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JUBILEE CELEBRATION
Of the First Universalist Church of Cortland
—Its Debt Paid in Full
THE BURNING OF THE OLD MORTGAGE
Program of Exercises Covering Three Days—
Historical Survey of the Past Sixty Years by the Pastor, Rev. W. D. Potter
—The Early Beginning of the Church
—Its Growth and Progress Traced
—Impressive Services for Tonight.

The First Universalist church of Cortland is passing through a three day jubilee celebration over the payment of its debt in full and the burning of the mortgage of \$2,295, which has been hanging over the church for the last twenty years. Every outstanding bill is paid and the church is free from every kind of debt. All this has been accomplished during the past year since the coming of the present pastor, Rev. W. D. Potter. And not only that, but about \$500 has been raised and paid for certain improvements upon the pastor's house which adjoins the church on Elm-st., all of which greatly add to its comfort and convenience.

On Sunday morning, Jan. 10, the pastor preached a historical sermon which traced the records of this church from its early beginnings more than sixty years ago. That sermon we publish in full today as many would like to preserve the records of the facts which it contains.

On Tuesday night occurred the annual meeting of the church and society, with reports from every department and organization in the church, and election of new officers.

Tonight occurs the culmination of the celebration with the formal burning of the mortgage by the pastor, and addresses by Rev. Lyman B. Weeks of Utica, state superintendent of churches, and Rev. I. [Isaac] N. Atwood D.D., of Rochester, secretary of the general convention and former president of St. Lawrence university.

The Historical Sermon.

Mr. Potter's historical sermon was as follows:

Text: Psalm xlv:1, "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work Thou didst in their days."—Scripture: Joshua 1, 1-9; Psalm xlviii:1-3; 8-14.

Since coming to Cortland as the pastor of this church, a little more than a year and a half ago, these words have apparently been fulfilling themselves, both in your life and in mine. That is why I choose them as being especially appropriate to the hour, fitly introducing us to the opening service of our jubilee.

During the fleeting days of my pastorate in this city I have often wended my way down Clinton-ave. to No. 5 River-st., a distance of nearly a mile, to the home of our aged friend and brother, Mr. Ebenezer Mudge. During the same period,

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though less frequently, I have gone to the little village of McGrawville, a distance of four miles to the east, and visited the home of our aged friend and sister, Mrs. Eliza Wells Chaffee. Mr. Mudge will be 93 in April and Mrs. Chaffee 92 in June. And as I have communed with these persons, rightly termed patriarchs ^[sic] of our church, and have listened to their story of the past, as many of you who are now before me, I feel that we can truly say together: "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work Thou didst in their days."

I am, therefore, to rehearse, in a very brief and imperfect manner, the story of our life as an organized church, relying in part upon the statement which has been directly spoken to me by our two oldest members whose names have been reverently mentioned.

In the earliest book of this church which is now extant there is this undated record: "At a meeting of the friends of Universalism in Cortlandville, for the purpose of organizing themselves into a society. 1—Voted, David Merrick preside, L. Boies, Secretary. 2—Voted that S. Noble, W. G. Parker, and Reuben Clough be delegates to the Cayuga Association to convene at Geneva, Sept., 1833. 3—A committee reported a resolve, but is not seconded. 4—Elected W. G. Parker, Wm. Berry as trustees to serve until next annual meeting. 5—Adjourned to 3d Tuesday in January, 1834, one o'clock p.m."

With no place or date given, this is a remarkable record. The friends of Universalism in Cortlandville met some time before September, 1833: that is certain. But from the record of the following year, whereby it was voted to change the annual meeting from the third Monday in January to the second Tuesday, we may infer that the meeting to organize the society was held on the third Monday of January, namely, Jan. 21, 1833. This, I assume, is the date of the organic birth of this church. She is now, therefore, on the eve of her 76th birthday.

At the annual meeting of 1834, and of which Ransom Mallery was chosen clerk, a committee consisting of Moses Hopkins, Jacob Badgley and W. G. Parker was chosen "to secure the old Baptist meeting house for the society." This was located where Fitz-ave. and Homer-ave. intersect. And as the next business meeting was held there, as set down in the records, it is natural to infer that there, also, was the organic birth-place of this society.

One minister, Rev. Nelson Doolittle, held services regularly for two years before the organization of 1833 was perfected. He is, therefore, rightly considered the first settled pastor. His successor, the Rev. George Sanderson, began his labor with a permanent parish organization, and continued in the pastorate for three years. Then came Rev. Walter Bullard for two years, followed by Rev. A. [Albert] C. Barry [Barray] for one year, the latter a native of Cortlandville. This brings us to 1840, comprising a period of nine significant years.

Let us name the more important events of this period. Mr. Doolittle, an incessant worker, sowed the good seed. This seed fell on fertile soil; and through faithful watch-care under the leadership of Mr. Sanderson, it grew into an

attractive and well-organized plant. February 12, 1835, marks the time of that memorable conference, held in the old Baptist meeting house under the direction of the pastor, assisted by Rev. Dolphus Skinner and others, when 71 new names, including many of the leading citizens of the community, were received into Christian fellowship. Then began the agitation for a house of worship. After much earnest discussion the movement took definite form at the annual meeting on January 12, 1836, when a committee was appointed to investigate. Mr. Bullard had just entered upon his work. On Feb. 23, at an adjourned meeting, Moses Hopkins, chairman, and Asa Crittenden, secretary, the report of the committee was accepted as follows: "That the meeting house be built on the lot offered by Calvin Bishop; that the size of the house be 60 by 44 feet; that the walls be of cobble stone and other such materials as are necessary for the purpose; that the funds be raised by subscription." The building committee, then to be chosen, were instructed by vote to "agree on a level floor; on a gallery on three sides, west, north and south; on two tiers of windows, and desk in the east end of the house; and that said committee shall have full power to mature the plans and say how the house shall be finished." The committee of three, as then chosen by nomination, were Mead Merrill, Moses Hopkins and Asa Crittenden. As time went on, however, the names of the building committee, as finally constituted and serving, are these seven: Mead Merrill, Asa Crittenden, David Merrick, Benjamin Roberts, Elias W. Ford, Edward Allen and Danforth Merrick.

During the summer of 1836 the committee were busy raising funds and maturing plans; but little was done that could be seen till the next summer, 1837, when the building was inclosed [sic] and the basement, only, completed. "Universalist Church, Erected 1837," is, therefore, appropriately chiseled above the entrance to the main doorway; while just above this name is another indelible inscription, interpreting the meaning of the building: "Holiness to the Lord. Good Will to all Mankind."

The work of completion went slowly forward, it seems, as the means at hand would permit. The meeting of Jan. 9, 1838, was the first annual gathering convened in this building. Sabbath services were held in the basement, while the finishing work went on through the passing weeks and months. Rev. Mr. Berry succeeded Mr. Bullard at the beginning of 1839; and, after incessant toil and sacrifice, this edifice was set apart for religious uses on July tenth, Rev. John M. Austin of Auburn preaching the dedication sermon.

In connection with the labor of building, it is interesting to note the following:— Horace Bliss of Truxton, afterwards of Cortland, and a leading member of the church, was the carpenter who took the contract and oversaw the work. Benjamin Davis of Clarendon, N.Y., an expert mason, builder of stone churches at Clarendon and Middleport, did the mason work. "He was a very large man," says one of our aged members, "a bright man, and a strong Universalist." Robert W. Wells, father of Mrs. Eliza Wells Chaffee, our venerable sister in McGrawville, contributed the

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large hard wood timbers from his farm, which was located west of the village near the old brick school house. Other donations, both of material and labor, were numerous, thus limiting the gross financial outlay, as estimated by Mr. Mudge, to about five or six thousand dollars. Evidently there was great rejoicing. And today, one of the most notable incidents to which Mrs. Chaffee proudly refers is her share in the work of adorning this sanctuary with evergreens and tallow candles, for the celebration of the first Christmas exercises ever held here, in 1839.

