

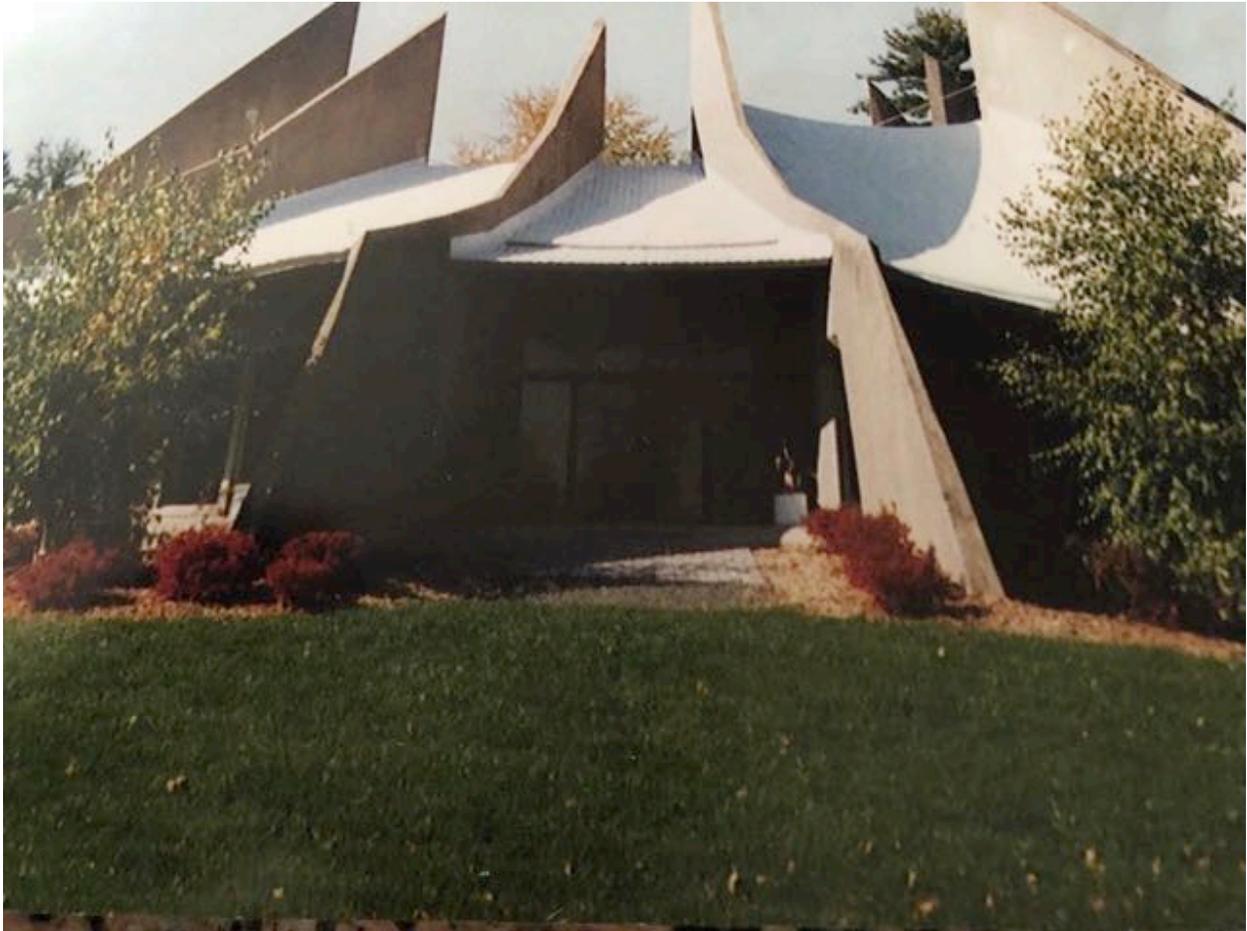
A History of Our Meeting House Memorial Gardens

By Janice and David Newton

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We first began attending USH in the mid 90s. At the time we had no idea of what the future held of our Meeting House, and its Memorial Gardens. This article is an illustrated history of the development of the Memorial Gardens since that time.

Prior to 1996, this is what the memorial garden looked like:



When the Meeting House was constructed, a memorial garden was contemplated outside of the South entrance. As with other items not finished at the time, the contemplated landscaping and plantings existed in plans, but had not been completed. What did exist was established in 1991 consisting of the Azaleas and White Birch trees seen in the photograph. A Memorial Garden Committee established the rules for use including burial of ashes only without markers, tags in the entry way listing the names of those whose ashes were interred, and a Book of Remembrance with notes and some programs from services of those who were buried elsewhere as well as those whose ashes were placed the “new” memorial garden.

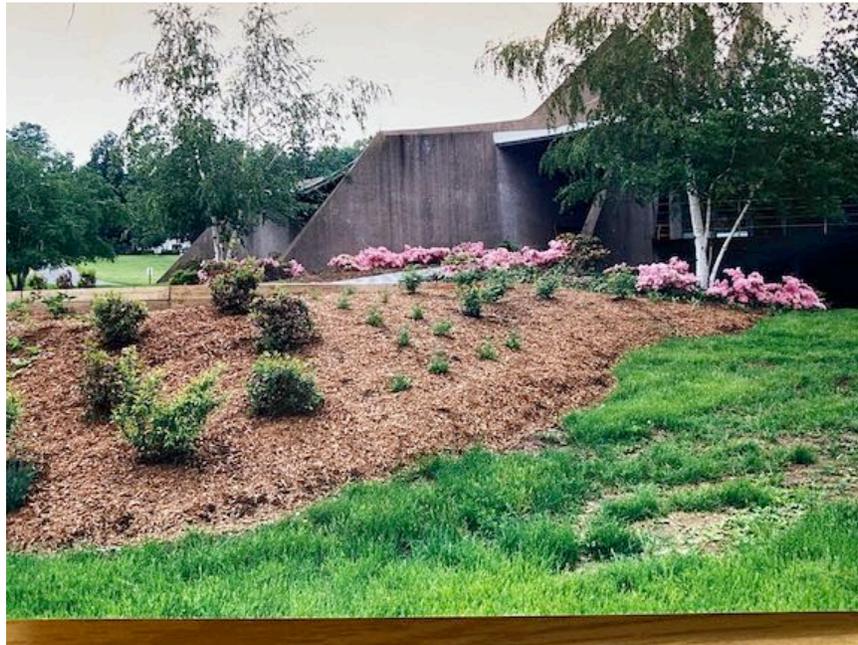
Among others, the committee at the time included Bill and Louise Willett, long active members of USH. They had buried the ashes of their son, Mark, under the birch tree shown to the right. Bill expressed the strong desire that someday the garden be completed as designed to better serve as a memorial spot for additional families and their relatives. Today we have memorial tags for 61 individuals recorded on the memorial plaques.

As it happened, an anonymous gift was received in 1999 to further develop the original concept with some departures for the original plans and designs. A patio area with benches was also added, providing a comfortable place to mediate and remember. Plantings in the Garden were selected to produce blooming through most of the season. The Garden currently has an automatic watering system. In the adjacent entry from the Meeting House is a wall plaque commemorating those whose ashes are interred in the Garden.

Subsequently, a Tree of Life created by John Stowe and a Memorial Garden plaque were added on the buttress.

Over the years the plantings have matured and been replaced. The pictures below show some of the varying views. The original white birches are long gone. Of the two river birches only one remains. The Mimosa tree, a relatively fast grower, has come and gone. The Hellebores have proved to be very successful, while peonies, roses and daisies do well. For such a garden, volunteer gardeners are and remain essential!

Beginning in 2000:



2006



2007



2008



2014



2019



So, there you have our evolving, every changing Memorial Garden, a place for remembrance, interment of loved ones' ashes, and on occasion, an outdoor space for events with pleasant surroundings.

But, wait, there is more.

About the time the Memorial Garden was well established, our member, Helen Skinner, wondered if we might find a place for a Pet Memorial Garden. She thought it would be meaningful for our children and their pets and offered to finance the construction of such a garden. Perhaps rashly, the Newtons said they would build it if she would finance it, and she did! Later the ashes of her beloved pet Barny were interred there. At the time, there was a construction project underway to pave the now accessible parking area in front of the West Meeting House door.

The construction personnel were persuaded to pave a short path and scoop out the soil and dump sand in the location of the new Pet Memorial Garden. In the following pictures you can see what was added.

The year, 2007:







And, in ensuing years we have had pet-related services near the garden, and a book of Pet Remembrance is maintained in the office for pictures and words children, their parents, and the rest of us may write recording memories of our loved companion pets on our journey through life.
