

Move to Flatbush Irked Church Oldsters in '05

In the Spring of 1905 there were old-timers in All Souls Universalist Church who were plainly apprehensive over the decision to move to Flatbush and unite with "The Church of Divine Love." For 60 years the church had grown and prospered in Williamsburg and it seemed then that Flatbush had little to offer except "farmlands with buttercups and daisies."

This Spring, 40 years later, the entire membership of All Souls is filled with a spirit of happiness, for celebration of the church's centennial is at hand. And none are happier than the Rev. Dr. Cornelius Greenway, the youthful and energetic pastor, who is rounding out his 17th year as minister of All Souls.

Dr. Greenway rejoices in the great vitality of the church that weathered the Civil War reconstruction period, several great depressions and periods of unemployment and five wars and today is free of financial obligations. The total cost of the present plant of All Souls, at Ocean and Ditmas Aves., was about \$111,300.

The church, which had little in the beginning except the faith and hopefulness of 22 persons who first worshipped in a rented chapel on 2d St., Williamsburg, today has 1,182 individual local members and communicants representing 523 families. Out-of-town persons who still retain membership in the church number 320.

2 Williamsburg Homes

In Williamsburg All Souls, known until 1874 as the First Universalist Church, had two church homes after three years' occupancy of the chapel. These edifices were located first on 4th St. and then, in 1874, when the change in the church's name occurred, on S. 9th St. The S. 9th St. building was acquired in 1905 by the Brooklyn Roman Catholic Diocese for use by the parish of SS. Peter and Paul's where Monsignor John L. Belford was pastor.

"All Souls has been blessed with good pastors, men who proved to be wonderful leaders at times when leadership was greatly needed," said Dr. Greenway.

Dr. Greenway spoke in particular of the Rev. Dr. Almon Gunnison, who served the church from 1871 to 1890, leaving All Souls to become president of St. Lawrence University, a post he held until his death in June, 1917. Dr. Gunnison, who was the brother of Herbert F. Gunnison, late publisher of the Brooklyn Eagle, had "a terrific personality and great strength," imparting "strength" to the church, the pastor said.

People are much more religious-minded, more God-conscious," and feel keenly the need of divine guidance as a result of the war, Dr. Greenway finds.

"The sorrow and hardships of the war have wrought a great change," he said. "Religious fervor [sic] is less emotional but much more deeply rooted. The Church, spiritually speaking, is very strong."

Came to U.S. at 19

Dr. Greenway, the church's 13th pastor, came here from his native Holland as a steerage passenger when he was about 19 years old. He did not know a word of English but later, after being gassed and wounded in World War I, he was appointed by President Wilson, because of linguistic ability, to be official translator at the Versailles Peace Conference. He "washed dishes" to get an education and was graduated magna cum laude and with Phi Beta Kappa honors from Tufts College [Universalist] in Medford, Mass.

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Dr. Greenway's "one diversion" is collecting autographed photographs. He has more than 4,000 autographs of famous people of the world including the two "headaches," Mussolini and Hitler. He described his autograph of Pope Pius X, his "favorite Pope," as "a lovely one." It reads, "Deus te benedictate (the Blessings of God upon you)."

When he lay wounded and blinded for 18 days in World War I, Dr. Greenway made his "deal" with God. He promised that "if he came through clean physically, mentally, and morally he would become a minister."

Celebration to Open Sunday

The entire property of All Souls has been redecorated for the centennial celebration which opens next Sunday when the Rev. Dr. Ellsworth C. Reamon, pastor of the Betts Memorial Universalist Church, Syracuse, and national moderator of the Universalist General Convention, will preach a sermon in recognition of the church's 100th birthday at the 11 a.m. morning service.

On April 11 speakers at a community night jubilee service will include the Rev. Dr. Alfred Grant Walton of the Flatbush-Tompkins Congregational Church, the Rev. Dr. Ralph Emerson Davis of St. Mark's Methodist Church, the Rev. Quentin T. Lightner of the Baptist Church of the Redeemer and the Rev. William S. Quigley of the Flatbush Presbyterian Church.

Lt. Gov. Joe R. Hanley, Borough President Cashmore and the Rev. Dr. Benjamin B. Hershey, president of the New York State convention of Universalist Churches, will address the centennial dinner on April 20. The Rev. Dr. L. Ward Brigham, who led the church for 14 years, will be another speaker. Dr. Brigham and the Rev. A. Eugene Bartlett of Lancaster, Pa., are the only living former pastors of the church.

An oil painting of the late Herbert F. Gunnison, who was president of the board of trustees in 1917 and 1918, will be presented at the dinner by Mr. Gunnison's children, Raymond M. of Larchmont, N. Y., Foster of Albany, Ind., and Mrs. Charles H. [Florence] Brown of Scarsdale, N.Y. The painting will be hung in the Gunnison memorial room. Present at the dinner will be members of the church who attended the 50th anniversary banquet: Mr. and Mrs. Thomas W. Comstock, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel A. Osborn, Lorena Wilson, Frank M. Price and Laura K. Brower, all Brooklynites.

On the church's membership roster are names of many well-known Brooklynites whose families have been members of the church for three generations.

The centennial committee includes Frank L. Bryant, who has been president of the board of trustees for 27 years, Dr. Frank Arnold, Mrs. Ruth Wathall, Arthur W. Brockway, J. Noble Landis, Lillian A. Blackmar, J. Norwood Parremore, Edwin B. Wilson, Lester K. Hillman and Dr. Greenway.

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Transcribed on 22 Feb 2011 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY