

## **Founders of the Fellowship**

**September 8, 2013 by UUFD member Kenneth Robertson**

This morning for my part of our celebration, I would like to remember and honor some of the many benefactors of the Fellowship. Evelyn and Mack MacKay were founding members. They had been members of the Unitarian Church in Fort Wayne before being transferred to Decatur. Although they were of modest means—Mack traveled as a signal repairman for the Wabash Railroad and Evelyn sold women's foundation garments at Newman's at a time when downtown was a flourishing shopping area—they owned a library of books a college professor would have treasured—books that they both likely had read and discussed. In the early years, each of them served terms as Fellowship President. Annually, Evelyn organized a Fellowship rummage sale held in a commercial rummage room with the proceeds dedicated to the "Cathedral Fund" as she named it, in hopes that, someday, the Fellowship would own its own meeting place. Mack was serving as president in 1961 when we moved into the Fellowship's first home at 716 W. William St. By the time we built our current building, Mack had passed on and Evelyn had retired to her native Louisiana, but she did get to tour the new building during a subsequent visit. Her modest estate provided funds to acquire and install the roadside sign on MacArthur Road that conveys our weekly messages to the passing public.

John Heil had grown to manhood in Decatur—the son of a respected physician. He spent most of his adult life working for Chicago newspapers as a reporter and editorial writer. Late in the 1950's he retired and returned to Decatur to develop lakefront property inherited from his father's estate into the area known today as Eastmoreland. He became an enthusiastic member of our Fellowship, which he liked to describe as "an intellectual oasis." John Heil was taken from us by a heart attack in 1961, a few months after we moved into the Unitarian House on William Street. His will provided that after 20 years, if the Fellowship continued in existence, it would be the beneficiary of the residual of his estate. The funds received from the Heil Estate, augmented by a capital fund drive supported by members and friends and further supplemented by two mortgage loans enabled the purchase of an appealing tract of vacant land at the well-known intersection of Mound and MacArthur followed by the design and construction of the building we occupy today.

Ken Smith lived his entire life in Decatur and first attended the Fellowship when he was a 16 year old high school student. He was always an enthusiastic participant in the discussions following Sunday mornings' sermons. A generous gift from Ken Smith's estate provided the basis for the founding and the funding of the Fellowship's Trust Fund. His thoughtful bequest remains by far the largest gift to the Trust Fund. Income from the Trust Fund has kept a sound roof over our heads, provided fresh paint for the building, paid for the periodic sealing of the parking area, and supported other activities as needed.

Charla Hathaway, along with her five siblings, attended the Fellowship's Sunday School in the 1950's and 60's. As an adult, her artistry in stained glass was first expressed in her gift of the pieces that grace the window of our entrance area. As her talent matured, her parents, Phyllis and Bob Hathaway, financed the gift of the magnificent flaming chalice she designed and constructed to be the focal point of our meeting room. Charla's brother, Tom, made it truly a family project by traveling here from Colorado to be the main ladder climber in the task of installing the stained glass treasure safely and securely in its place.