

[Conesus, Livingston Co. NY]

A CHURCH OF YESTERDAY
by L. N. W.

When we hear from our boys who have been fighting in Italy and stationed near any of the large cities for any length of time, they write that they have visited the ruins of such and such a church, cathedral, and other buildings, for example, in Pompeii, where there is an entire city in ruins. But we, in America, do not care for ruins of anything. When a structure becomes so damaged by fire or storm that it is of no value, it is torn down and if the need arises, replaced by a new building. So in many cases we have only our memories of such buildings. Such is the case of the old Universalist church of Conesus, gone these fifty years.

As Hemlock Baptists celebrated, last summer, the centennial of the erection of their church, which was built only two years before the Conesus Universalist church, some facts about this latter church may also prove of interest. In looking over some old papers, George Penning of Conesus came across two Sunday School records which read, "List of boys and list of girls attending Universalist Sunday school, Conesus, Liv. Co., Sept. 5, 1869." It appears, however, that only two or three of the group who attended this church are alive today who might remember something about it. The story that unfolds here is pictured in my mind by information from Mrs. Ida Jewell Van Dorn of Cohocton, 82, last June, sister of Charles Jewell of Livonia, who attended the church as a child of ten; from George Penning of Conesus, and from the late S. E. Hitchcock's "History of Crockett's Corners."

This church of yesterday, Universalist church of Conesus, stood at Crockett's Corners, diagonally across from the Charles McGinty home. It was a large white edifice and, standing high on the hill, was a beacon of light in a far-separated community. It had been built on land belonging to Timothy McGraw, who gave the use of the land as long as it was devoted to church purposes. The structure was large enough to accommodate about 200.

This large house of God was topped with a cupola, and had three windows on each side reaching from the roof almost to the floor, and two in front. Entrance from the flat front porch was through wide doors to a square hall, from which a door led into each side of the church. When one walked in and stood in one of these doors the first thing to catch the eye would be the gallery, which extended all around the church. In this gallery, at the back, sat the choir and from here the chorister, with only a tuning fork to set the pitch, led the congregation in song. After a few years an organ was purchased and placed in the gallery, and here Miss Anna Coe (later Mrs.

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John Webster) used to play, sending the fragile notes of the old reed organ out over the congregation.

But alas, there came a Sunday when this wonderful organ refused to play. On investigating, it was found that mice had gotten into it and damaged it so that it would not produce a single note. It was immediately repaired and a carpenter hired to build a box to put it in during the week. The mice, however, took the box as a challenge and gnawed through that. No one seemed to know what to do until Mr. Kelleman, who lived near the church, offered to store the organ in his home each week, if his daughter could practice on it. His offer was accepted and so each Sunday, directly after the benediction it was carried to his home, and back again the next Sunday, by four "able-bodied" men.

To go back to the entrance, besides the gallery could be seen, on each side, rows of bare seats or pews, each large enough to seat four people, while down the center were double seats cushioned in green with the aisles covered with a green carpet. No adornments of any kind marred the simplicity of this church building, but the large stove in the back, which furnished the only heat for this large edifice during the winter, and the candlesticks placed at regular intervals under the windows, which threw light across the pews when twilight descended. Candles were also arranged in tiers in the gallery.

When one went in and sat down on the green cushioned seat, it was discovered that the pulpit was placed in front, midway between the two entrance doors, and from this pulpit the Rev. Morris and the Rev. Montgomery and many others preached to an earnest group of people. One can easily sketch a mental picture of the peace and serenity of mind this plain white edifice, with its green coloring, gave to its members as they sat, sometimes for two hours, listening to the Rev. Morris. There was a sense of urgency to be there, a certainty that something infinitely valuable could be found. No golf, movies or pressures of extra work called them from their attendance. Their church seemed to mean to them freedom and release from the "humdrum" of every day life.

The ministers came mostly from other towns to preach and so stayed over night with some of the members. Many times S. E. [Solomon] Hitchcock used to relate, the preacher passed Sunday at their home.

The Sunday school classes were also held in the gallery. Mrs. Lucinda Annis was teacher of the girls' class and her husband, Lansing Annis, superintendent of the Sunday school. The girls' class was made up of Louise Raymond, Jennie Raymond, Mattie Holmes, Celia Kelleman, Belle Kelleman, Flora Bearss, Lettie Bearss, Cora Bearss, Eva Jewell, Alice Jewell, Helen Annis, Helen Gilbert, Ida Mitchell, Frances Allen, Alice Coe, Mary Raymond, Minnie Alger, Emma Jerome, Ida Jewell, Della Clark and Nellie Rowland; the

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boys, Moses Clark, "Eddie" Hitchcock, Scott Jewell, Jimmie Patterson, Burty Patterson, Moses Raymond, Sammy Clark, Rodney Sherwood, Willie Holmes, Willie Thomas, Frankie Thomas, Alva Pease, Arty Rowland, Burty Jewell, Flavie Coe, Jimmie Alger and Jonnie Webster. Although these records were for the last four months of '69, they showed an almost perfect attendance on the part of the scholars. That is another significant fact to store in our book of memories.

And so, although we have no ruins to display, this church of the past was an integral part of our today. For the foundations for better living and closer unity made in those churches of yesterday, find proof in our lives today.

Livonia Gazette, Livonia NY, Thu. 18 Jan 1945

Transcribed on 6 Aug 2011 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY