

[Cicero, Onondaga Co. NY.]

Razing of Cicero Church Saddens the Sentimental

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This week was a sad one for residents of Cicero who are sentimental about old landmarks.

The 128-year-old Universalist Church, built in 1832, was torn down so that a new post office may be constructed on the site. The New England type structure was the second church in the village and was constructed by the Baptists.

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Congregation Disbands

The Baptist congregation disbanded and the building was purchased by Dr. Joslyn, John Leach and John L. Stevens. They sold it to the First Congregation of Disciples, and organization made up of former members of the Baptist Church.

In 1867, under a special act of the Legislature, it was purchased by the Universalists, who had been holding services there for several years. The Disciples organization had been discontinued for some time. The proceeds from the sale were given to the Church of Christ in Syracuse.

It was in 1859 that the Rev. A. [Aaron] A. Thayer, a Syracuse resident, began teaching the doctrines of Universalism in Cicero and organized a Society.

Started in 1860

In 1860 the Rev. W. W. Clayton came from Auburn and began preaching in Cicero and Brewerton with a service in each village every Sunday. He served two years and then became chaplain at Camp White during the Civil War. He was the author of the well known "History of Onondaga County."

In 1867 The Rev. John Austin became the minister and through his efforts the church organization was formed and the building purchased. Warren Wright that year became superintendent of the Sunday School.

The church was completely redecorated in 1871. The outside remained the same but two sections of its steeple were removed. At that time a gallery [balcony] ran around all four sides of the building. The ceiling was painted a light blue. In the center was a cluster of pink roses surrounded by a gold band. One member said as a little girl this represented her idea of heaven.

Pioneer Reminders

In raising the building to add a basement for a dining room and social affair[,] workers found some reminders of pioneer days. The fir stumps placed there by the original builders had to be dug out.

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Donation parties were the main support of churches in those days and many of these were held at the Parker House, now King's Hotel. Here the members danced and ate, and finally the hat was passed for subscriptions.

Many residents remember the annual banquets held for many years in the church dining room. This was "The Affair" of the support the church [sic]. Members brought their own linens, sterling silver, Haviland china and with lighted candles people from miles around enjoyed the chicken dinner and evening of entertainment.

For many years the church depended upon the Canton Seminary for ministers. After remaining for a short time they left for pulpits in larger churches. Cicero thus became noted for the number of ordinations. "We laid our hands on them, if we did nothing else," was often the comment of members.

Dr. Betts There

Dr. F. [Frederick] W. Betts, pastor of the Universalist Church of Syracuse came to Cicero for seven years to preach.

One of the few women in Onondaga County who had been ordained a minister was Miss Julia Tobey. She was the granddaughter of Methodist ministers. She was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and studied and taught music. She studied at St. Lawrence University. In 1921 she came to Cicero and was ordained at the Universalist Church.

The act of Ordination and prayer was given by the Rev. J. M. [John Murray] Atwood of St. Lawrence University and the Rev. Dr. Betts preached the ordination sermon. For eight years she served both Central Square and Cicero. Her last sermon was on Jan. 13, 1929. She repeated by request of the parishioners a sermon previously preached. "And so if you ask me where God is, I must tell you he is everywhere in everything," she said. "He is in the heart of a rose. He is the planets of the Universe. He is the brain of the man. He is in the trusting eyes of a little child. But most of all He is in the goodness of a man's heart, for God is love."

Came from Canada

The Rev. George Campbell, still a resident of Cicero, came to the Universalist Church as minister in 1931, leaving a pastorate in Bristol, Ont., Canada. He and his wife both studied at St. Lawrence University. Mrs. Campbell taught the third grade in Canton for a year while Mr. Campbell finished his studies. During his seven years as minister he also served at Central Square.

The Utopia club, which did such a large share toward procuring the Village Library, was a club formed within the church. Still active, its membership was broadened to include those other than church members. It was organized in 1913 with Lucy Sleeth the first president.

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On Oct. 8, 1966, just as Mr. Aurthur Hobday, Principal of Bear Road School, started to play the organ, the doors opened and the congregation was told the church was on fire. One of the parishioners, Clayton Eastwood, assistant fire chief, took charge and the damage was mostly confined to the steeple.

Names Recalled

It is with sadness that many members face the loss of their church. Some are the descendants of early pioneers and represent the third and fourth generations attending services in this church. Here the members have been gay at weddings, reverent at Baptisms, sad at funerals and thoughtful at sermons.

Names connected with this church for years and also in the history of Cicero are: Eastwood, Multon [Moulton], Herrick, Klosheim, Plant, Cushing, Lower, Sadler, Gage, Loomis, Wright, Dunham, Sneller, Millen, Coonley, Fox, McCullock, Stearns, Pardee, Black, McKinley and Lawrence.

Ministers supplying the pulpit were: Thayer, Clayton, Tibbits, Skinner, Austin, Weeks, Stocking, Fisk, Beardsley, Rendor, Cramer, Cowing, Tobey, Allison, Campbell, Metz, Thomas and Lovejoy.

Bell Preserved

In distributing some of the properties of the church the bell is to be preserved by Lester Herrick. This bell, I remember as a girl, together with the one in the Methodist church, rang each Sunday morning, telling the whole community it was God's day.

The Bible was given to the Central Square Church, the Communion Service to the Cicero Center Methodist Church and the pews to the Lutheran Church in North Syracuse.

Three Gothic chairs and the pulpit went to Mr. and Mrs. Edward Carter for their historic mansion in Chittenango.

The weather vane has been preserved and it is hoped that through the efforts of William O'Brien it will be placed on the new post office. This vane has for years shown the villagers the direction of the wind each morning.

The members, though saddened by their loss, are attending services at Central Square and in Syracuse.

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Transcribed on 8 Aug 2017 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY