

## Norbert Čapek and the First UU Church of Essex County

Norbert Čapek, born in 1870, first became a Baptist, strongly disagreeing with his Uncle Victor's Catholic faith. Uncle Victor booted him out of the house. The Baptists took Norbert in and put him through Seminary.

Norbert was bright, questioning, alert to intellectual and political issues. He insisted that religion apply to life.

The Protestant religion was regarded as subversive by the authorities and the police raided Čapek's belongings more than once.

Čapek decided to go to the US to escape persecution. His probing, scientific spirit led him to become dissatisfied with the Baptist faith. Norbert met Thomas Masaryh, who later became the first Czech President, and was married to an American Unitarian. Čapek was overjoyed to find such an open faith. When he and his wife, Maja, were seeking a church, they sent their children out to investigate local Sunday schools. After several attempts, they came back with glowing reports of the First UU Church in Orange NJ. Norbert and Maja joined that church in January, 1921.

When World War I was over and the Czech nation launched, Čapek was sent by the American Unitarian Association as a missionary to Prague. Unitarianism was new to Czechoslovakia. In the beginning Norbert rented a concert hall in which to meet. Eventually the group built their own building, named "Unitaria". The church grew to a congregation of 5,000, the largest in the world.

During WWII he was arrested, released and ultimately re-arrested and killed by the Nazis in 1942. For more information, please see the website <http://essexuu.org>.