Imagine, now, the condition of things on 1840. Rev. Thomas J. Whitcomb, an old-time preacher, and very enthusiastic, is the settled pastor for four years. He had a wife and three grown daughters, as Mr. Mudge tells me, two of whom were good singers, their home being on Main-st. and just south of Wiltsie's store. The church lot, bought of Gilmore Kinney for \$245, contains nearly a third of an acre, or about twice its present size. The highway in front is called Chapel-st.; that to the north side, having no name yet assigned, is referred to as the "new street." Clinton-ave. was then known as the old mill road, and Groton-ave. as Cortland-st. Abraham, the father of our venerable brother, Ebenezer Mudge, had bought the old red mill the year before, including 50 acres of land, and had moved into what is now known as the Todd house nearly opposite. This family brought added strength; its members were called to the best positions the church could give. January 11, 1842, is the date upon which both the parents and their son were welcomed to membership. sixty-seven years, therefore, almost to an even date, Mr. Mudge has held the fellowship of this church.

Just a word further concerning the Mudge family and their relation to the church. They came from Canajoharie, Montgomery Co., in April, 1839. They waited for no one in the church to look them up, but came at once to this sanctuary; finding it congenial, they soon secured a pew for themselves running lengthways of the church, and at the minister's right hand, namely: a front pew, "Slip No. One." And to show the custom which was then in vogue I will give the exact wording of their deed: This Indenture, made the twenty-seventh day of August in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-nine, between Jacob Badgley, Mead Merrill, Zalmon Barnum, Erastus Perry, Orrin Parsons, Benjamin Roberts, Trustees of "The First Universalist Society, town of Cortlandville," in the county of Cortland, and state of New York, of the first part, and Abraham Mudge of the second part, Witnesseth, that the party of the first part, as such Trustees, for and in consideration of the sum of fifty-five Dollars, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, Have, and by these presents to sell and convey into the part of the second part, his Heirs and Assigns, Slip No. One in the Meeting House of said Church and society, situate in Cortlandville aforesaid, to have and to hold under and according to the Constitution and regulations of said church and society. Witness our hands and seals, the day and year above written.

Jacob Badgley, Mead Merrill, Zalmon Barnum
Erastus Berry, Orrin Parsons, Benj. Roberts,

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Trustees.

From 1844 to 1857, 13 years, there were four pastorates, namely, that of Reverends Charles S. Brown, D. H. Strickland, J. D. Cargill, and Mr. Brown for a second time. They were uneventful years. Among the leading laymen of this period were Edward Allen, Thomas P. Chaffee, the husband of our aged sister, Mrs. Eliza Wells Chaffee, Horace Bliss, Stephen R. Hunter and Francis Eggleston, an uncle of our honored townsman, Judge Joseph Eggleston. Mrs. Chaffee was admitted to membership on February 4, 1847, under the pastorate of Rev. Mr. Strickland. And this worthy minister, she told me quite recently, was called upon to mourn the untimely death of his young wife, causing grief so intense as to terminate his helpful pastorate.

1857 to 1875, comprising 18 notable years, may be looked upon as a third period in the history of this church. The ministers, in chronological order, were: Rev. William H. Fish, Rev. Stephen Crane, afterwards a Doctor of Divinity, Rev. John H. [M.] Austin and Rev. Frank B. Peck. Hiram J. Messenger, banker; H. L. Green, lawyer; Charles P. Snyder, Lucien Hale, Madison Woodruff, Horace Baker, Lewis Davis, Jesse M. Blanchard, and Noah J. Parsons, were some of the leading workers. Rev. Mr. Fish brought into the work a deep enthusiasm for the cause of Abolition; Mr. Crane, a rare type of sincerity and consecration; Mr. Austin, a fund of Bible knowledge and uncommon eloquence, and Mr. Peck, the gift for effective prayer and the charm of a wholesome life. Those were memorable days, and highly prosperous; and much of the best life in the community centered in this church. Often has the story been told me by the older members, and with great pride, of the speakers of national reputation, like Dr. Edwin H. Chapin, Henry Ward Beecher, Starr King and others, who have spoken their life-giving messages in this place to overflowing congregations. Many have told me, also, of the blind workings of religious prejudice in those stirring days, when respectable and God-fearing men like Stephen Brewer were expelled from a sister church, because they came into this house to listen to those great men of the Civil war period. Those, indeed, were memorable days in the history of this church, and they will certainly continue to be an inspiration and guide throughout its entire history.

Rev. Mr. Peck closed his work in Cortland on March 14, 1875, after a pastorate of four years. Owing to the sickness and death of his three children he remained four years longer to recover from his overwhelming grief. This fact was effectual in closing the church doors; and not until May 1, 1882, after a cessation of seven years, occasional preaching excepted, were they again opened. The people were ready for a leader, quite evidently; and Rev. Elmer F. Pember proves himself the providential man. He serves not only as a missionary, however, finding a successor in the person of Rev. H. Wells Hand, who remains a year and welcomes many new members. September 30, 1883, is the date of his resignation.

The short pastorates of Rev. Geo. Adams and Rev. Harry E. Gilchrist follow in their order, and with good results. Mr. Gilchrist was ordained in this church November 18, 1887. In October, 1884, during the pastorate of Mr. Adams, a building lot on the south side of the church was sold to Frank Fenner, the consideration being 1300 dollars, the proceeds of which were taken to build the present parsonage adjoining the easterly line of the church lot during the spring of 1885. The contract for this work was taken by our well known co-laborer, Mr. Newton Cone, who now resides at 123 Groton-ave.

The fourth period of our history as a church, from 1882 to 1891, ends with the resignation of Rev. Ure G. Mitchell, March 1, 1891. He was pastor a little less than two years. He had come unheralded in February, 1889, only asking to be heard for the voluntary offerings taken at the services. The interest quickened at once and the congregations rapidly increased. Such was the new condition that on March 12th it was unanimously voted "to repair the church at once, the trustees to do the work, and devising ways and means." Then came the strenuous days. On April 21, scarcely three months after the pastor's arrival, eleven were received into fellowship. Other groups followed in varying periods, making 47 in all.

And as to the repairs made: The high pulpits and box pews were removed, the floor made to incline toward the pulpit, the galleries torn down, opera chairs installed, memorial windows put in, basement ceiled and refitted throughout, besides other repairs, and largely as we see them today—costing in the aggregate some five thousand dollars. Of that amount, \$3,500 was then raised and paid, and the balance of \$1,500 was furnished by William Riley, a fellow-townsmen, in consideration of a mortgage to that amount against the church property. The names of the trustees then in charge, and who signed the mortgage, were: L. W. Camp, L. S. Crandall, N. J. Parsons, Albert Terrell, and W. W. Kelsey.

There was cause for great rejoicing over the many improvements made, as was manifested at the services of re-dedication on August 21, 1889. A two days' conference was held at that time, attended by three former pastors and several neighboring clergymen, and Rev. Dr. A. J. [Andrew Jackson] Canfield of Brooklyn preaching the dedicatory sermon.

The fifth epoch in our history may be considered as dating from 1891. Rev. Herbert W. Carr took up the work in May of that year, and laid it down again with the close of 1896. He was ordained to the Christian ministry in this edifice soon after his settlement. He had the rare distinction of being married here also.

The new pipe organ, made by Morey & Barnes of Utica, and costing \$1,945, was installed in 1895—Mrs. Dr. J. H. Knapp of Harford contributing \$500. The old pipe organ was sold to the Universalist Society of McLean. Forty-three members were added to the church.

Rev. John Kenyon was pastor from April 1, 1897 to October 1, 1898, a period of a year and a half. He was ordained to the ministry in this edifice on July 22d,

1897. He is spoken of by his friends as an inveterate reader, and as having a passion for books that exceeded prudence.

The untimely death of his wife, Bertha Payson Kenyon, at 35—soon after the close of his pastorate—has left a lasting impression upon those who knew her. Her example of faith and tenderness will ever remain, both to cheer and to bless. During this brief pastorate nine members were received into fellowship.

The work of the last pastor, Rev. U. S. Milburn, being so recent, speaks for itself. It is too near to estimate justly. Bounded by the dates, Oct. 1, 1898, and June 1, 1907, it covers a period of eight years and eight months. It was a significant period for this church. Only those who were participants in the church's life can appreciate it. It was the longest pastorate in the history of the church, and 64 communicants were admitted to its membership.

A few more facts and impressions connected with this historical survey will bring my words to a close.

The first fact to be noticed is that no attempt has been made to picture the chaotic and uncertain conditions of organized Universalism in this community prior to 1831. The first organization of 1813 and the second of 1829 were both transient, and would deserve further time and study. I have made very little estimate concerning the character and place of the founders of this church. Suffice it to say that of all the early lay workers in the first period of our church's life in this vicinity Mead Merrill stands foremost, if not the first in power and influence.

He was a soldier of the revolution, and lived to the age of 88. He was at one time a dry-goods merchant, also a farmer. He was honored with the responsible offices of county clerk and member of the assembly. He was somewhat above the average in stature, had blue eyes, and was affable and intellectual. He lived at what we now know at No. 23 Clinton-ave., in the house which is now owned by Melvin Samson and located at the rear of the office now occupied by Dr. A. C. Knapp. He left eight children, four boys and four girls, and was highly respected by all.

Another interesting fact is the relationship which the basement of this church has borne to the town and state. It appears to have been used for election purposes from the time of its completion in 1838 to May 1, 1883, a period approximating 45 years. By a resolution of the town on Feb. 20, 1883, the last town meeting held therein, it was unanimously voted to surrender its further use to the church, with all the acquired rights and privileges.

Thus, in various ways, are the fathers speaking to us about the work done in their days. They labored nobly and well, and we have entered into their labors.

To erect and dedicate this edifice in 1839 was a glorious expression of a glorious faith: to repair and rededicate it in 1889 was a repetition of the same indefatigable purpose; it was a herculean task. It meant untold faith and sacrifice to this people, and the probable breaking down of its pastor, who was so zealous

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and untiring in its accomplishment. But we are glad in this jubilee hour, after the passage of nearly twenty years, to share in their work and burden by courageously facing the obligation and lifting the longstanding debt.

In what we have done, and are doing, we can the better appreciate the work of those who have gone before.

All hail to Brother Ebenezer Mudge, and his princely gift of one thousand! Hearty thanks to Mrs. Jane A. Murray for her gift of \$500 in memory of her late husband; and for other gifts of more recent date. Blessing upon the gift of \$100 by Alonzo O. Bliss, the grateful son of a loyal father! All honor to our late sister, Mrs. Adeline E. Heath, for her timely bequest of \$500. And to all who have contributed in lesser amounts, our praise and gratitude are equally due. Let it be known with joy that in the closing month of 1908 the debt of twenty-three hundred was raised; that because of this, services of rejoicing were held in the church during the week of Jan. 10, 1909, and that the mortgage of 1889, given when the church was rededicated, was publicly burned with fitting ceremonies.

Dear members and friends, both individually and collectively, you have a goodly heritage. Your unbounded faith speaks a confident message.

Behind you holy martyrs uplift the palm and crown;
Before you unborn angels send their benedictions down.

In the dignity and grandeur of the present, therefore, this sublime truth is forever an inspiration: We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days.

Cortland Standard, Cortland NY, Wed. 18 Jan 1909

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