

Bragg Excerpts 2

To Ed Wilson who had passed on the comments of Col. Ruby Garrett, member of ASUC and Board Member, AHA.

March 26, 1952

[Boston]

Many thanks for your letter of March 25th.

Garrett's evaluation of the Unitarian scene in Kansas City is approximately what I have heard from other sources. There is undoubted factionalism, yet no one seems to feel that it runs deep enough to endanger wholesome group life.

I have written to Lester Mondale after talking to him on the phone. He has not yet replied though I expect that each mail will bring a response.

Your commendation of my talents ought to go along [sic] way in convincing Garrett that I am a man needed in Kansas City. You're too generous; in this instance, too uncritical.

I have felt for a year or more (perhaps because I am approaching my fiftieth birthday) that I ought to think solemnly about the remainder of my career. For a variety of reasons I incline toward a church, particularly a church within the borders of the Western Conference. There I am at home; there I feel that my best work can be done.

Having reached such a decision, I had to acknowledge that there are relatively few churches in a position to pay a livable salary, livable for me has to include extraordinary expenditures on behalf of Kate. Then, too, a forthright Humanist has to recognize that relatively few churches are interested in him. Kansas City is obviously one; Madison another.

There are many attractive features in Madison -- a great capital city with a grand liberal inheritance despite Joe McCarthy. It is a favorable location. When you add the features of a new and interesting building with a great university near at hand, you have an almost perfect set-up. Upon inquiry, I learned that Madison

could not pay a salary in keeping with what I am used to for my needs. With this impression fixed in my mind, I made overtures to Randall Hilton regarding Kansas City.

Their response was prompt. They invited Ilse to visit there as well as the prospective minister. No commitments have been made or implied. However, I am genuinely interested and if the situation appears to be what has been reported I shall in all likelihood accept the call if it is extended.

To Dr. and Mrs. Harold Buschman in Kansas City:

May 20, 1952

[Boston]

As undoubtedly you know informally and officially, we have decided to accept the Kansas City call. We anticipate no easy time of it, but still are convinced that an opportunity exists, an opportunity that may in some measure be illuminated by my own experience.

Measuring the job from top to bottom and in its breadth, I conclude that it is in many ways not unlike the situation that was mine in Minneapolis. That, I was able to weather and, if I do say so myself, make a contribution. My hide is tough and my patience longer than some.

To Rev. John Ruskin Clark, Jr. in Concord, NH:

January 29, 1953

[Kansas City]

We are thoroughly happy in Kansas City. There is much to do, much to plan. By New England standards and 85th anniversary sounds unimpressive. By western Missouri standards, in Unitarian terms, eighty-five years is quite a span. I am impressed with the eagerness of these folks to get at some of the basic themes. I have tried to think of a New England church familiar to me where fifty to seventy-five persons would turn out of a Monday evening to think about the contents of the new testament. By gosh it's true here, and I rejoice in such truth.

To Fred Putney in Lincoln, NE: (The Braggs had just suffered through their first Kansas City summer.)

August 5, 1953

[Kansas City]

We are hoping to get away next week for at least a fortnight in Colorado. If you have not left Lincoln I suspect that you will have in the fairly near future. It was reported to me a day or two ago that the only reason for remaining in Kansas City during the summer is that in the event you die there is time off in hell. It has been a tough season.

To Rev. Ellsworth Smith in Chicago:

March 31, 1959

[Kansas City]

You will. . . find things looking up Unitarian-wise in Kansas City. At our Congregational meeting last evening the Board was instructed by an overwhelming vote, 154 to 16 precisely, to proceed immediately with the construction of a new building. As you might well expect, the minority was comprised of those who would find it difficult to build a new building if all the funds necessary were presented to the church. It was a good meeting in every detail.

To Agnes Birkhead, Falls Church, VA, who had wired congratulations to All Souls Church on the occasion of the dedication of its new building:

February 25, 1960

[Kansas City]

I wish you might have been here last evening. Despite the remains of a wicked snow storm we had a large company. It was a typical sort of Unitarian gathering — warm-hearted and full of self-approval. Nonetheless, it was a good wholesome occasion.

To Rev. Alan Deale in Rockford, IL:

March 1, 1960

[Kansas City]

Sad to relate, there are in existence no adequate pictures of our new building. Bad weather overtook the late stages of construction and we have not yet been able to landscape. Once that phase is completed pictures will be taken, and I shall remember your request for them.

The Dedication Book has a rough representation. As you will note, it is far from adequate, though it will give you an impression of what stands here. We had an unusual architectural problem in that the building stands alone in a wedge reaching out into a boulevard. Windows in the auditorium would have made anyone attending an evening meeting dizzy, since automobile lights would play on the interior walls. The lounge, a large area to the rear of the auditorium, has large glass surfaces.

I am impressed that you are confronting so quickly the problems imposed by growth. We are still renting space from the Conservatory of Music across the street – space for half our church school. Our second unit we hope to build in the not dim future, and that ought to take care of all our church school needs until it is feasible to think of another Unitarian church in this metropolitan area.