

[Cortland, Cortland Co. NY]

Universalist Church Celebrates Century Mark of Oldest Edifice
Dr. Leining, State Superintendent, Preaches Centennial Sermon—
Judge Davis to Give Centennial Address

Services in celebration of the Cobblestone Church, oldest church edifice in Cortland, will take place Sunday, April 4. Generally spoken of as the Cobblestone Church, the century-old landmark of Church street is the edifice of the First Universalist church society of Cortland, or, to give it its little used legal name, All Soul's church.

The Sunday services will be followed by the centennial exercises Tuesday evening, April 6, at which church history and the historical pageant and tableaux will be given, and the centennial banquet, Wednesday evening, April 7.

Rev. Fred C. Leining, D.D., of Syracuse, state superintendent of Universalist churches, will preach on "From One Century to Another" at 11 o'clock Sunday morning. Rev. Edward C. Downey, pastor of the church, will preside at the service, and the prayer will be offered by Rev. H. L. Brockway of Ithaca, pastor in 1924-26.

The centennial service of the Sunday school, at 10 o'clock, will precede the church service. Classes will be suspended and the Sunday school hour will be devoted to "A Hundred Years by Radio," under the direction of Catherine Hazzard. A reunion of all who have attended the Sunday school is planned.

Justice Rowland L. Davis of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court will give the centennial address at 7:30 Sunday night. He will be introduced by Fay C. Parsons, moderator of the society. Rev. Mr. Downey will preside and the devotions will be conducted by the Rev. D. J. Westlake of the First Congregational church.

Numerous incidents of the century of church history will be depicted in the pageant to be presented at 7:30 Tuesday night and the historical sketch will be read. Mrs. Grace B. Buck is chairman, and she has the assistance of Mrs. L. D. Ticknor and Miss June Sewell. Mrs. Buck is preparing the centennial history, to be published later. A pamphlet has been prepared from a part of the material she has compiled.

The centennial banquet will be at 6:30 Wednesday evening in the church parlors. Mr. Parsons will preside as toastmaster and grace will be said by Rev. G. Y. Benton of the First M. E. [Methodist Episcopal] church. The speakers will be Rev. W. A. Braithwaite of Grace Episcopal church, for the churches of Cortland; Rev. Emer H. Peters of Floral Park, "a young man of our church;" Mrs. Myrtle M. Cortright, wife of the pastor of 1914-15, for the ladies of the church; and Rev. E. [Ellsworth] C. Reamon, pastor of the Betts Memorial church of Syracuse, for the Universalist denomination.

[Cortland, Cortland Co. NY]

Mrs. Dorothy Hazzard Glann, musical director and organist, will be in charge of the music for all services of the centennial.

Cobblestone Church Built in 1837

The Universalist church standing on the corner of Church and Elm streets, erected in 1837, is the oldest church edifice in the city. The Universalist society was organized a few years prior to the erection of the building, but is not quite so old as the organizations of the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians. Nevertheless, Universalists were among the religious pioneers of Cortland county.

Earliest church dates in Cortlandville credited by the county history are: Methodists, 1804; Baptists, 1801; Presbyterians, 1824; Episcopalians, 1831; and the Universalists, 1813. The Universalist society of 1813 did not flourish, and it was not until 1833 that the permanent organization was effected. The first meeting was in the old Baptist church which stood on the present hospital corner, and at about the time that the Baptists moved down town to Church street. Many of the names in the later Universalist society are mentioned in that of 1813.

The annual meeting of January 12, 1836, voted to build a church edifice and a committee was appointed and given definite instructions. The lot, 60 by 44 feet, was given by Calvin Bishop. The builders were Horace Bliss of Truxton, later a resident of Cortland, and Benjamin Davis of Clarendon. Rev. Walter Bullard was pastor.

Seven men of the building committee were Mead Merrill, Asa Crittenden, David Merrick, Benjamin Roberts, Elias W. Ford, Edward Allen, and Danforth Merrick. They had the building enclosed and basement finished in 1837 and it was in use as a place of worship that year. Completion of the building was not until 1839 and the dedication service was July 10.

Basement Was Town Hall

By an arrangement with the town of Cortlandville, the church basement was used as a polling place for general elections and town meetings and came to be called the town hall and the town after more than 40 years considered that it had some interest. The town meeting of 1881 instructed a committee of the town board to ascertain the town's legal rights and title and sell its interest. The town meeting of 1883 voted to relinquish any interest to the church and vacate, and shortly thereafter designated Taylor Hall as the voting place.

[Cortland, Cortland Co. NY]

The old church must have been rather shabby in 1839 when it was remodeled. The exterior was left as it had been thru all of its hundred years, except the front steps and entrance, but the interior was rebuilt with the inclined floor and opera chairs, the timbered ceiling and handsome windows. Madison Woodruff was chairman of the building committee, and his associates were Noah J. Parsons, Albert Terrell, and William W. Kelsey. Rev. Ure Mitchell was the pastor. Dedicatory services were held two days, August 20 and 21, 1889.

It was at the rededication of 1889 that the name "All Souls' Church" was adopted. The bell purchased of the Presbyterians rang out its first call from the Universalist church for the rededication service. Enlargement of the chancel was a notable improvement of the rebuilding in 1889, to make room for the pipe organ and the quartet of singers.

The organ was one of the best built by Garrett House of Harford about 1850. Mr. House was a noted builder of pipe organs and he made the organs used in many of the old churches of Central New York. The organ built by Mr. House was sold to the Universalist church at McLean in 1895 and the present organ was installed.

The Cobblestone church throughout its hundred years has been a community center in numerous ways. Long its basement was the town hall, and the church was famous for its lyceum or forum in the Civil War era. The old church was the cradle of at least two leading churches of the city. First services of Grace Episcopal church were held there in 1847, and the First Congregational church held services there at times before it had a church home of its own.

The New York State Convention of Universalists will meet in the Cortland church next October in recognition of the centennial.

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