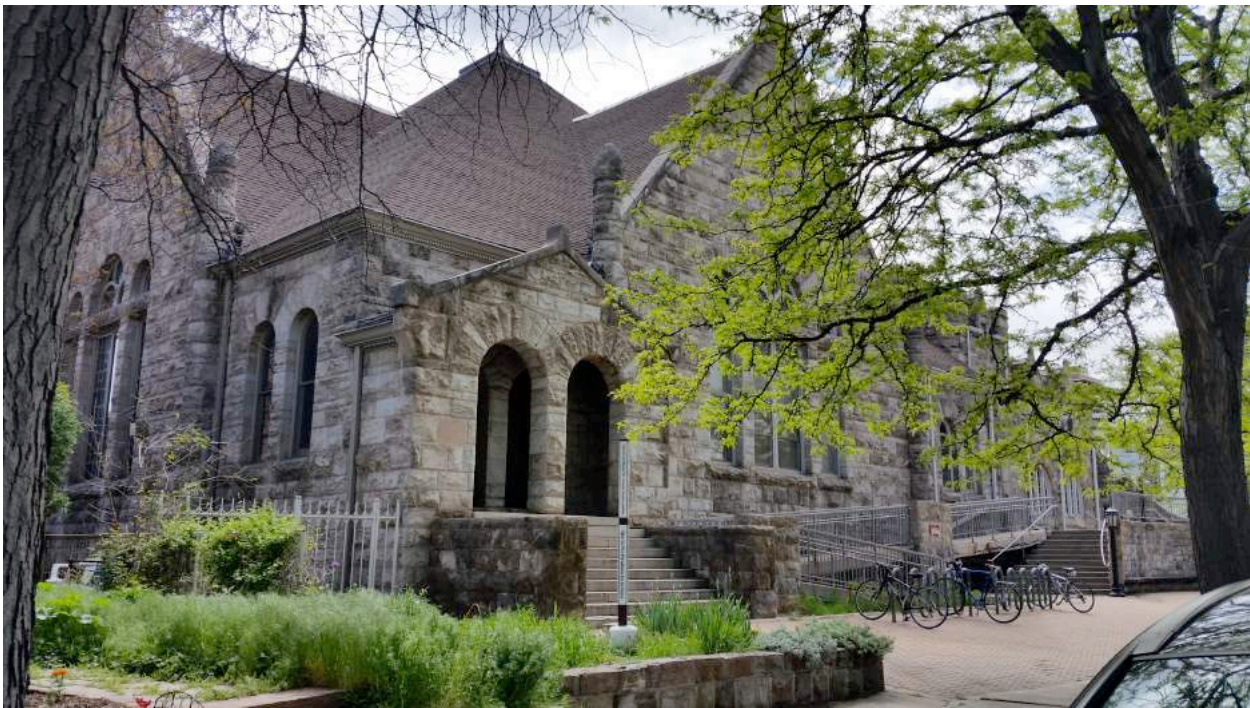
See next page

# First Unitarian Society of Denver

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*First Unitarian Society of Denver: Southwest Corner*



*First Unitarian Society of Denver: Northwest Corner*

# First Unitarian Society of Denver

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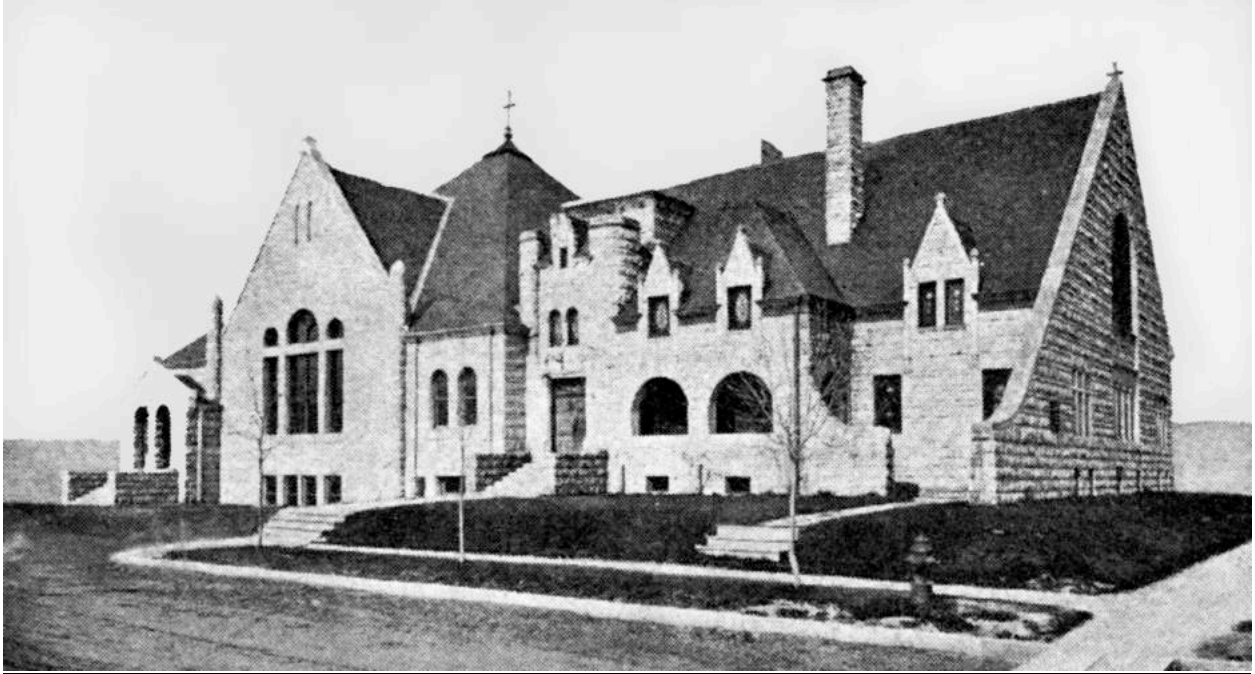
*First Unitarian Society of Denver: Southeast Corner*



*First Unitarian Society of Denver: Northeast Corner*

## First Unitarian Society of Denver

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*Early picture of 1400 Lafayette St., Denver CO*



# First Unitarian Society of Denver

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## Letter of Support from First Plymouth Church



May 25, 2016


Denver Landmark Commission

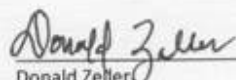
To Whom It May Concern:

First-Plymouth Congregational Church, U.C.C., is the successor to the Plymouth Congregational Church, original builders of the large stone church at the corner of E.14<sup>th</sup> Ave. and Lafayette St. in 1893-1899.

As such, we whole heartedly support the First Unitarian Society of Denver application for Landmark Designation for their building which we sold to them in 1958 upon completion of our new building at E. Hampden and S. Colorado Blvd.

  
Annie Nestor,  
Church Council Moderator

  
Rhonda Williamson,  
Director of Administration

  
Donald Zeller  
First-Plymouth Church Historian

First Plymouth Congregational Church, A United Church of Christ | 3501 S. Colorado Blvd., Englewood CO 80113-4211  
ph. 303.762.0616 | fax. 303.769.2783 | [www.firstplymouthchurch.org](http://www.firstplymouthchurch.org)

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