

# As to Early Universalism

## GLANCE OVER THE FIELD OF CENTRAL NEW YORK

Synopsis of an Address Delivered Before the Universalist Convention in This City  
by Rev. Anson Titus of Tufts College, Massachusetts

The address by Rev. Anson Titus on Early Universalism in Central New York, delivered before the convention of the Central Association of Universalists in this city on Wednesday afternoon, was very comprehensive, and would occupy, if printed in full, a page of the Sentinel. Therefore only a synopsis can be given, as follows:

Central New York was a transplanted region. Its settlers came from varied parts of New England, eastern and southern New York, and New Jersey. This intermingling of men brought out an intense intermingling of political and religious ideals. In political life they held together, but in religion there was warm discussion. In the army the regimental and brigade chaplains who had a message attracted the soldiers. In this way Jesse Lee of Virginia attracted followers and evangelists, which made possible the rapid growth of the Methodist Church at the close of the Revolution. Likewise when General Nathaniel Greene of Rhode Island desired Rev. John Murray of Massachusetts for brigade chaplain, a call was made which caused Universalism to break forth not only in camp but in all the back towns of New England. The preaching of John Murray during the Siege of Boston held the minds of many patriots, and his interpretation of the Gospel became the subject of conversation in the homesteads of the hill town. He who studies the beginnings of Universalism in America will be forced to note the appearance of the new interpretation in the minds of the patriots. The new interpretation led in a fresh ardor for Bible reading, and ere we are aware men like Hosea Ballou and Nathaniel Stacy, who were children in the homes of patriots, grew warm in passion to proclaim a faith which gave homage to God and the Savior, and found in them that which would subdue the world and bring forth the souls of men, in a more blessed likeness.

[The] Central, or as then styled Western Association was instituted June 2, 1806, at Columbus, Chenango county. Rev. Hosea Ballou, then of Bayard, Vermont and Joshua Flagg were present, representing the general convention. The first meeting was held in the hall room of the new tavern of Mr. [Joshua] Lamb, a justice of the peace. The second day—the people were too numerous and they assembled in a grove a short distance away. The day was clear and beautiful. In the forenoon a sermon was delivered by Rev. Joshua Flagg, and in the afternoon were two sermons, one by Rev. Paul Dean, and the other by Rev. Hosea Ballou. Rev. Nathaniel Stacy made the arrangements for the meeting and was present, but did not preach. It was a day to be remembered, for gathered there were many seekers after light, who had not heard the beautiful message proclaimed since they left the homestead in New England. The meeting of the Western Association in 1807 met in New Hartford, where Nathaniel Stacy was then residing.

The communities in which centered groups of Universalists in central New York may be named as Hartwick, New Hartford, Hamilton, Madison, Clinton and Utica. Not that many of the believers in Universalism resided in these places, but these places were central for them. The weakness of early Universalists was in their scattered condition, there being only a family or so in a town.

With the settlement of Rev. Dolphus Skinner in Utica in 1827, there became a new interest in the publication of Universalist papers and books. Dolphus Skinner was a man of large

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ability. He had a vigorous fashion of statement, and his writings were read by many thousands. He was assisted by Rev. Aaron B. Grosh and others in his labors on the paper. These men, residing in Utica, went throughout central New York, preaching on Sunday and attending funerals. In 1837 a young man from Bridgewater strayed into the bookstore of Rev. Aaron B. Grosh in Utica and became interested in reading Universalist books. Mr. Grosh got interested in him and ere long he became a writer on the paper, and on March 4, 1838, at Spencer school house, Litchfield, Edwin H. Chapin preached his first sermon. In two months more he was pastor in Richmond, Va., thence to Charlestown and Boston, and finally to New York city. His fame as a preacher and lecturer became world-wide.

The roll call of the ministers who have served the Universalists of central New York is no mean affair. We have occasionally mentioned certain of the more than others, but these men could not have done their work if they had not been royally supported. Nathaniel Stacy was the minister to many old time families. His sunny disposition made him a welcome guest. He was welcomed by the young people. Too many ministers of the older day were worse than refrigerators. Children kept away from them. But Nathaniel Stacy was loved and even while yet a young man was called "Father" Stacy. Stephen R. Smith, whose youth was spent in the town of Floyd, when 18 years old walked to New Hartford and Utica and heard Hosea Ballou preach. This was in 1807. This was enough. It was a whole course of theological training in a day. The walk from Floyd to New Hartford was a pastime for a young man who had iron in his blood.

Job Potter was a father in Israel, and Father [William] Underwood, E. [Edwin] M. Woolley, John Freeman, Aaron B. Grosh and Dolphus Skinner. Dolphus Skinner almost for a half century resided in Utica. His presence, venerable and stately, was known by all. He was preacher and editor. Following Dolphus Skinner as pastor and long resident of Utica, were T. [Theodore] D. Cook and Daniel Ballou. The pastor at Clinton held a strong position in the church. From 1845 onward for a number of years they heard the ministrations of Thomas J. Sawyer, and following him William P. Payne, who still is living in Iowa. With reverence we mention Rev. Albert H. Marshall, whose thirty years' pastorate in Madison left an indelible impression and [he] dying in the service, still is remembered by them.

It is almost unsafe to begin to name the illustrious laymen of the Universalist Church in central New York. But foremost we place Judge Hugh White, the pioneer of Whitestown, whose treatment of the Indians saved the settlers much trouble. While many a land speculator was pressing the Indians hard in bargains, he ever treated them with honor and they in turn so treated him. He lived the Golden Rule in his dealings with them. While toward others they kept aloof, he was a chief man among the settlers, a soldier of the Revolution, a man of broad spirit and humane in all his conduct. He was the first judge of the region. He was known as an open and above-board Universalist and died in 1812, altogether too early in life. He welcomed the preachers in the very earliest days and left a beautiful and fragrant memory to all succeeding.

General Oliver Collins of New Hartford or Middle Village, Whitestown, was a leading spirit of the second war with England. Through him Father Nathaniel Stacy was appointed chaplain and for a time was stationed at Oswego. To Joseph Stebbins of Clinton belongs the honor of nobly standing, financially, by Stephen R. Smith in the erection of the church in Clinton and the Clinton Liberal Institute. Enos R. Barnum and Lester Barber and Peter Fake

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began young in life to render service to the institute and the church. Reuben Foote of East Hamilton died in 1849, aged 89 years. He was an early supporter of Nathaniel Stacy. Lorin Robbins died on Babcock Hill, Bridgewater, in December, 1849, aged 88 years. He was a patriot of the Revolution and in young manhood became a believer and supporter of the doctrine of the restitution of all things. David Rixley of Kirkland died in 1829 and was an earnest supporter of the church in New Hartford and Clinton.

Considerable attention is paid to the work which attended the establishment of the Clinton Liberal Institute, St. Lawrence University and other Universalist schools, the details of which can not be entered into in a newspaper report. The address of Dr. Titus was listened to with undivided interest and received liberal applause.

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Transcribed on 14 Dec 2012 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY