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THE CHURCH DEBT IS ALL PAID
And the Universalist Church is Happy at the Result
EXCELLENT WORK OF THE PASTOR
Debt Had Been Hanging Over the Church for Twenty Years
—Jubilee to be Held Three Days Next Week
—Eminent Speakers from Away to be at Hand
—Fine Program in Prospect.

An announcement was made on Sunday morning at the Universalist church by the pastor, Rev. W. D. Potter, that carried joy to the heart of every member of that church and congregation who heard. The last dollar had been raised with which to pay the debt of \$2,295 that had been hanging over the church for twenty years. The money was all in hand and was paid today to the holder of the mortgage. The mortgage was today satisfied and will next week be burned on a public occasion. Every bill is paid and the church does not owe a cent to any one at present.

On July 1, 1907, Rev. W. D. Potter entered upon his pastorate over this church. He felt that the highest efficiency of the church could not be reached, while it was burdened with such a debt and determined to raise it at the earliest opportunity. The time did not seem ripe till within the last few weeks, and during this period he has worked early and late. His efforts were heartily seconded by the members of his congregation, and nearly all the money for the debt has come from within the church membership, only a little help coming from outside. The announcement that his efforts had been crowned with success was yesterday greeted with enthusiasm. During the past year and a half the church has raised and paid \$500 for repairs upon the parsonage.

Next week there will be a jubilee celebration over the liquidating of the debt. It will begin on Sunday and extend over Wednesday.

On Sunday morning the pastor will preach a historic sermon which will include a survey of the church and its work.

On Tuesday evening there will be the annual meeting of the church with reports from all of the officers of the church and the election of new officers.

On Wednesday evening, Jan. 13, there will be the special jubilee service at which the two speakers will be Rev. I. N. Atwood, D.D., of Rochester, secretary of the general convention, and Rev. Lyman R. Weeks of Utica, state superintendent of churches. Dr. Atwood was formerly the president of St. Lawrence university. He has spoken and lectured in Cortland on several occasions in the past and is a most fascinating speaker. There will also on this occasion be special music by the church choir, assisted by Charles Wibiraiske of Orange, N.J., with his violin, and perhaps a lady soloist of repute from out of town.

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A committee on decorations has already been appointed and plans are under way for decorating the church in a highly artistic way.

At the service on Wednesday evening the mortgage will be publicly burned. Following the service in the church, there will be a reception in the vestry with a short program, and refreshments will be served.

At the service on Sunday there were five additions to the membership of the church.

The two oldest members of the church at present are Ebenezer Mudge of 5 River-st., Cortland, who was born April 6, 1816, and Mrs. Eliza Wells Chaffee of McGraw, who was born June 10, 1817.

Steps looking toward the erection of the present church were taken in Feb. 23, 1836, and the completed church was dedicated on July 10, 1839.

Historical Sketches

The following historical sketch is quoted from the "Grip" Souvenir of Cortland which was issued in 1900.

Universalism was first preached in Cortland county by Nathaniel Stacy, who wrote: "In 1807, on my first visit to Cortland county, I delivered one address at Homer, and one at Port Watson. The latter was a new place but contained as many inhabitants as Homer. There was but one solitary house where the flourishing village of Cortland now (1850) stands, and that one was a residence of a friend of ours by the name of Hubbard." (Stacy's Memoirs, page 190.) In the oldest record book of the parish extant, is the following reminiscence written apparently from memory, by the first clerk of the parish, John Chamberlain:

"According to early records of Universalism in Homer, it appears that a society of the name of 'The First Charitable, Universal, Religious Society of the Town of Homer' was organized at the courthouse, Homer, (now Cortlandville) the 16th of Nov., 1813. Samuel Ingalls and Mead Merrill presided at the above meeting. The following persons were elected trustees: Moses Hopkins, Allen Barry, John chamberlain, David Merrick, Mead Merrill, Roger Edgcomb. A society of the name of 'The First Universalist Society of the Town of Homer' was organized Jan. 19, 1829, at the house of David Merrick. The last meeting at the above society was holden on the 18th of Jan., 1831."

The "House of David Merrick" stood on the present site of the Cortland Opera House. In the early days there seems to have been no settled pastor, services being held occasionally, whenever a preacher came this way. This continued until 1831, when Rev. Nelson Doolittle settled at Cortland and Homer as the first permanent pastor. For a number of years services were held on alternate Sundays at these places. His pastorate lasted two years, when Rev. George Sanderson, in 1833, became pastor, and served the church in that capacity for three years. It was during this period that the

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permanent foundation of the present society was laid. At a special meeting of the parish in the Baptist meeting house, held Sept. 17, 1834, a committee of seven of which the pastor was the first named, was appointed "to draft a new code of by-laws for the benefit of the society." The committee reported the next month; the reports was adopted, and arrangements made for a grand meeting when the new Covenant should be signed. The two days' Conference meeting was held in February, 1835. Rev. Dolphus Skinner gives a very interesting account of it in the "[Evangelical] Magazine and [Gospel] Advocate" of that year, he preaching two sermons. Nine ministers, whose names he mentions, were present. In conclusion he says: "At the close of the service, the Constitution, Declaration and Covenant were read, and signed by thirty-five sisters and sixty-six brethren, making an aggregate of one hundred and one members." The Baptist meeting house was still used as a place of worship. Late in 1835 or early in 1836 a committee was chosen relative to "building a meeting house." On February 9th, 1836, this committee was empowered "to fix upon the size of the house, form and materials of which it shall be built, the plan of raising the money, and the site where it shall stand." February 23, the committee reported "That the meeting house be built on the lot offered by Calvin Bishop. That the size of the house be 60x44 feet. That the walls be of cobblestone and such other materials as are necessary for the purpose and that the funds be raised by subscription." This was not quite explicit enough, for this was followed by a motion that "the committee agree on a level floor, a gallery on three sides, west, north and south, two tiers of windows, and a desk in the east end of the house." About this time the Rev. Walter Bullard became pastor and served in that capacity for two years, being followed by Rev. A. C. Barry [Barray] in 1838. During his pastorate the society was reincorporated, the legal name, "The First Charitable, Universal, Religious Society of the Town of Homer," was changed to "The First Universalist Society of the Town of Cortlandville." This was done May 7, 1839. The new church was dedicated July 10, 1839. At the annual meeting Jan. 10, 1840, Rev. T. J. [Thomas Jefferson] Whitcomb was called to the pastorate. The following year his predecessor, Rev. A. C. Barry [Barray] wrote in the "Magazine and Advocate" (page 41) regarding this society, "There are now (1841) probably between seventy and eighty members. Their meeting house (the best in the county) is located at Cortland village—the county seat—which contains rising of a thousand inhabitants." On Jan. 11, 1842, Rev. Mr. Whitcomb received twenty-two new members in the church, among them being our honored and beloved deacon, Ebenezer Mudge, the only survivor or that company. We will pass over the [brief] pastorates of Rev. Messrs. Charles S. Brown and D. H. Strickland and others, until the year 1857, when the church called to minister to it Rev. William H. Fish. Mr. Fish cane as a non-sectarianist.

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His creed was temperance and the abolition of slavery. His pastorate extended through five years, 1857 to 1862. This was the golden age of the Lyceum and public lectures, and Mr. Fish was the man to make the most of every opportunity. To the platform of this church came Thomas Starr King, Theodore Parker, Henry Ward Beecher, Edward H. Chapin, Charles Sumner, Wendell Phillips, Wm. Lloyd Garrison, Ralph Waldo Emerson and others. With considerable Yankee shrewdness Mr. Fish quite often managed to have the lectures take place on Saturday night, so that the guests would have to remain over Sunday, and the people would have the privilege of two or three more lectures the next day, free of charge. Rev. Mr. Fish's stirring pastorate was followed by the ministrations of the Rev. Stephen Crane, who remained with the church for four years, being followed by Rev. John M. Austin and Rev. F. [Francis] B. Peck, Rev. E. F. Pember and Rev. H. W. Hand, the latter remaining one year, doing excellent work in the way of reorganization, and furnishing a new set of by-laws. This church has a good constitution else it never could have survived the numerous by-laws!

Rev. George Adams was the next pastor, from 1883 to 1886. He was followed by Mr. H. E. Gilchrist, who was ordained in the church. Rev. Ure Mitchell assumed the pastoral duties Feb. 1, 1889. Under his energetic administration the church edifice was entirely remodeled, giving it its present modern appearance in the interior. He was succeeded by H. W. Carr, who graduated from the Canton Theological school in June, 1891, and who assumed the pastoral duties of the church at once, which proved to be a successful and prosperous one, and the longest in the history of the parish. During his pastorate the church was further modernized by placing a new organ in its present position, cutting out the original solid stone wall and building the organ loft. Mr. Carr was ordained to the ministry in the church while pastor. Since his resignation the church has had two ministers—Rev. John Kenyon, from April 1, 1897 to Oct. 1, 1898, who was also ordained in the church, and the present pastor, Rev. U. S. Milburn, who commenced his duties Oct. 1, 1898. This church has given to the Universalist ministry four clergymen—Rev. Messrs. A. C. Barry [Barray], J. M. Peebles, G. A. Kratzer and H. E. Newton.

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Transcribed on 23 Feb 2016 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY