

Brief History of the Ellisburg Universalist Church

The earliest records of the Universalist church of Ellisburg are dated 1821, in which year Rev. Cornelius G. Person came to the town to live, although other Universalist ministers, Rev. Nathaniel Stacy and Rev. Mr. Winslow, had visited the town as early as 1814. Mr. Person formed a church organization and preached for several years. He died in Ellisburg in 1849. Rev. Seth Jones moved to the town in 1832 and remained until 1844. The second entry in the parish records is dated 1833, at which time the organization was formed and a decision made (but not immediately carried out) to build a church. Rev. John French, also a resident of Ellisburg, Rev. William Sias and Rev. C.[Charles] B. Brown preached Universalism occasionally during the next few years. In 1841 Rev. O.[Oliver] Wilcox came as pastor and remained until his death in 1845. During his pastorate, as the result of a vote on April 6, 1842, a church was built and dedicated in 1843.

The following description of that occasion was written by Rev. Pitt Morse: "On Thursday, the 24th of August, the new Universalist church in Ellisburg was solemnly dedicated to the worship of the one loving and true God, the Creator and Saviour of all men. A very able and useful sermon was delivered by Bro. Wilcox, who was assisted in the services by Bros. [A. W.] Bruce, Jones and Morse. The house is a very neat, substantial and convenient building, 34 by 42 feet, with raised seats in the rear for the choir, and we understand it is very nearly paid for.

"In the afternoon Bro. Wilcox was installed as pastor of the church and society in that place. Sermon by Bro. Morse, aided in the other exercises by Bros. Abbott, Person, Jones, Bruce.

"The day was bright and pleasant, the house filled with attentive hearers during the long exercises both parts of the day. The singing from a numerous choir was well suited to the occasion and all seemed to participate in the joys and bliss of the Divine Kingdom.

"The church and society in Ellisburg are now furnished with a house of worship and a faithful minister of the reconciliation; and we trust that they may be regularly in that place listening to the ministrations of the Words of Life, and encouraging each other in every virtue. They are now united, prosperous and happy. May the Lord of the Vineyard long continue to bless them, preserving among them the unity of spirit in the bond of peace."

Mr. Wilcox was taken ill and the pulpit was supplied by C. G. Person, Jacob Sax, Justin Averill, and others until the pastorate of Rev. Luther Rice, 1846-51. In the following years came Rev. Pitt Morse, A.[Alfred] Peck, J.[John] H. Stewart, E. A. Holbrook and others. Mr. Rice returned in 1859 for three years.

The civil war was responsible for the practical closing of the church for several years, during which control of the property nearly passed into the hands of another denomination; but in 1873, Rev. W.[William] H. Goodell reopened services. He found the church "dead, twice dead, plucked up by the roots," but before he left in 1880 the building had been repaired and the interest and loyalty of the people revived.

Succeeding ministers have been Revs. L. B. Fisher, D. L. Fisher, H. P. Morrell, L. M. Clement, Arthur Roberts, S. G. Ayers, G. W. Scudder, L. O. Black, W. J. Mets. The present minister is Rev. Elmo A. Robinson.

Jefferson County Journal, Adams NY, Wed. 23 Jul 1913

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The Empire State Universalist (NY State Convention of Universalists: September 1913), pp. 241-2