# The First Liberal Church

In 1770 the brig Hand-in-Hand went ashore at Good Luck, New Jersey. Among the passengers on board the vessel, that it would perhaps be wrong to call ill fated, was John Murray, founder of Universalism in America. He had left England in despair, for his wife and children were dead, and so broken was he in his power of thought and purpose that he felt as if he should never preach again.In fact, his rescue from the wreck was passive, on his part, and he suffered himself to be carried ashore, recking little whether he reached it or no. After he had been for half an hour or so on the soil of the new country, to which he had made his entrance in so unexpected a manner, he began to feel hungry, and set off afoot along the desolate beach. He came to a cabin where an old man stood in a doorway with a basket of fish beside him. "Will you sell me a fish?" asked Murray."No. The fish is all yours. I expected you.""You do not know me.""You are the man who is to tell us of God.""I will never preach of Him again.""I built that log church yonder. Don't say that you will not preach in it. Whenever a clergyman, Presbyterian, Methody, or Baptist, came here, I asked him to preach in my kitchen. I tried to get him to stay; but no—he always had work elsewhere. Last night I saw the brig driven on the bar, and a voice said to me, 'In that ship is the man who will teach of God. Not the old God of terrors, but one of love and mercy. He has come through great sorrow to do this work.' I have made ready for you. Do not go away."The minister felt a strange lifting in his heart. He fell on his knees before the little house and offered up a prayer. Long he staid in that place, preaching gentle doctrines and ministering to the men and women of that lonely village, and when the fisherman apostle, Thomas Potter, died he left the church to Murray, who, in turn, bequeathed it, "free, for the use of all Christian people."

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