

[Genesee Falls (Portageville), Wyoming Co. NY]

Shut Portageville Church Erected Near Century Ago

Portageville. Nearing the century mark as a place of worship, a snow white church with a tall spire has been closed for the winter because of inadequate heating facilities. Besides its neat appearance, despite its age the church has another unusual feature. Carpenters started the building in Allegany County and finished it in Wyoming, although the building has never been moved.

It is the First Universalist Church, located within a few hundred feet from the southern entrance to Letchworth State Park. Construction began in 1840, having been raised by popular subscription, old church records show. The site at that time was in Allegany County and the following June Wyoming County was formed and the church property was included in the new county.

Plan Continuing Rites

Efforts have been made to purchase the building for other than church purposes but residents reported yesterday plans were going forward to continue church services next summer if arrangements can be made for the attendance of a minister from some other nearby section.

Oil lamps still hang from a chandelier a few feet in front of the plush-draped pulpit. There is no hallway or vestibule; the front doors open directly into the place of worship. Late comers can be plainly seen by the congregation as the audience faces the front doors, and the old fashioned organ and choir pews are at the opposite end of the single room in the rear of the congregation.

In front of the altar are two round pillars that were said to have been made by fastening the pieces of timber at each end and turning them with a cant hook. Another workman held a chisel and gradually hewed them into shape.

Record of First Meeting

Records show the first meeting in the new church took place the summer after completion. This is the way it is recorded: "We assembled at the meeting house on Saturday Aug. 13, 1842 at 1 p.m. for the purpose of organizing a Christian church. Alanson Ward was named clerk. The Rev. I. B. [Ichabod Blakesley] Sharp, Hume, read the scripture lesson and the Rev. A. [Alanson] Kelsey preached. After appropriate remarks by the brethren on the property and importance of church fellowship, an organization was effected."

Democrat and Chronicle, Rochester NY, Mon. 10 Jan 1938