

[Fairhaven (Childs), Orleans Co. NY]

Restoration Eagerly Begun

The Universalist Church at Childs stands today as a memorial to the men who vowed "to serve God by serving humanity" and after 130 years is on the threshold of becoming a shrine to pioneer religion. For by its restoration the Cobblestone Society beckons not only to people to view this rich architectural heritage of Western New York, a cobblestone building, but points up the place each church has held in the forming of pioneer communities since men found the need for religion as a part of every day living.

The history of the Universalist church at Childs has been like that of many pioneer churches. It survived through dull and enthusiastic periods and then the change in the center of population closed its doors except for the services held in tribute to its pioneer founders.

It was through the efforts of Joseph Billings, Chauncey Woodworth, John Hutchinson and John Proctor that the First Universalist Society of Fairhaven (Childs) was legally established in 1834 and the church erected.

As the church life of today shows its lean years and inspiring accomplishments, so it was during the years that followed in the life of the First Universalist Church. In 1861 when John Proctor provided for the future of the Church Society in his will the church was reorganized and a constitution adopted. Through his bequest there has been possible a continuance of service through this church until the present day.

The year 1865 brought hard times and the church was forced to close its doors for a decade. Then the enthusiasm of Charles Danolds induced a complete reorganization of the church in 1877 as the Church of the Good Shepherd. Rev. T. D. [Theodore Dwight] Cook was called as pastor marking one of those uplifting experiences of church life and the congregation increased to 125 members. The church again became a center of the community and the enthusiasm of the congregation working together carried for another decade.

It was this enthusiasm that prompted George Pullman to give the Pullman Memorial Church in Albion in memory of his parents. The handsome sandstone structure is built in the form of a cross. The stained glass windows are by Tiffany in deep jeweled tones and the organ the largest in a rural church in Western New York but the church was not endowed.

When the Universalist Church at Childs closed its doors the trustees of the church entrusted in John Proctor's will with "maintaining public worship" diverted the bequest to the new church but returned to Childs for memorial services.

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Today the First Universalist Church at Childs, just east of the fourcorners [sic], has had few alterations through the years. The morning sunlight highlights the inscription above the center entrance just as it did when it was built by John Proctor "Erected by the First Universalist Society in the year 1834 A.D." "GOD IS LOVE." It is reflected again in the many panes of the single double hung windows with twenty over twenty sash that flank the entrance. There are similar windows over the three lower openings. The Tympanum of the front gable is filled with flush wood siding.

The cobblestones for this Early Period church were picked up in the fields. They are of various sizes and colors laid in courses about four and one quarter inches on centers. The quoins at the corners are roughly cut from ledge limestone and vary from eight by fourteen inches to nine by twenty-three inches. The window sills are four inch thick wood planks and the lintel above the entrance door consists of a double row of brick headers laid flatwise above.

Bricks laid on each side of the entrance steps carry the Lafler brickyard stencil.

The wood cornice is Post Colonial design.

Plans have been made to restore the bell tower.

The interior of the church is very interesting to the architectural historian because few alterations have been made since it was first built.

Of special interest are the mural paintings in back of the pulpit done in perspective making the altar look as if it stands in front of a deep recess probably at one time centered with a cross or religious symbol.

The interior of the church is topped by a balcony along two facing sides reached by stairways from the vestibule. The double row of straight backed pews in the balcony match the pews in the church sanctuary finished in grain pine with walnut scroll arm rests.

Original seat cushions, carpeting and a few kneeling benches have been preserved. The original church organ and pulpit furniture including a communion table and communion service need little restoration.

The hand turned spindles in the balcony of the choir loft at the rear of the church, are of black walnut, matching the pulpit furnishings.

At one time doors with name plates led to each pew but the doors were use [sic] to face the pulpit when it was enlarged.

The Cobblestone Society plans to plaster the church ceiling as a first step in restoring the interior of the building and to cement the basement floor where a museum will be established.

John Proctor, strange as it may seem, was never a formal member of the Universalist church but he believed so firmly in its covenant that he insured its future through his will.

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The church covenant reads in part:

“that we may more cheerfully love God and keep his commandments, and recognizing our need for mutual aid, watchcare and communion...we will not be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit and serving the Lord...we will speak in love [love] to those of contrary part, and thus seek to turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God...We will endeavor to keep the unity of spirit in the bonds of peace, and so make it an object of others to seek our communion and fellowship.”

Medina Daily Journal-Register, Medina NY, Fri. 21 Feb 1964

Transcribed on 28 Dec 2015 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY