

Let's Play UU Spring Madness – The Semi-finals!!!

John L Cashin: was an African American Unitarian Universalist. His story demonstrates how public witness is a sign of our faith. John Cashin was born in Huntsville, Alabama in 1928. His mother was the principal of a school. His father was a dentist, and when John Cashin grew up, he became a dentist, too. Way before John Cashin was born, his grandfather had been a representative in the Alabama State Legislature. So, you see, his family cared very much about health, and education, and citizens taking part in government. Cashin made a promise when he was 11 years old, to do whatever he could to get Blacks involved in the political process and to speak out against the injustices that kept them away. Every time John Cashin put his name on a ballot and his picture on election posters and flyers, he caught the dreams of other African Americans in Alabama. Campaign speeches gave him a chance to make some noise for justice, and speak out against laws that were not fair to African Americans.



When John Cashin formed the National Democratic Party of Alabama, he chose as its symbol, an eagle—the well-known symbol of American freedom. With eagles printed all over their flyers and signs and posters, the National Democratic Party made sure even blacks who could not read could vote for justice-loving candidates, the ones with the eagles by their names. Soon, African Americans in Alabama were running for sheriff, city councils, and judgeships—and the National Democratic Party helped get many get elected. He was the party's nominee when he unsuccessfully ran for governor against George Wallace in the 1970 gubernatorial election. Cashin did not have to witness alone. His family, his Unitarian Universalist congregation in Huntsville, Alabama, and many other UUs and friends joined him. They came to his rallies, made their own speeches to support him, and helped him raise money to run for elections. Like John, they believed that to witness against the wrongs committed against African Americans was an important way to show their faith.

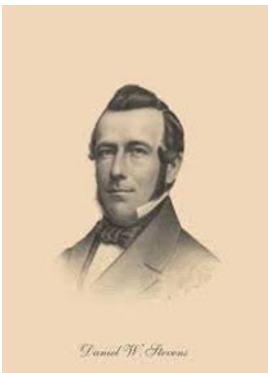
He and his older brother, Herschel, who were always in the same year at school, were co-valedictorians of their Alabama A&M High School graduating class. Both brothers were attending Fisk University in Nashville, an HBCU where other leaders of the civil rights movement would study, including John Lewis and Diane Nash. In 1952 he was drafted into the U.S. Army, where he was commissioned as a first lieutenant and served as chief of dental services for soldiers stationed near Fountainebleau, France. Cashin befriended several African American expatriates in France, including writer James Baldwin, who were welcomed by the French as racial tensions increased in the United States.

Cashin was also a pilot. He took to the air in his single-engine plane each election season for years to drop campaign leaflets in the state's black districts.

In 1968, after Alabama refused to place its candidates on the ballot for the general election, the party sued. The case was ultimately heard by the United States Supreme Court, which ordered the state to put them on. But in Greene County, near Tuscaloosa, a judge defied the high court's order and refused to place six of the party's candidates on local ballots that fall. The case returned to the Supreme Court, which voided the results of the general election in the county and mandated a special election there. In that election, held in July 1969, the six candidates, all African-American, prevailed. Their victory — four seats on the county commission and two on the school board — was the first time since 1819 that Greene County's government had not been controlled by whites.

Cashin's daughter, Sheryll Cashin, described his long fight for social justice in her book, "The Agitator's Daughter," published by Public Affairs in 2008. John Cashin died in 2011.

Rev Daniel Stevens: (182-1891) namesake of Stevens Chapel. A Harvard graduate, the Rev. Daniel Waldo Stevens, whose



original mission was to minister to the sailors who landed at Holmes Hole en route to New York or Boston, is credited with the true beginnings of the church here. Mr. Stevens, who was a Unitarian, served the sailors at Holmes Hole after a Universalist preacher left to minister on the mainland. Rev. Mr. Stevens and a representative of the American Unitarian Association called on the congregation and offered Stevens' services, since he was already here serving the sailors. The Universalists agreed to have the Unitarian minister preach on Sundays, and then they renamed their congregation the Church of Unity. They were 100 years ahead of the times. Of course, the name of the church was misleading, because the congregation couldn't come to a resolution over Pastor Stevens' compensation, leading to his eventual resignation, and the Church of Unity faded into the sunset by 1880. Undaunted, Mr. Stevens went on to set up the

Sailors Free Reading Room, Library, and Chapel, and lead what was the first Unitarian congregation. Stevens managed to purchase a small boat with a gift given to him by the Sunday school he attended some 25 years before, and this allowed him to visit the ships in the harbor. He invited sailors of every nationality to the chapel and wrote that there were no “contribution boxes” in a flyer that he distributed among them. The flyer also reported that the library and reading room offered 25 different newspapers and 1,100 books. It also states, “No respect to persons on account of dress, color, or religious opinions. The word of God is not bound to any sect, party, or nation.” Now, that sounds a lot like the Island’s current Unitarian Universalist Church.

The Mass. Memories Road Show is a statewide, event-based participatory archiving project that documents people, places, and events in Massachusetts history through family photographs and stories. Archivists and public historians at the Joseph P. Healey Library at UMass Boston collaborate with local planning teams and volunteers to organize free public events where individuals bring photographs to be copied and included in a digital archive. Our own Sarah Shepard, UUSMV Archivist & Historian, contributed the chapel’s portrait of Reverend Stevens to the Mass Memories Road Show. Sarah also published an article in the Dukes County Intelligencer, a publication of the Martha’s Vineyard Museum. The article points out something pretty amazing. Mr. Stevens, who was a Unitarian, served the sailors at Holmes Hole after a Universalist preacher left to minister on the mainland. The two groups — the Universalists and the Unitarians — wouldn’t come together formally until 1960, but it was a different story on the Island. The First Universalist Society of Holmes Hole was formed in 1860, but after their minister left, they had trouble finding someone to lead the congregation on Sundays. So, the Rev. Mr. Stevens and a representative of the American Unitarian Association called on the congregation and offered Stevens’ services, since he was already here serving the sailors. The Universalists agreed to have the Unitarian minister preach on Sundays, and then they renamed their congregation the Church of Unity. They were actually 100 years ahead of the times.

Before Reverend Stevens came to the Vineyard, the *Monthly Religious Magazine* of 1849, published in Boston, reported that, in March the Reverend Daniel Waldo Stevens of Northborough became the minister of the Society in Somerville.

The following is from our own website *UU History* by Sarah Shepard. Rev. Stevens graduated from Harvard Divinity School in 1848 and had been the minister of the Unitarian Church in Mansfield. However, he came to the Vineyard from his position as superintendent of schools in Fall River. His charge was to minister to the sailors who stopped in Holmes Hole harbor, many to get supplies, but mostly for safety during bad weather. Charles Banks knew Rev. Stevens, and, in his *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, wrote that Rev. Stevens was “a man of strong intellect, unconventional in his methods, and full of enthusiasm.”

Rev. Daniel Waldo Stevens came to Holmes Hole in 1867 at the behest of the American Unitarian Association as a missionary to sailors. He was forty-seven. At that time 10,000 sailing ships per year were making their way through Vineyard Sound on their way to and from New York and Boston. He received much hostility from the Baptist, Methodist, and YMCA congregation members who threatened, but failed, to set up rival missions. Little boys were sent to make a racket under the chapel windows when he was conducting services.

The Reading Room library with its eleven hundred books was free to borrowers for two weeks. Later Rev. Stevens noted frequently that this was the largest free library on the Vineyard at that time. He provided materials for writing letters and took them to the town post office daily which is a walk of one mile each way. He took meteorological observations for the Smithsonian. Prof. Agaziz of Harvard, well known biologist of the time, persuaded Rev. Stevens to ship turtles to his assistant in Cambridge. Rev. Stevens was invited to be the chaplain for the Marine Hospital. By 1875 he was chairman of the Vineyard Haven School Committee “because intellectual cultivation is a strong ally of Unitarianism”.

Rev. Stevens preached twice to the Methodist Campground and was invited to fill the pulpit in the Vineyard Haven Methodist Church. In 1878 he became the island agent for the Shaw Asylum for Mariners’ Children, and this became one of his most treasured tasks, as he was able to use the institution’s funds (several thousand dollars over the years) to assist many destitute families when the sailor who is head of the household has died or become ill. He explained to all recipients that Robert Shaw was a good Unitarian.

Rev. Stevens’ will stipulated that land be given to the American Unitarian Association with the provision that a chapel be built upon it within the next two years. This was not done. However, wishing to honor his father’s request, his son gave an almost identical piece of land to the Channing District on which to build a chapel. In 1896 this chapel was built by the Channing District on Old Lighthouse Road. We remain very grateful to this remarkable man for whom our chapel is named.