

## THE OLD STONE CHURCH AT SCHUYLER LAKE

By H. Paul Draheim

The Old Stone Church at Schuyler Lake Village, erected in 1839-40 as a union church and used by the Universalists since 1874, has one unusual distinction. It never has had a resident minister.

Despite this, services have been conducted regularly on Sundays, sometimes in the morning, then again in the afternoon and on occasion in the evening. The time for the service depends entirely on when the supply minister could be present.

The church seeps with history, particularly in the era following the War of 1812. In its vestibule there hangs a portrait of the man who planned and built the 110-year-old structure. The picture is that of George Herkimer, a descendant of General Herkimer. The trim stone church stands as a monument to the peacetime labors of the famous family which settled long ago in the Schuyler Lake area. The picture is an enlarged photograph of an original daguerreotype of George Herkimer and his wife. Underneath is the inscription telling how it was acquired. It reads:

"Picture copied from old daguerreotype of George Herkimer, architect and builder of the old stone church of Schuyler Lake, and his wife Sarah Fraser Herkimer. This picture was given by Albert Livingston Marshall, a great-great-nephew of George Herkimer, and Mrs. Nelson T. Tunnicliff, a great-great-granddaughter of Maj. Joseph Tunnicliff."

The history of the old church provides a unique example of the wide religious tolerance in America. It was built by contributions from the people of four religious faiths. They were the Christian Society, Free Will Baptists, Methodists and the Universalists.

Mrs. Nellie Southworth, 91, the church's oldest living member, possesses a handwritten historical sketch prepared many years ago by the Rev. S.[Samuel] R. Ward, one of the parade of supply ministers. He served about 40 years. It states that on Dec. 17, 1838, representatives of the four denominations met and adopted a constitution. They then set about building the church which was dedicated Mar. 5, 1840. The cost of the building was \$4,000.

Elder Ward noted: "To the different denominations comprising the Union Society, the use of the church for purposes of worship, was arranged: Universalists, first Sunday of each month; Free Will Baptists, second and fourth Sundays; Methodists, third Sunday and when there was a fifth Sunday in the month, the church was used by the Christian Society.

"It was enjoined upon all classes of worshippers that they be kind and obliging to each other and thus promote the spirit of good will."

He further states "what organization the Universalists had here in the early days of their history, we have no means of knowing. A District Society of Universalists was formed here in 1874 and in 1877 a Universalist Church was established with six members." The Free Will Baptist[s] eventually went out of existence in Schuyler Lake and the Methodists built their own church, and no

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record is available as to what happened to the Christian Society. The Universalists, being the sole users of the church, inherited the edifice thus preventing the return of the land to heirs of the original owners, the Plumb family.

Mrs. A.[Ashley] W. Strong said the Universalists recently obtained a deed granting full title to the property. The original deed was lost.

Mrs. Dorothy Wing Ames, in preparing a historical sketch of the church and its societies, notes that in the Ladies Aid Society record book there was a rule designed to discourage extravagant competition among the women who entertained the society in turn. It provided that a \$5 fine must be paid by any person getting refreshments other than apples and popcorn at any of the meetings. It is interesting to note that men were members and held office in the Ladies Aid Society.

In the early days of the church the pews faced toward the front entrance with a gallery on three sides and the pulpit between the two doors. Later the pulpit was placed at the rear of the church.

Later the gallery was made into a Sunday School room and kitchen, and one large door led into the auditorium instead of two. New seats were purchased and the appearance of the church then was much the same as today.

Mrs. Southworth recalls the familiar figure of Elder Ward in a linen duster and silk hat on warmer summer days, when he arrived at the church after making a six mile trip by horse and carriage from Richfield Springs [where he had a settled pastorate].

Currently supplying the pulpit are Dr. Fred C. Leining, Syracuse; the Rev. Howard Gilman, Little Falls and the Rev. Harold D. Haynes.

The two old stoves, used for many years to heat the church, have been replaced by an oil burner. Several years ago the kitchen was remodeled and equipped with cupboards.

Incidentally, the church is not equipped with running water. Nearby wells furnish the supply.

"It's wonderful what the women of this church can do in preparing meals for 40 to 60 people, with the few facilities available," the Rev. Mr. Haynes, now retired, is quoted as saying.

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Transcribed on 24 Mar 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY