

History of the Universalist Church

The people of the Universalist faith met on the 28th day of November, 1881, at the Fox Opera House (now Hemstreet Apartments), where they had held religious services for a considerable period of time, for the purpose of organizing a church.

They incorporated under the name, "The Universalist Society of Herkimer," and elected six trustees, as follows: Henry McNeal, Amanda R. Marckres, Orson G. Stearns, G. Monroe Helmer, Hon. Amos H. Prescott (then County Judge and Surrogate) and Amanda A. Eaton.

This church in later years added two additional Herkimer County Judges and Surrogates to its official board membership, viz: Hon. Irving Devendorf and Hon. Charles Bell, the former of whom subsequently was twice elected Supreme Court Justice. And our present resident Supreme Court Judge, Hon. Abram Zoller, while continuing his enrollment in the "old home" Little Falls Universalist church, is a contributing supporter here.

Sheriffs, district attorneys and other officials from our congregation might be mentioned, if space permitted, testifying to the splendid influence of this small society on the public life of Herkimer County and beyond, as all made good in their respective positions.

The lot for erection of the present church edifice on the south side of Park Avenue (then Liberty Street) was purchased under date, March 22, 1882 and was originally a part of the Dr. Peter Pryne tract extending way to Main Street. By May 1, 1882, the contracts for the building had been let and erection proceeded that year. Formal dedication services were held on Thursday afternoon, February 1, 1883, the speakers for that occasion being Hon. A. H. Prescott, historian; Rev. J. J. Brayton, pastor; Rev. E. F. Pember of the Little Falls church, address; and music by a choir consisting of Mrs. T. A. Heard, soprano; Miss Fannie D. Glee, contralto; Charles R. Helmer, tenor; and N. A. Stimson, basso; with Miss M. E. Hadley, organist. Rev. G. W. Powell of Norwalk, Ohio was the speaker at an evening session held the same date, and a later pastor of the church.

In the sixty-five years since that dedication a long line of pastors has served this parish, many starting their ministerial careers here, thence going on to bigger and greater work elsewhere in this and other states in the larger churches of the denomination, but all thankful for the training and helpful experience had with the Herkimer church and with Herkimer people.

Like the other Herkimer churches of all denominations, the Universalist has ever been responsive to worthy calls for service to humanity and has contributed generously, proportionate to its numbers, of young men in each of our country's wars: the Spanish-American, World War I, and World War II. A beautifully designed tablet graces the entrance hall to the church auditorium listing the names of our boys who served in the latest and greatest, and we sincerely hope, the last of these tragic sacrifices to the greed and selfish ambitions of modern flouters of the Christian principles of peace and love.

from the Herkimer County Historical Society
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Transcribed on 6 May 2005 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY