

## Biographies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Unitarian Church of Phoenix Board Presidents in our first decade, 1947-1957

Year served	Board President	Location
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<b>1947</b>	<b>Milton J. Shear</b>	<b>Kenilworth School</b>
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Milton James Shear was born on 25 Sep 1891 in Castle Grove, Iowa, the son of Romaine and Ada Laude Shear. In 1917, when he registered for the WWI draft, he lived in Flint, Michigan, was married, had a child and was a farmer. The registration noted he was of medium height and build, with blue eyes and brown hair. By 1946 he was living in Phoenix. A 23 Dec 1946 article in the Arizona Republic on plans for a Unitarian church listed Mr. and Mrs. Milton J. Shear as being on the promotion committee for the group. An article in the 3 Mar 1947 Arizona Republic noted that the day before, Sun 2 March, Milton J. Shear had been elected president of the board of trustees of the youngest Unitarian church in America. He wrote several letters to the editor showing his concern for social justice. In one of them on 22 Aug 1948, at the height of McCarthyism, he challenged the idea that one country or party or church was right and righteous. He said that thinking was totalitarian. On 25 Aug 1962 in his letter he said there are three guideposts to scholarship - a strong inner desire for truth, honesty and accuracy. He died on 14 Dec 1962 at age 71 in Phoenix and is buried in the Encanto Mausoleum Garden of Roses at the Greenwood Memory Lawn Cemetery.



<b>1948</b>	<b>Taylor Smith</b>	<b>Kenilworth School</b>
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The second president of the board was Taylor Smith serving in 1948 when the congregation was meeting at Kenilworth School. Slade Taylor Smith was born on 27 Jan 1900 in Stacyville, Iowa, the son of Frank S and Effie A Meapes Smith. His WWII draft registration noted that he was 5' 10, had hazel eyes and brown hair. After graduating from Dartmouth, he began a career in banking in Indianapolis in 1927. In 1933 he joined the FDIC and was a senior examiner when he moved to Arizona and the Valley Bank in 1945. After serving in a wide field of banking, he was named manager of the East Van Buren Street Office in Phoenix and later the manager of the Youngtown/Sun City office. In addition to his work as president of the fledgling congregation, he was involved in the community. He was the chairman of the board of the Friendly House which was 'a social service organization operated for the benefit of Spanish-speaking people and others of foreign heritage to gain American citizenship.' To be supportive of immigrants was probably not popular during McCarthyism. He was also a board member of the Memorial Hospital. He was described as an outgoing, friendly, understanding man. He retired in 1965, died on 24 Dec 1996 and is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Toledo, Ohio.

<b>1949</b>	<b>E. B. Myrick</b>	<b>Kenilworth School</b>
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Exum Britt Myrick was born on 25 Oct 1895 in Suffolk, Virginia, the son of Alexander and Anna

B Britt Myrick. Educated as an electrical engineer, in 1917, when he registered for the WWI draft and enlisted, he was working for General Electric in Schenectady, NY. In July 1942, Major Myrick moved from Gallup, NM and assumed command of the Navajo Ordnance Depot in Bellemont, outside of Flagstaff, dubbed Arizona's war town, when the arsenal was activated for ammunition storage. He was described as an easy going, likable officer. Because of the war-time labor shortage, he created a Navajo and Hopi village at the depot encouraging Native American workers to move in with their families. By October 1 more than 1,000 had moved into the compound. Heavy snow and rocky terrain slowed down the construction activity but on Armistice Day, 11 November 1942, Senator Carl Hayden loaded the first case of ammunition to be shipped from the Depot. In 1945 he was a supervisor for the OPA (Office of Price Administration) in Phoenix. In 1947 he formed a corporation to produce pictures in the non-theatrical field such as schools, churches and clubs and broke ground on four studios. In 1951 he was the president of Oracle Engineering Corp, a new engineering firm. A 13 May 1958 article in the Flagstaff Daily Sun reported E. B. Myrick was the vice president of O'Malley Investment and Realty Co. which owned the Flagstaff Industrial Park. But like the previous board presidents, he was also active in the community. He was vice president of the Camelback Mountain Improvement Association whose goal was to preserve the mountain. He was the chairman of a committee of citizens working to create a Scottsdale Volunteer Fire Company district and he served on the Scottsdale drainage and street committee. He and his second wife and step-daughter were cat fanciers and members of the Canyon State Cat Club whose show in Phoenix in 1950 attracted 200 entries from several states and had 2,200 spectators. It was during his tenure as board president that the congregation was asked to leave Kenilworth School and moved to the Valley Garden Center. He died in Phoenix at age 81 on 13 Apr 1977 and is buried in Cedar Hill Cemetery in Suffolk, Virginia.



**1950 Jan-Sep**

**James Stewart**

**Valley Garden Center**

James Irving Stewart was born on 27 Nov 1907 in Schenectady, NY, the son of Miles V. and Nellie B Stewart. His WWII draft registration noted he was 5' 6", had a light complexion with blue eyes and red hair. He began teaching in 1933 after receiving his BA from Dartmouth, MA from Columbia University and a PhD in education from Stanford. He taught history and English at Phoenix college for ten years then became principal of North Phoenix High school and served as assistant superintendent of curriculum for high schools in Phoenix. He was president of the Arizona Education Association and served on the State Board of Education. He acted as a high school representative to the Commission on Colleges and Universities of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Like his predecessors, he was also active in the community. He was a member of the executive committee for the Phoenix Mothers March for the March of Dimes and gave talks on such topics as the foundation of peace among the great powers. He was interested in athletics and was one of the top golfers in the country. He and his wife were active in the still-new 1<sup>st</sup> Unitarian Church of Phoenix. A 22 Mar 1947 article in the Arizona Republic reported that there would be a farewell reception for founding minister Rev and Mrs. Lon Ray Call at the home of Mr. and Mrs. James I Stewart. McCarthyism continued to threaten the congregation, and pressures forced the Church to move to the Valley Garden Center. Stewart served as president of the board for only part of 1950. That might have been because he

left in 1951 to become the principal of San Mateo High School in California. He attended a Congregational church there. He died on 19 Oct 1961 in San Mateo at the age of 53 from cancer.



**1950 Oct-Dec Isabelle Johnson YWCA**

A longer biography is available on UUCP's website at <https://www.phoenixuu.org/about-us/our-stories/history/founding-family/>. This is an excerpt from that work. Isabelle Marie Hastings Johnson was born on January 15, 1880 in West Boylston, Massachusetts to William R. and Fannie Wilson Hastings. She graduated from the English High School. In February 1903 she married Benjamin Oliver (B.O.) Johnson and had two daughters. Her husband was a civil engineer who worked on improving the Trans-Siberian railroad. After the he, Isabelle and their daughters lived in China, Worcester, Mass, Montana and eventually settled in St. Paul, Minn. by the time of B.O.'s death in 1932 at the age of 54. Her travel may have given her a broader view of life. Isabelle "was a huge women's rights person... and a remarkable person," according to her grandson, George Rountree III. Isabelle was involved in the Minnesota effort to support the women's suffrage amendment. She was also an administrative leader of the Red Cross Motor Corps during WWII. Isabelle, her daughter Frances Locke, and granddaughter, Joanne Locke moved to Phoenix in 1943. In 1946 Rev. Lon Ray Call was sent to Phoenix by the Unitarian Association to organize a church. Isabelle Johnson, who had known Lon Ray Call in the Midwest, was contacted by Rev. Call and asked if she would act as an appointed secretary for the initial meetings and newspaper publicity. That was the beginning of the First Unitarian Church of Phoenix. She was the first woman to be president of the board and served during the difficult time when the congregation met at the YWCA, filling the term left by Mr. Stewart. Isabelle was known for her intelligence and community leadership. In addition to being a founding member of the UUCP, she was also a charter member of the Arizona Country Club, the first and only woman charter member of an Arizona country club at the time. On Isabelle's 90th birthday, 15 Jan 1970, the Isabelle Johnson room was dedicated at the church in her honor. She died in her home at 1616 W. Glendale, on October 30, 1976 at the age of 96.



**1951 Frances Locke Bishop YWCA Jan-Mar / 800 E Pasadena**

A longer biography is available on UUCP's website at <https://www.phoenixuu.org/about-us/our-stories/history/founding-family/>. This is an excerpt from that work. Frances Johnson Locke

Bishop was born on 1 Nov 1903 in Forsyth, Montana, the daughter of Isabelle and Benjamin Oliver Johnson. The Johnsons lived in Montana then in China where B O worked on the trans-Siberian railroad after the Bolshevik Revolution. After his death in 1932, Isabelle and Frances lived in St. Paul, Minnesota. According to the 1940 US census, Frances was divorced, living with Isabelle and working as a kindergarten teacher. In 1943, Isabelle, Frances and Frances' daughter, Joanne Locke moved to Phoenix. Frances graduated from the University of Chicago in 1929. She did graduate work in education, psychology and sociology at several universities including ASU. She was a teacher and then a counselor for the Child Study Service of the Phoenix Elementary Schools. In 1969 she ran for the Phoenix Elementary District School Board. Her hobby was woodworking; she made beautiful furniture. Frances and William Blauvelt Bishop met during the formation of the Unitarian Church. They are Founding Members of the church. They were married on February 22, 1952 in the church the congregation built at 800 East Pasadena Avenue. Frances was an intellectual and active in the youth education programs at the church. She was president of the Board of Trustees in 1951 and 1953, the time the fledging church moved from its temporary quarters in the YWCA and built its own building at 800 E. Pasadena. There was no minister from Aug 1951 to Sept 1952 so she would have had extra responsibility. After Bill died in 1987, she moved to a retirement home at the corner of Thomas and 68th St. She died on Dec 13, 1991. Her ashes were buried in the Memorial Garden.



**1952 J. D. Filson 800 E Pasadena**

James Dee Filson was born on 14 Jun 1915 in Illinois, the son of P. C. Perce and Daisy Filson. He graduated from Roodhouse Illinois high school in 1935 and from Illinois State Normal, a teacher training school, in 1941. He also attended the University of Chicago and Arizona State College in Tempe. He taught in three schools in Illinois and served as district supervisor of the Division for Delinquency Prevention in Illinois. He joined the North Phoenix High School faculty in Aug 1948 as a teacher-counselor. He was the chairman of the English department and a drama and speech teacher and past president of the Salt River Valley Federation of Teachers, American Federation of Teachers. A former student, Janet Gay Burroway had this to say about Dee Filson, "He was tall, graying, horn-rimmed, and intense. His classes left me breathless. It was my first experience of the connection between eroticism and the intellect. Mr. Filson insisted that we think of ourselves as adults. When we discussed family relations we were to "relate" to our potential children rather than our soon-to-be-abandoned parents. One day when one of the students used the word "Communist" in a sneering tone, Mr. Filson said: 'Hey, whoa! Would you like to define Communism for us?' (This was still the early fifties.) He then spent the rest of the hour on Marx, comparing ideological communism to the practice of the Soviet government and also to various forms of Western democracy. He concluded, "When you look at it this way, Jesus Christ was the first Communist. And tomorrow one of your mothers is going to call the principal to tell him I said so.' " He represented Arizona at the 1954 National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan. In addition to being president of the board, he was a Lay Reader at the church and presented plays there. In Sept 1952 the church finally acquired a minister, Charles Donelson but he only lasted a year. It was a challenging time for the still young church and its leadership. Filson died in 1984 in Hilo, Hawaii at the age of 70.



**Feb 1953 - Jan 1954**

**Charles Purtyman**

**800 E. Pasadena**

Dr. Charles Smith Purtyman, Jr was born in Phoenix on 31 Oct 1920, the son of Charles and Mary Bustrin Purtyman. He was a graduate of Phoenix Union High School, Phoenix Junior College and received a BA in education from the Arizona State Teachers College in 1942. In 1943 he was assigned to the Coast Guard pharmacist school at Columbia University in New York City. He graduated from Baylor University's College of Dentistry and taught biology at Baylor's Waco campus. He had a dental practice in Phoenix for many years. In 1954 he won election to become president of the Phoenix Union High Schools and College District board of education. He had received the support of the coordinating council of the Classroom Teachers Association. In the 5 Sep 1954 article in the Arizona Republic announcing his candidacy it was reported that he was a Sunday school instructor and past chairman of his church's board of trustees. He won re-election in 1959 on a platform that teachers and other employees should be recognized and paid according to their proven ability and the use of trainer personnel and sound business practices in all school business. He was president during a high point in the church's history. After three controversial ministers, E. Burdette Backus arrived in Sept 1953 and brought stability and popular leadership to the community. Sadly, Burdette's death in Apr 1954 started another time with no minister and lay leadership followed by two more failed ministers. Purtyman and his family were pictured in the 1968 directory for the 1<sup>st</sup> Unitarian Universalist Church. In the 1970s he was the president of the Phoenix Iris Society. In the 1980s he moved to Salem, Oregon where he was active in the First Unitarian Society of Salem. He died on 7 May 2007 in Scotts Mill, Oregon.



**1954**

**Vernon Robbins**

**800 E Pasadena**

Vernon Fiske Robbins was born on 4 Nov 1908 in St. Paul, Minnesota, the son of Orsin B. and Mary F. Robbins. He was a graduate of American University, a Navy electronics mate during WWII and a leading Indian land title authority in Arizona. He worked for Arizona Title & Trust and served as secretary for the Arizona chapter of the American Right of Way Association. According to his obituary his favorite things in life were singing in the Orpheus Club and Unitarian Universalist Church choirs, the Lions Club, his years as a Red Cross volunteer and traveling with his wife of 62 years, Alice. He died on 2 Mar 2006 at age 97 and is buried in the Resthaven Park West Cemetery in Glendale, AZ



**1955**

**William B. Bishop**

**800 E. Pasadena**

A longer biography is available on UUCP's website at <https://www.phoenixuu.org/about-us/our-stories/history/founding-family/>. This is an excerpt from that work. Bill Bishop was born on Oct 8, 1911 in Wyoming, IL. He was the son of Florence Julia Blauvelt and William Herbert Bishop. He moved to Arizona in 1938 from his native Illinois and worked as a letter carrier for the U.S. Postal Service. He was also poet and owned a used bookstore, the Ostrich Farm and Antique Store. He was a civil rights activist, a member of the Arizona Civil Liberties Union, the Urban League and Planned Parenthood. He was also a founder of the First Unitarian Church of Phoenix and the first and long-time editor of the church newsletter, Horizons. According to Ellie Murphy, he was very friendly and essentially ran the church office for many years. He and Frances Locke married in February 1952 in the church on Pasadena. Bill served on the Board of Trustees when the Rev. E. Burdette Backus was minister in 1953-54 and was president of the Board in 1955. Bill was also a gardener. He planted the Palo Verde trees on the south side of the parking lot. He called it the "Bishop Promenade". Bill Bishop died on Oct 12, 1987 in Scottsdale, AZ. His ashes were buried under the Blue Palo Verde trees he had planted.



The board in 1953-54 contained several past and future presidents. standing from left Leander 'Lee' Binna, FD Filson, Eugene Grigsby, James B Hoagland, William Swineford. Seated, Sarah Ingersoll, sec, Bill Bishop, Dr Burdette Backus, William H. Patey, treasurer, Vernon Robbins, retiring chairman.



**1956 Jan-Oct**

**Roy Gaintner**

**800 E. Pasadena**

George LeRoy Gaintner was born on 24 Nov 1916 in Lancaster, Penn, the son of George L and Ellen Eckman Gaintner. According to his WWII draft registration, he was 5' 11' with blue eyes and brown hair. He was a planning engineer in a San Francisco shipyard during the war but spent his off hours studying drama at the University of California and directing and acting in shows. When he came to Phoenix in 1951 he organized the Variety Guild at AiResearch where he was inventory control supervisor and directed the group's first production. His biography in the Internet Movie Database, written by his son, stated: Roy Gaintner was a long-time actor on a number of local theater levels, as well as performing in movies and commercials. Born in Lancaster, PA in 1916, he was involved in little theater work there until the late 1930s. After moving to the Washington, D.C. area, he became active with the Crossroads Theater Group in Arlington, VA, where he met his wife of over 50 years, Esther, a professional violinist. Moving to Phoenix, AZ in 1951, Roy was a steady performer and director of numerous plays for Phoenix Little Theater and Scottsdale's Stagebrush Theater, as well as performing at Cudia City, a long-standing western theater set used in many westerns of the 1940s and 50s. In his 50s and 60s, Roy was a SAG performer, with roles in a number of movies filmed in the Arizona area. In 1976, he toured for a year as the second lead opposite Bob Cummings in the dinner theater circuit play, "Take Her, She's Mine." He was president of the board at a turbulent time for the church, having had four short-term ministers in four years before the arrival of Arthur Olsen at the end of Gaintner's presidency. He died on 21 Nov 2008 in Chandler, AZ.



**1956 Oct – Dec and 1957 Lee Binna 800 E. Pasadena/Jewish Community Center**

Leander W. Binna was born on 1 Feb 1912 in Chicago, Illinois, the son of Leander and Carrie Walker Binna. He graduated from the University of Illinois and was a high school teacher in Woodstock and Chicago, Illinois and Arena, Wisconsin where he taught history and drama. By 1953 he was in Phoenix on the faculty of Phoenix South Mountain High School in counseling. In 1958 he accepted a position as psychologist and counseling consultant for the Stanislaus County schools in Modesto, California. He was eventually the psychologist for four elementary and two high schools in the Oakdale Public Schools in California. He was also a church organist for 30 years for Stanislaus County's Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. The 22 Jun 1958 article in the Arizona Republic on his move reported that Mr. and Mrs. Binna had been active in community

affairs. It noted his activities had included two terms as president of the board of the Unitarian Church of Phoenix. He had served on the 1953-54 board under the Rev. Dr. E. Burdette Backus. He stayed involved during the unsuccessful ministries of Dr. Edwin Broome and Charles Wing. His terms as president included a time of explosive growth for the church under the charismatic ministry of the Rev. Arthur Olsen. The congregation outgrew the hand-built building on Pasadena and moved into temporary quarters at the Jewish Community Center in 1957. Binna died on 15 Dec 1994 in Modesto, California.

This ended the first decade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Unitarian Church of Phoenix.