

[Cohocton (Liberty Corners), Steuben Co.]

HISTORY OF COHOCTON
UNIVERSALIST CHURCH
COHOCTON
(Mrs. Albert H. [Fanny Parmenter] Wilcox)

As to the earliest services held by the Universalist Society, Rev. A. H. Curtis writes, November 25, 1830, as follows:

"At Cohocton (Liberty Corners) our regular congregations are large and attentive. I commenced laboring among them about the first day of May last. Universalism is a new thing here. I believe that not more than two or three discourses had ever been delivered here by ministers of our faith until the commencement of my labors among them. I think God has lighted a candle here which the people are determined not to conceal under a bushel. A spirit of free inquiry prevails to a great extent and I firmly believe the time is not too far distant when they shall become conspicuous as a Christian Society."

Be it remembered that at a meeting of the Universalist Society held at the school house District No. 5, in the town of Cohocton on the 28th day of January, 1833, pursuant to public notice and according to the statute incorporating religious societies in such case made and provided, Caleb Crouch and Peter Haight were duly nominated and elected to preside at such meeting and to certify and return the proceedings thereof to the Clerk of said County.

That at said meeting it was unanimously resolved and agreed that said Society should forever thereafter be known as the First Universalist Society of the town of Cohocton.

That the following persons were then and there duly elected trustees of said Society, to wit:

Daniel H. Davis, Benona Danks, Caleb Crouch, Paul C. Cook, Eleazer Tucker and Levi Smith, and that said trustees and their successors shall forever hereafter be known and called by the name of the Trustees of the First Universalist Society of Cohocton. In witness whereof we have set our hands and seals the day and year above written.

Peter Haight
Caleb Crouch

They were among the earlier settlers of Cohocton and with many more of the most respectable and influential citizens were firm believers in the doctrine of the final salvation of all men.

Such men as Peter Haight, Levi Smith, Simeon Holmes, Eleazer Tucker, Benjamin Warner, Lucius Shattuck, David Parmenter, John Larrowe, Darius Crosby and many others were of the class.

Although they did not organize as a church they often held meetings and had preaching either at their own houses or at some school houses in town until after

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the M. E. church was built by the united efforts of all denominations with the understanding that it should be free to all. They worshipped there until 1858, when one Sunday afternoon upon going to the church to hold meetings as usual they found themselves shut out, the door being locked, and no one knowing where the key could be found, and they had to adjourn their services for this time. This was the beginning of the feeling which resulted finally in the building of the First Universalist church of Cohocton.

A meeting was held September 19, 1859, at which David H. Wilcox was made chairman. At this meeting Franklin Larowe, Amos W. Chase and David H. Wilcox were elected trustees and a regular church organization formed as required by statute. A subscription was circulated and money enough subscribed to warrant the commencement of erecting a church at once. Among the most liberal in giving for this purpose we find such men as John Larowe and his sons, Franklin and Albertus, F. N. Drake, N. J. Wheeler, D. H. Wilcox, E. A. Parmenter, T. S. Crosby, I. M. Tripp, Benjamin Warner, A. W. Chase, P. F. Horr, Stephen Philips, John Kellogg, C. O. Smith, G. E. W. Herbert, L. D. Shattuck, Austin Hall, Israel Hoagland and others.

The church was commenced in 1860, but was not completed until September 1863. It is located on Maple Avenue, is a fine building and cost about \$3000. The dedication sermon was preached by Rev. J. M. [John Mather] Austin of Auburn, N.Y. Soon after the erection of the church the Society engaged the services of Rev. J. H. Tuller, who remained with them about two years. Then Rev. Mr. Cheney and Rev. O. [Orson] B. Clark were also settled pastors. But the old church book being lost there is no way of knowing the length of time of their stay, or names of others that held services here after which they had no settled pastor and only occasional services until the year 1891. Rev. B. B. Fairchild settled here and remained three years, the first to settle here on opening the church after being closed for many years. It was his first charge after graduating from the Theological School of St. Lawrence University at Canton, N.Y. He was ordained in this church. Rev. I. M. [Isaac Morgan] Atwood preached the ordination sermon from James 5:20.

A Sunday School was started with a good attendance, also a Young People's Christian Union, and a Ladies' Aid Society, which was a great help to the Society financially.

In December, 1893, Rev. Herbert P. Morrell settled here until 1896. In June, 1897, Rev. Charles F. Bushnell was engaged and remained until May 1899. Then after a few months Rev. Isaac K. Richardson was engaged and stayed about three years.

July 1, 1904, Rev. Clara E. Morgan came and was pastor, preaching every other Sabbath evening, when she accepted a call to Perry, N.Y. Her morning service the day here was at So. Dansville. The alternate Sabbath she preached at Conesus. She was a resident of Cohocton during her pastorate here and the Society deeply regretted her departure. She had good congregations and did good work here.

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She had the help of M. Louise Blanchard, the lady who lived with her, who was a fine musician and singer. The church has since been closed.

In talking with a prominent member of the Universalist Society, he said: "Our Society has a fine church, well finished and furnished, free from debt. We are happy to furnish a respectable place for worship to any who believe in God the Maker and Ruler of all things, for the doors of the church are always open cheerfully to their Brethren in Christ, no matter by what name."

During the years 1872 and 1873, the Presbyterian Society being without a house of worship, they had the free use of the Universalist church until their church was completed and again in 1878-1879, also in 1889, during repairs on their church building.

(To be continued)

[Note: transcriber was unable to locate a successive article.]

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