

## THE MINISTRY OF THIS MEETING HOUSE

Rev. Edward T. Atkinson

It is easy to dismiss as frivolous and unimportant  
the character of this building.

It is, after all,

Only four walls and a roof,  
A place to hang your hat,

To be protected from wind and rain and sleet.

And the ancient teacher from Nazareth,

No temples, however modest, did he build.

For him most any hillside place

or spot beside the sea

Would do for altar table, pulpit and pew.

Yet his message was no less moving or profound.

Why then should we

Devote even a moment

To that which is merely

Wood, stone and glass?

No matter really,

It won't last.

And to do so opens us to

Those modern-day prophets

Who would chide saying

We suffer from an edifice complex!

So be it.

I'll accept the admonition.

But this structure of wood

Has stood

Over two centuries

And somehow I cannot help but believe

That does mean something.

So it is a symbol

And symbols can become idols –

Can become a substitute for a living faith.

Agreed!

But symbols are also

A medium for communication.

No symbols?

No words,

No numerals,

No way to reach out to another

through something held in common,

Hence no community.

In the extreme  
The iconoclast plays a losing game.  
Of course the symbol is not the essence  
But rather a vehicle we use to pierce the veil  
A glass through which we peer to search for  
realities always beyond our grasping.

Value people, persons, before buildings!  
to be sure  
but buildings house people  
buildings reveal persons  
in their style.

What do we see here?

Plain walls, clear glass  
evidence of simple speech  
of no-nonsense people.  
A high beautifully crafted pulpit  
Testimony to some early artisan's skill  
And the weight placed upon  
the preaching of the Word.

Simplicity,  
Plain speech,  
Craftsmanship,  
Conscience,  
Truth

All values worthy of our emulation.  
And there is more

For we know that the things we see  
and hear  
and touch  
become a part of us  
And we of them.

So we feel a special presence here

This is the place  
where Brown and Flint and Osgood preached.  
This is where  
men have celebrated life, married and mourned.  
This is the hall  
where our town was formed.  
This is where  
we have worshipped, wedded and wept.

The plain walls  
The clear glass  
The hand crafted pulpit

Speak to us of times gone by  
of promises made, some broken some kept  
of passing years, of hopes, of fears  
of words of wisdom  
and songs of praise  
of insights and challenge and calm.

Worship anywhere?  
Of course we can!  
Worship alone?  
Indeed, by the sea or on a mountainside.  
But here we come together,  
to share  
to care  
to grow we hope  
to be reconciled and to forgive.

And simply because  
This is the place  
It is made holy by others and our being here.

Then to give this building care  
does say something of us.

In our town  
Grand homes abound,  
Plush places to dine  
Country clubs so fine,  
Temples to the art of gracious living.

Let this steeple-topped structure stand  
to remind that moth and rust do consume  
that man does not live by bread alone!

To fill this symbol with meaning  
That is our task  
Not to bask  
In things past  
But to strip the mask  
that separates us one from the other.

Let not this towered temple be  
nothing more than the ashen tomb  
of ideals no longer able to bloom  
or move the hearts of men to see  
the truth that may set them free.

A thin film of paint  
A carpet soft  
New lights to brighten our hall,

Will the light shine within you and me?

Will it illumine so our eyes really see?

Let the light shine in  
And so may men know this Meeting House  
As a symbol of a living faith.  
A vehicle for truth,

for caring,  
for liberty,  
for celebration  
for man  
for God.  
Let the light shine.

Amen