

1893 Swami Brings Modern-Day Swamis to Annisquam



For the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Vivekananda's birth, the Vedanta Societies of Boston and Providence joined with the Annisquam Village Church in an interfaith service on July 28, 2013. The service was filled with a wonderful energy.

Saffron robes and languages ranging from French to Bengali make annual appearances at the Annisquam Village Church in Gloucester. Modern-day Hindu Pilgrims visit to pay homage and walk in the steps of Swami Vivekananda, the first Hindu monk in America, who spoke from the Church's pulpit in 1893, just before he made history at the first meeting of the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago (an adjunct event to the Columbian Exposition) as representative of Hinduism.

Eloquent and, at the time, exotic, Vivekananda mesmerized his audiences both here and in Chicago, winning new respect for and interest in the religions of the East. He started the Vedanta Societies in America to spread his message of harmony of religions and inherent divinity of the soul. Vivekananda remained in Gloucester for several weeks during his two visits.

First as the guest of John Henry Wright, a Greek professor at Harvard who helped Vivekananda make the arrangements for his Parliament appearance; and then he stayed at the Annisquam residence of Alpheus Hyatt, whose marine biology station on Lobster Cove was the first iteration of the present-day Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute.

Hyatt was the father of Gloucester's renowned sculptor, Anna Hyatt (later Huntington), who would have been 17 at the time of the Swami's visit. More than 100 years later, devotees of this visionary Hindu man make annual pilgrimages to the Village Church, to touch the stone doorstep and to meditate in the serene space where their leader spoke.

The service included brief addresses by Swami Yogatmananda of Providence (Hindu Chaplain at Brown University and UMass Dartmouth), and Swami Tyagananda of Boston (Hindu Chaplain at Harvard and MIT), and the Rev. Deirdre Greenwood White, Pastor of the Annisquam Village Church. Music from both traditions included preludes of sitar and tabla. The children of the Village Church performed a short play portraying the arrival of Swami Vivekananda in Annisquam. A simple Indian meal followed the service and included a partial screening of the new documentary about Vivekananda's sojourn in America.

Listen to Vivikananda's speech at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIwZNMgFBWM>.