

Read by the archivist at the Parish Supper  
November 1933 (Bertha Shambaugh)

#### EDNA B. WILSON AND THE CHURCH CHART

Tonight, in memory of Edna Brown Wilson and her sixty years of practical devotion to this church, the archivist leaves her documents, record books, calendars, and clippings to tell Mrs. Wilson's own story of the ministers of the church from 1878 to 1933 — a story recorded by the archivist after an afternoon spent with Mrs. Wilson about four months before her death.

It was Mr. M. L. Townsend who suggested a diagram or graph in the manner of a fever chart, of the life line of the Iowa City Unitarian Church. Mr. Townsend was making a study of the church in connection with the Liberal movement in Iowa. He had the basic information furnished by secretaries' books and treasurers' reports. To this he wished to add what the journalist calls, "the human side of the story".

With the hope of assistance, Mr. Townsend left with the archivist a list of the ministers — but the archivist belonged to the generation in the church whose guiding motto had ever been, "When in doubt — ask Mrs. Wilson!" Mrs. Wilson's father, E. A. Brown, had been a generous supporter of the original Universalist Church, and Mrs. Wilson herself, as a young matron, had lived through the period of transition from the old Universalist Church to the new Unitarian organization. She had known all of the ministers, she had an historic appreciation and a good memory. She was absolutely honest, fair and just.

Mrs. Wilson had grown rather frail, but she answered the

hesitating inquiry of the archivist with the positive assurance that she was quite well enough to talk over the church diagram or graph or chart -- whatever that happened to be. And so, with Mr. Townsend's list in her hand, the archivist went to see Mrs. Wilson.

Seated in her favorite chair in the bay window of her living room she took up the question in hand at once. "I don't see much in the idea of that chart or diagram or thermometer" was her characteristic comment, "but I'll tell you what I remember about the ministers of the church" -- which she did, and this is Mrs. Wilson's story recorded at the time as nearly as possible in her own words and in her own realistic fashion -- frank and fair -- with flashes of dry humor and touches of her own working philosophy, with the old familiar refrain "Well I for one was ready to stop" (which of course she never did). And through it all runs the silver thread of more than sixty years of Spartan loyalty and practical devotion -- as unique as it was unconscious on Mrs. Wilson's part.

The archivist spoke of that practical devotion throughout the years of her own memory -- to which Mrs. Wilson replied, as only Mrs. Wilson could, "Well, practical devotion is the only kind that will set machinery into motion! I'm not sure there is any other kind."

"Yes", began Mrs. Wilson, "I remember when the church voted itself Unitarian -- that was the liberal wing of the Universalist

movement. That's one thing you've got to give this church credit for", continued Mrs. Wilson. "It was always on the liberal front. We never tied strings to our ministers. We were sometimes too liberal for the American Unitarian Association, but we always managed to hold our ground."

"I suppose the church graph or thermometer or whatever that young man calls it" (still quoting Mrs. Wilson) "begins with Oscar Clute -- the first minister sent to us by the American Unitarian Association in 1878 -- I think that's right. He was here six or seven years. We were glad to have him come and quite as glad to have him go. Mr. Clute was a good speaker -- preached evolution -- it was a new and rather daring pulpit topic in those days. People came to hear him and for a time the church seemed to prosper in spite of -- or perhaps because of -- the vigorous opposition of some of the Evangelical ministers of the town.

"Mr. Clute had a Scotch wife who was as witty as she was untidy -- and the six Clute children did about as they pleased.

"Mr. Clute organized an Iowa City branch of the American Agassiz Association and persuaded the women of the church to turn over the church parlor for their use. No one had any objection to that", added Mrs. Wilson, "until the older boys with the two Clute boys in the lead, got to using the parlor as a club room. And when the church women missed one of their big blue pitchers and found it in the parlor smelling of beer, they notified Mr. Clute and the Agassiz Association that it was time to move!"