

[Auburn, Cayuga Co. NY]

Last Service to Be Conducted in Universalist Church  
By IRENE C. TALLMAN

The last service in an old church that is one of Auburn's oldest landmarks will take place Sunday afternoon. The First Universalist Church will be taken down to make way for a new office building. It was built in 1847.

A vesper service has been arranged for 4 p.m. Sunday so that members of the congregation and people of the community may have a last look at the stately sanctuary and hear, perhaps for the last time, the fine pipe organ installed there 50 years ago.

Louis S. McCarthy will give an organ recital from 3:45 to 4 p.m. Miss Dorothy Groben will play the harp, and Mrs. Alvin Edwards will sing. Rev. Carl Westman of the Rochester Universalist Church will speak. Mr. Westman is president of the St. Lawrence Unitarian Universalist District organized last November, of which Auburn is part. Mrs. Lyndon Haight of Auburn is a member of the district board. Pastor of the church is Rev. James Hunt of Syracuse.

Representatives of other denominations and the public have been invited to the Sunday afternoon service. Refreshments will be served afterward by women of the church.

The small congregation will continue to meet, either at the YMCA or the Cayuga Museum. The parsonage at 49 Hamilton Ave., unoccupied, will be used to store the church properties.

Famous Auburnians

Some famous people have been part of the First Universalist Church during its 117 years. Among the more recent of these was the late Thomas Mott Osborne whose funeral took place there in 1926. Mr. Osborne taught a men's class in social ethics in the Universalist Sunday school for many years. It was often attended by more than 100.

Mr. Osborne, warden of Sing Sing Prison from 1914 to 1916, had spent a week as a voluntary prisoner in Auburn Prison, and reported it in his book, "Within Prison Walls." He later wrote "Society and Prisons" and "Prisons and Common Sense." He organized the Mutual Welfare League, first inmate organization within prison walls, and members of it were bearers at his funeral. Dr. Samuel Eliot, president of the American Unitarian Association, officiated.

A Universalist minister left his pastorate here to become president of St. Lawrence University—Rev. Richmond Fiske—1865-68.

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Rev. D. [Daniel] P. Livermore, pastor in 1855-57, was the husband of Mary A. Livermore, suffragist, author and a leader in the establishment of the United States Sanitary Commission in the Civil War.

Turned Catholic

An outstanding Catholic writer of the 19th century was once a minister in the Auburn Universalist Church. He was Orestes A. Brownson, once a member of the Transcendentalists, whose conversion to Catholicism in 1844 surprised his Protestant friends.

About four years ago, during the pastorate of Rev. Myles D. Blanchard, the Universalists dedicated an inter-faith meditation center. It was opened to the public "as a place of refuge from a busy and confused world," and contains symbols of the Jewish and the Baha'i religions.

The Universalists organized in Auburn in 1815, meeting in the Lyman Paine home on North Street, and later in the schoolhouse on Academy Green. Only two or three families at first "dared to manifest sympathy with the doctrine of unlimited grace and a God represented as Father and Friend of all His creatures." The Presbyterians, Methodists and Episcopalians already established in the village were hostile.

Transient preachers led the flock for several years, and Rev. L. [Linus] S. Everett was the first resident pastor in about 1824. The small, newcomer religious group met in the Court House for a time, then purchased a house on the south part of the site that later became Richardson's furniture store.

This was the Universalist Church that was too small to entertain a United States convention in 1840, and over-ran into the Baptist Church on Genesee St. Hosea Ballou, noted theologian, preached a two hour sermon on this occasion, and those who heard him afterward said "the time seemed short."

In 1844 Rev. John [Mather] Austin became pastor at a salary of \$950, "including a donation." Old records tell of a Christmas exhibition that year when the collection amounted to \$10.90, and "would have been more, were it not that the lower part of the house was crowded almost exclusively by women who are not expected to contribute much."

One of the early money-raising schemes of the Universalists in Auburn was a Sabbath School excursion. Records tell that in 1849 an excursion train of 22 cars and 1400 people left Auburn for Clifton Springs. Six hundred more joined it at Seneca Falls, Waterloo and

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Geneva, and several hundred dollars were thus added to the Sunday School treasury.

Contracts for a new building (the present one) were let in 1846, after the site had been given by Josiah Barber and his wife.

The last sermon in the old church was preached July 18, 1847. The new building was dedicated that week. The interior was decorated in fresco by a Boston painter and cost \$300. Woodwork was white with mahogany trim. "The pews had doors which kept the heat in the aisles and the cold in the pews. In order to face the music the people would rise and turn toward the organ in the balcony."

#### Later Improvements

The building lately used for Sunday school and social room was built in 1871. Electricity was installed in the Universalist Church in 1888. In 1905 the Universalists talked over the matter of inadequate heating and considered installing steam heat, but it was decided to patch up the old furnaces.

"However," an old record says, "the matter did not rest there, for two years later two new furnaces had been installed and half the expense had been borne by Thomas Mott Osborne.

In 1913 Rev. Arnold Yantis announced that \$3,775 had been raised for a new organ.

A grant of \$1,600 was obtained from the Carnegie Foundation, there was a gift from T. M. Osborne, and the King's Daughters, the church women's organization, paid the balance of more than \$2,000.

The organ still is considered one of the finest toned instruments in the area. It is up for sale, but there are among its admirers those who hope it will not be sold, but will be stored against the time when the Universalists again have their own church building in Auburn.

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Transcribed on 21 Jan 2016 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY