Portageville Universalist Church Opened Sunday
for Centennial Services; Congregation Has Scattered

PORTAGEVILLE—Its doors long closed and its pulpit unfilled for years, the Universalist Church here was opened Sunday, as neighboring Universalist parishes gathered here for the 100th anniversary of its foundation.

Instrumental in remembering the centennial, and bringing about an observance, was Miss Julia B. Tobey of Perry's Universalist Church. The congregation of that church came here Sunday along with parishioners from other churches, and Dr. Fred C. Leining of Syracuse, state superintendent of Universalist churches, gave the address.

This snow-white church, with a tall spire, occupies a commanding spot, a short distance from the south entrance to Letchworth Park, and has unusual features. In spite of its great age, it presents a neat appearance.

When carpenters started hewing the timbers by hand for the "meeting house" a century ago—machines to smooth timbers being unknown at the time—the building was in Allegany County, but by the time it was finished it was in Wyoming County, although it was on the same site. The reason for this was the redistricting of the section, which placed Portageville in Wyoming County, rather than Allegany.

Church records show a popular subscription was taken up and work started on the building in 1840. The first meeting for the purpose of organizing a Christian church was held in the new building Aug. 13, 1842. Alanson Ward was named clerk, the Rev. I.[Ichabod] B. Sharp of Hume read the scripture lesson and Rev. A.[Alanson] Kelsey preached. Following appropriate remarks by the brethren on the property and importance of church fellowship, the organization was completed.

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 opening directly into the place of worship. The old-fashioned organ and choir pews are at the opposite end of the room. In front of the altar are two round pillars that are said to have been made by fastening the pieces of timber at each end and turning them with a cant hook, while another workman held a chisel and gradually hewed them down into the desired shape.

The Portageville Universalist Church was an active organization during the days when the Genesee Valley Canal and the Erie Railroad were being constructed, but when work on these projects was completed, the people drifted away from the village and the church was finally closed. In 1880 there were but three original members living and today it is believed there are only three living persons who have at any time held membership in the parish.

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Transcribed on 3 Dec 2010 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY