

## **Historic Furnishings of UUFDFurnishings from the Unitarian Church in Shelbyville**

December 16, 2012 by UUFDF member Kenneth Robertson

By May of 1961, this Fellowship had been in existence for eight years, meeting first in members' homes, one summer in the Jewish temple, and for several years in the downtown YMCA Chapel. An increasing membership enabled the group to raise funds for a down payment on a permanent home, a two story residence at 716 West William St. with a large front parlor that would serve as a meeting place. By that time the historic Unitarian Church in Shelbyville no longer functioned, but some of its former long-term members attended the Fellowship from time to time. Through them, arrangements were made for the Fellowship to acquire the furniture from the Shelbyville Church.

Dave Macarus, the Fellowship President, had reserved a rental truck and asked Harry Cole to pick up and drive the truck to Shelbyville. Harry had another commitment that morning and passed the request along to me. Harry also arranged for a student member of our group to ride along as my helper. On that sunny Saturday morning in May, we would be met in Shelbyville by two carloads of fellowship members who would assist us in loading the furnishings. In my entire life, I had never driven a truck but I had no concerns about my ability to do so. Downtown, at the truck rental place on Wood Street, I found the reserved vehicle was a full sized truck with a large open bed such as farmers use to haul grain.

The Shelbyville Church was a traditional one-room structure with the usual white exterior but inside, rather than pews, we found rows of sturdy bow back oak chairs, 99 in number. The miniature chairs for children were clustered in a rear corner of the room. I remember the interior as a study in shades of tan and brown. The walls were a tan color and the carpet was dark brown as was all of the furniture. We loaded everything that was moveable, all of the chairs including the pulpit chairs, the pulpit, the pedestals, the walnut storage cabinet, the ancient treadle-powered organ, the rolled-up carpet—even the silver communion set, the bookcase and the books that had belonged to the then deceased legendary minister, Jasper Douthit.

Before noon, everything was loaded and my swamper and I began the trip back to Decatur. Several miles out of Shelbyville, the truck engine sputtered and died and the gas gauge showed nearly empty. Fuming at the thought of a truck rental company that would send me out without a full tank of gasoline, I asked my helper to stay and watch the load while I hiked to a farm house within sight about a quarter of a mile away. The farm lady was friendly and accommodating. She let me use her telephone to call the rental company. The dispatcher listened for a while to my complaints before he interrupted to inform me of the truck's reserve gasoline tank and where to find the valve that would connect it. Back at the truck, I found the valve just as instructed, and in a few minutes we were able to resume our return trip to Decatur.

Again we were met by members to help unload the contents of the truck. In our newly purchased quarters that we named Unitarian House, members of the decoration committee repainted the chairs, the pulpit, the pulpit chairs, and the pedestals with a gleaming white enamel, and they served the Fellowship in that form for a twenty year period. In 1982, when this building was completed, the historic chairs were replaced with more comfortable seating

and the pulpit, the pulpit chairs and the pedestals were refinished to reveal the intrinsic beauty of the walnut wood that had been so completely hidden by the white enamel.