

190th Anniversary Greetings

(Presented by Harald Grote Sunday, 31 Jan. 2010, the Anniversary of the Charter signed Monday 31, Jan. 1820)

It was cold during the entire month January 1820; Philadelphians saw only three days with temperatures above freezing. On thirty-first day of that cold month – it was a Monday - more than a dozen souls, men and women, gathered to sign the Charter that created our community, eventually known as ***The Church of the Restoration***.

What was Philadelphia like when the Charter was signed?

Although growing rapidly, the city occupied not yet nearly the geographic area that we know today. In 1820 Philadelphia had between 60 and 70 thousand inhabitants, including a large proportion of blacks and immigrants from many parts of the world. Despite the aims for religious tolerance, there were violent ethnic clashes, which authorities found difficult to control. The population endured several yellow fever epidemics that took many lives, especially of children. In 1819 Philadelphia also experienced a serious economic depression.

The young country was still recovering from the War of 1812. The 5th U. S. President, James Monroe, was elected for a second term on December 3. After Maine joined the Union in March, the revised U.S. flag boasted 23 stars. Coincidentally, a number of prominent Americans were born in the course of 1820, among them:

February 8 – William Tecumseh Sherman, American Civil War general (d. 1891)

February 15 – Susan B. Anthony, American suffragist (d. 1906)

May 12 – Florence Nightingale, English nurse (d. 1910)

What were some of the milestones on the journey of Restoration?

Restoration experienced much change during its 190 years of its existence, not only in its ministers and lay leaders, but also in its name, its location, and of course its membership. Since the Charter was signed, some 40 different ministers served **Restoration** at four different locations:

1. After the signing of the charter the congregation entered a period of vigorous growth despite the precarious economic circumstances. For the first three years, Abner Kneeland, minister of the Lombard street church and a signer of the Charter, also served the new group. Within his short tenure, **Restoration** - astonishingly - not only acquired a lot on **Callowhill Street (1)**, but also took on a \$10,000 loan, raised as much again from contributions, and completed its first church building there by 1823. Unfortunately, a few decades later a devastating fire burned down most residences in the area.
2. As the city grew, Restoration relocated twice before coming to Mount Airy. Early in 1850 the congregation changed its name from **the Second Independent Church of Christ called Universalist of the Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia** to **The Second Universalist Church**. Not long thereafter - Feb. 19, 1854 – the congregation acquired a larger building at **8th and Noble Streets (2)** from the **Eighth Street Methodist Church**, which had relocated to Greene Street.
3. In December 1871 the church occupied a new building at the Southwest corner of **Greenhill and Masters Street (3)** and the name of the church was changed to **Church of the Restoration**. I don't know when Universalist was restored to the name but **Unitarian** was not added until 1980.

4. Ground for our present building on **Stenton Avenue in Mount Airy (4)** was broken January 18, 1937 and the building was dedicated at the first service on Sunday September 27 of that year. The educational wing, funded by Lena Louise Hale in memory of her sister Carrie, was dedicated in 1953.

As we contemplate this anniversary, it is fitting to remind ourselves that the word charter - from Latin: paper - also implies writing or charting of an initial plan or map, something used to set the course for a journey. It is fitting to briefly look back, like this, at the path we have travelled together as a community.

- So we honor, today, the people who signed the original charter.
- We honor the authors who recorded milestones of our long journey, among them Edward S. Deemer (1920), Pearce M. Gabell (1945), Rev. Richard A. Perry (1975) and William T. Dikeman (1995).
- We honor the people who funded and constructed this building and those who now care for it.
- We honor the ministers, trustees and teachers, who have led this congregation over the years.
- We honor those who, over so many years, have filled our building with art and music.
- We honor the unsung heroes – treasurers, secretaries, sextons, singers, gardeners, and committee members – who continue working behind the scenes, so that we may continue to meet.
- We honor the parents who bring their children here, who teach us love and keep us looking forward into the future.
- And we honor the people the people who – week after week – fill these wonderful spaces (and the collection plate), as we recognize the extreme privilege of entering the last decade of the second century of *Restoration*.

As we stand at the threshold of this new decade, it is also fitting to look forward to the path before us. Therefore, I invite you to take inspiration from the many people who have gone before us: be generous, as we prepare for the next steps of our journey. As our ushers come forward with the collection plate, give with your heart and with joyful energy, so that we may be fortified for the next segment of our continuing journey together.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, EVERYONE!