

# Preservation is Revolutionary

ANNUAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

June 11, 2026 | 521 Overlook at Fenway Park



## 2026 People's Preservation Choice Award Nominee

### **The Unitarian Church of Barnstable**

Today, churches face many challenges, and the Unitarian Church of Barnstable is no exception. With a membership that has hovered around 200 for decades, as the average age of our members has steadily increased, we have been challenged to find ways to attract new and younger members. While many churches no longer offer religious education, we have made it a priority to provide programming for children and youth. We have also worked hard to be environmentally responsible and reduce our carbon footprint. We made a precedent-setting and successful application to the Old King's Highway historic district to allow us to put solar panels on our fellowship hall. We have been recognized as an Interfaith Power and Light Cool Congregation for realizing a 63% reduction in our carbon footprint, and we were recently re-certified by the Unitarian Universalist Association as a Green Sanctuary. Alarmed by the number of mass shootings targeting faith communities, another challenge we needed to address is how to provide adequate security during worship services and still remain a church that is welcoming to all.

It is in this context that we confronted the need to restore and preserve our historic sanctuary. Because of the substantial cost of such a project, this at first appeared to be an especially daunting challenge. How, we wondered, could a congregation that struggles annually to fund its operating budget possibly pay for such a project? Some doubted that it could be done, and others questioned the wisdom of investing in the preservation of our historic sanctuary when it may ultimately be doomed by climate change and the rising sea levels and severe weather it brings.

However, the deteriorating condition of the sanctuary's building envelope could not be ignored, and clearly matters would only get worse if we did nothing. The challenge had to be faced. The first thing we had to do was inform the congregation and ascertain that there would be sufficient support within the congregation for such an ambitious undertaking. Articles were written for the monthly church newsletter, and congregational meetings were held. Votes were taken at the June 2021 Annual Meeting to authorize a full assessment of our entire property, and at a Special Congregational meeting in May 2022 to authorize a capital campaign for the purpose of restoring and preserving our historic building.

Successful grant applications were made to the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Town of Barnstable Community Preservation Committee. We worked with a professional fund-raising consultant first to perform a feasibility study, then to develop a compelling case for support for our project and identify potential contributors to our cause. In a barter arrangement with Hyannis Whale Watcher Cruises, in exchange for their use of the church parking lot for customer parking in the summer months, we kicked off our capital campaign in September 2022 by offering a complimentary cruise to potential donors from throughout the community. We had perfect weather conditions for this event, and it generated a lot of positive energy.

Meanwhile, we continued all our usual services and activities, including a very successful fundraising activity that began in 2020, inspired by a member of the congregation who suggested that we should have a signature product by which we would be known. She cited the example of another church that is known for its home-made pies. She suggested that scones might be our signature product. To explore this possibility, we formed a "Scone Squad" to test recipes, select and perfect a basic recipe, approve a limited number of variations on the basic recipe, standardize ingredients, recruit bakers and other volunteer workers. In the summer of 2020, we began selling our trademark Top of the Hill scones on Saturday mornings on the church's front lawn, packaged in environmentally friendly paper bags sealed with a label with an image of our church's iconic bell tower. This effort was an immediate success and has only grown in popularity. Scone season runs from Memorial Day to the first Saturday in December. To attract customers, we have set up road signs advertising "Scones Today" and have volunteers of all ages waving signs and directing traffic to turn into our parking lot.

In 2023, with work on our preservation project in progress, scone sales soared to new heights and many customers put their change in a tip jar to further support the preservation project. It became very clear

that the community loves both our baking and our building. We are now looking forward to continuing the momentum and undertaking some landscaping improvements to enhance the setting around the beautifully restored historic church building.