

James Shrigley

(April 5, 1813 – July 24, 1905)

James Shrigley was a Universalist minister, a United States Army chaplain during the Civil War, a leader in the *Pennsylvania Universalist Convention*; a supporter of *Murray Grove*,¹ a librarian, and a historian.

He was born in Delph, Yorkshire, England, the fifth of nine children born to John and Mary (Shaw) Shrigley. In 1821 the family moved to the United States and settled in Putney, Vermont. James's parents had belonged to the Church of England and he had been christened in the Anglican Church outside of Delph.

Because of the excesses and abuses they perceived in the Anglican Church, the family had soon after joined the reformist Methodists in Delph.

James's writings indicate that even as a young boy he was troubled by the church's belief that salvation was not available to all people. He begged his mother to go with him to hear a Universalist minister when he came to Putney.

James, who had shown the most academic promise of the Shrigley children, was sent to an academy in nearby Brattleboro. When the family's fortune turned, however, he was called home and apprenticed to a cabinetmaker. When he was free from his obligation, he decided to follow a career in the Universalist ministry. Years later he said, "This faith came to me in my earliest years intuitively. I did not inherit it, nor did I receive it from the writings of men – God must have given it to me, and I have tried to be faithful to the trust."

He studied in Dana, Massachusetts, and later under John H. Willis at Stafford, Connecticut. He was ordained in 1835 at his first church settlement in North Granby, Connecticut.

Shrigley served churches: Exeter, New Hampshire, 1838-39; Baltimore, Maryland, 1841-48; Reading, Pennsylvania, 1850-54 and 1856-58; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1854-56; and Richmond, Virginia, 1858-61. While he served in Baltimore he met and in 1842 married Mary Elizabeth Myers. The Shrigleys had four sons, one of whom died young.

1. Murray Grove, a Universalist retreat and conference center in Good Luck, NJ [now Lanoka Harbor], has been traditionally considered the site where Universalism in America began. Its roots go back to landowner Thomas Potter in 1760, where John Murray, in 1770, preached the gospel of universal love there.

In Philadelphia Shrigley served local churches and ministered to war wounded. After he had applied for Chaplaincy in the United States Army, a group of Protestant ministers traveled to Washington hoping to dissuade President Abraham Lincoln from making the appointment. The President asked on what grounds they were opposed to Shrigley. They replied that Shrigley believed in the salvation of all souls, and that even the rebels would be saved! Lincoln's response was that, if that be so, then Shrigley deserved to be a Chaplain in the U.S. Army. Shrigley served at the McClellan Army Hospital in Philadelphia until 1865.

Following the war Shrigley was a supply pastor in and around Philadelphia. He held various offices with the Pennsylvania Universalist Convention, including secretary and historian. He was Librarian of the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

Nelson C. Simonson

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