

June 14, 1976

Mr. Frank Schuerholz
17 Commonwealth Ave.
Middletown, N.Y. 10940

Dear Frank:

Last Wednesday in connection with other travel, my wife and I took the opportunity to visit Speedsville to make inquiry about the church property which the Convention is carrying on its books at the nominal value of \$ 1.

The visit was an experience. Speedsville is a very small village in the Town of Caroline, Tompkins County. It is in the Southeast corner of the county and only a few yards inside the County line from Tioga County. As we drove into town, which has a very nice little park as its center, I pulled around the square to ask information at the grocery store. The door had a "closed" sign up and next door to the store was an open lot with an old gentleman sitting down working on a wheelbarrow full of spindles. When I asked him if he could tell me anything about a Universalist Church in town, he pointed across the park and said "that is it". His name was George Osborne, aged 70, and he told me his grandfather had helped build the church. His great uncle had raised the steeple and his father built the pulpit. The steeple is now gone and the bell is in the attic. He said he had never been a member of the church as services had been discontinued while he was still a boy. He said the last use of the building as a church with a minister conducting services had been about 1912 or 1914. A few years later there was talk of using the unoccupied church as a community hall. One lady of the few remaining old members was very upset at the suggestion and put a padlock on the door and removed the church records to her residence. She is now dead and the records have been lost. For about 40 years now (give or take 10 years) the building has been used as a community hall. Mr. Osborne with the help of one or two men about his age have kept the building in repair. There are some manner rentals received which do not nearly cover the costs of upkeep. He had a key and showed us through the building which is in poor condition. He also told me that the vacant lot beside the church was part of the property, and in former years when services were held there had a shed for horses and wagons for the church goers. The shed is now gone. My wife took pictures of the church building and lot. Mr. Osborne said a number of years ago the fire department wanted to buy the lot and build a fire house, but a search did not disclose a deed, so they were not able to buy and as a result built elsewhere.

After leaving Speedsville I checked at the County Courthouse in Ithaca, where a clerk was very helpful in checking the records of deeds in the town of Caroline. She found that the First Universalist Society in the town of Speedsville had deeded property consisting of a church and lot to the New York State Convention of Universalists, on December 28, 1928, which deed was recorded January 7, 1929, Book 215, page 419, which I read. The clerk further checked the records from 1929 to 1950 but found no other deeds to this property. The clerk then referred me to the Assessors Office where she said all tax exempt property was listed and where I might find out if the property was still listed under either the First Universalist Society of Speedsville, or the New York State Convention of Universalists. I inspected the records of the tax exempt

properties in the Town of Caroline, which were not too numerous but that I could read each listing. In the Assessors records the property which fits the description and location of the Universalist Church property is described as Comm. Hall, Speedsville; 13. Speedsville Comm., .266 acres, full value of land \$ 160, full value of land and buildings \$ 5830.

Just playing guessing games from the information I have gathered it seems likely that the village just appropriated the building in the late twenties or early thirties for a community hall without actually acquiring formal title.

I can understand why the State Convention did not reconvey title to the local society as was the custom, because at that date according to Mr. Osborne's account, the local church had been inactive for at least ten or fifteen years.

Having no knowledge of law I do not know what the next move should be, but at least I now have some documentation to support and justify the original entry on the Conventions' books.

Do you have any suggestions for pursuing this matter further.

Very truly yours,

Gilbert F. Casanova, Treasurer

cc: Finance Committee
Harry A. Thor
James T. McCellum

Jim - I also have photos of the property

GC

June 2, 1977

C-Realty
408 E. Main Street
Endicott, New York

Attention: Vincent Petrolawicz

Re: Speedsville Community Center

Dear Mr. Petrolawicz:

You informed me that you have been authorized by the Universalist Church to list on the market real property which they own situate in the Hamlet of Speedsville which is occupied by the Speedsville Community Club. You further stated that said church apparently had a deed of record for such real property. I inquired of a local resident and ascertained that for at least 37 to 40 years, said premises have been occupied and maintained by the "Speedsville Community Center", and in my opinion, their open and notorious possession has vested title in such group and has also divested the Universalist Church title to such real property.

I am forwarding a carbon copy of this letter to William Osborn and to Robert Maynard, whom I have been informed represent the Speedsville Community Center. I do advise such group to ascertain whether or not the Universalist Church has title of record and if such is the fact, that it would be to their benefit to pay \$20.00 or \$25.00 to obtain a quit claim deed from such church in order to perfect their title.

I inform you that in my opinion, the Universalist Church does not have marketable title to such property and any attempt to

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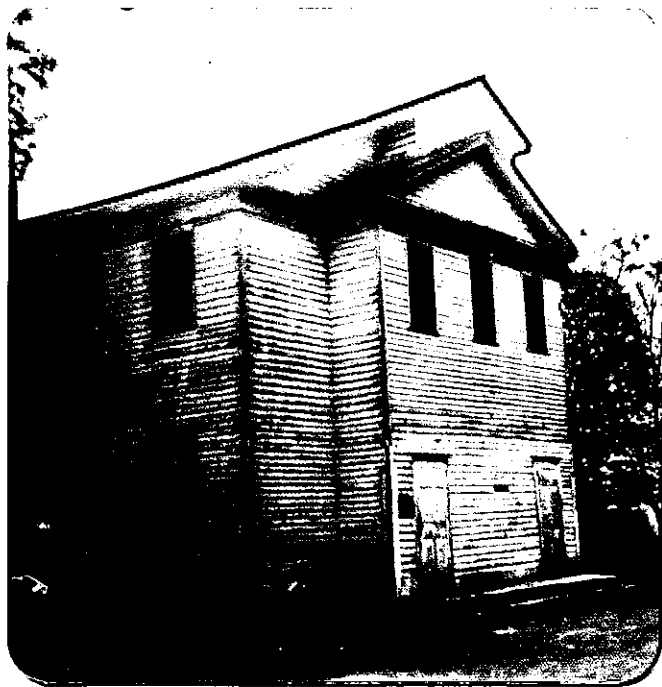
sell same to anyone other than the Speedsville Community Center
would result in litigation.

Very truly yours,

WALTER V. SCHULTE

WVS:bh

CC: Mr. William Osborn
Mr. Robert Maynard



**FORMER UNIVERSALIST CHURCH
SPEEDSVILLE, TOMPKINS COUNTY, NY**