

# All Souls Universalist Church Originated in Williamsburgh

## Congregation Founded in 1845 Changed After 60 Years

(This is the 32d in a series of articles in Flatbush and adjoining communities.)

by Mary Hosie

To old Williamsburgh belongs the early history of All Souls Universalist Church, now one of the strongest in Flatbush.

In fact, All Souls spent the first 60 years of its 87 years of existence in Williamsburg. The reason for its removal to Flatbush back in 1905 was the same as the reason for its organization in Williamsburg in 1845.

The movement of city dwellers to the suburbs, still a problem for all city churches, brought about the founding of All Soul Church [as the First Universalist Society of Brooklyn] in Williamsburg. Sixty years later, when Williamsburgh had become a cosmopolitan community, All Souls Church again looked around for a suburban location and Flatbush was finally chosen.

### Founded in 1845

The history of All Souls started on April 6, 1845, when a small group of Universalists who had emigrated to the new community from Manhattan, gathered for the first service of the new church. Many of these people had been parishioners of the Orchard Street Church [Second Universalist Society of New York], of which the Rev. Thomas J. Sawyer was pastor, Williamsburg as then a hamlet of less than 2,000 families and easily accessible from New York by ferry across the East River.

This first service was held in a small rented chapel, known as "The Tabernacle," on Second St. (Wyeth Ave.) near what is now S. 5th St. The story is told that the owner of the chapel, a Baptist, was accused of "having dealings with the devil" for renting the building to the liberal church.

By Dec. 9, 1845, the new church had 21 members and a pastor, the Rev. Henry Lyon. By the end of Rev. Mr. Lyon's pastorate in 1849, the congregation had grown to such proportions that it had outgrown the rented chapel and a new building had been erected on the corner of 4th St. (now Bedford Ave.) and S. 3d St. The marble lintel of this church is now part of All Souls foundation wall.

### Pastor 19 Years

The second pastor was the Rev. Day K. Lee, who served until 1854. He was succeeded by the Rev. W. W. King, who served less than a year. In 1856 the Rev. Bernard Peters became pastor and served until 1865, when he was succeeded by the Rev. Andrew J. Canfield, who remained five and a half years.

Then began the most memorable period in the history of All Souls. The Rev. Almon Gunnison assumed the pastorate in 1871 and served for the next 19 years, during which much was accomplished for the progress of the church.

His first task was to provide a modern and adequate place of worship for the congregation, which had again outgrown its quarters. On April 12, 1874, the new structure was dedicated, having been erected on S. 9th St. at a cost of \$60,000. Two years later the chapel on S. 10th St. was completed at a cost of \$24,000. Within 10 years the debt contracted through these buildings had been completely wiped out.

### Move to Flatbush

When Dr. Gunnison left he was succeeded by the Rev. John Coleman Adams, who served for 10 years. On Dec. 1, 1901, the Rev. L. Ward Brigham assumed the pastorate.

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A few years later the congregation began to think seriously of securing a new location. The construction of the new Williamsburg Bridge had brought a change to the little rural community and many of the parishioners had moved to other suburbs. Finally the church property was sold to the R. C. Church of Sts. Peter and Paul. Possession of the church proper was given in January, 1905, while the chapel was to be used free of charge by All Souls for the next six months.

A committee was appointed to choose a new location, which was to be either in the Eastern District, in Flatbush, where All Souls would unite with the newly organized Church of the Divine Love, or on Eastern Parkway, near Franklin Ave.

The Flatbush location was decided upon and immediate action was taken. A lot was purchased, ground was broken for the new building, and on July 22, 1905, the cornerstone was laid.

### Families Follow Church

The Church of the Divine Love, of which the Rev. Luther F. McKinney was pastor, had progressed to the point where a lot had been purchased at the corner of Farragut Road and E. 23d St., and plans had been drawn for a new building, when the offer was received from All Souls. All Souls asked that this church merge with them, promising to erect, free from debt, a fine building, bearing the name All Souls. The offer was accepted.

Although a special car without cost to parishioners and Sunday School pupils was run twice a day from the Eastern District for some time, as promised when the church was moved, its patrons became steadily less [fewer] because an exodus at once began. It was reported that over 50 families had followed the church to Flatbush.

The completed church was dedicated on Feb. 11, 1906, and All Souls was firmly established in Flatbush.

In October, 1913, with the difficult work of establishing All Souls in its new home and amalgamating it with another church successfully completed, Dr. Brigham resigned. For the next few months the Rev. Caphas B. Lynn, a retired minister, served as temporary pastor.

### Call Dr. Bartlett

On Jan. 25, 1914, the Rev. Dr. A. Eugene Bartlett preached his first sermon in All Souls and on March 29 he was installed as pastor. Dr. Bartlett resigned in May, 1922, having listed among his accomplishments the erection of a parish house, doubling the church income, payment of the mortgage on the parish house, acquisition of a parsonage and 408 new members.

The Rev. Dr. Arthur W. Grose, who succeeded Dr. Bartlett, served until 1929, when he retired from active work. In 1928 a new parsonage had been built adjoining the church and matching it in architecture, the former parsonage having been sold. The Rev. George Henry Thorburn Jr. served as assistant pastor under Dr. Grose from 1927 to 1928.

Dr. Grose, following his resignation, consented to serve until a successor had been chosen. In 1929 the Rev. Cornelius Greenway, the present pastor, was chosen by the nominating committee and was unanimously elected to the pastorate of the church.

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