

[Lockport, Niagara Co. NY]

The Universalist Church

The doctrine of God's impartial grace was first proclaimed in Lockport by missionary efforts as early as 1835, but the names of the preachers of that time have been forgotten. The first preacher of whom any record can be obtained was Rev. Job Potter, though Rev. Luther Knapp also preached in the then village, but at what time the records do not disclose. Rev. Job Potter was in the village in the winter of 1836 and 1837, and held meetings in the court-house which resulted, soon after, in the formation of a society under the name of the First Universalist Society of Lockport; but for some cause unknown at this time some of the members lost their interest, and finally the attempt to sustain preaching was abandoned for a time. Those who were the real friends and advocates of the doctrines of the Universalist church, then everywhere spoken against, were discouraged and disheartened by the failure of their efforts, and in this condition affairs remained until early in the summer of 1841, when Rev. Charles Hammond [of Royalton], a preacher of considerable ability, afterwards editor of a Universalist paper, called *The Western Luminary*, published at Rochester, came to the village "determined," to use his own words, "to make a trial" and see what could be done for the cause of truth as he understood it. The friends of the cause, though discouraged and burdened with a debt incurred in their previous efforts, came together at his call and again hired the court-house, and held several meetings. Feeling encouraged by the attendance at the services, the meetings were continued. Being at last refused the use of the court-house, they hired a hall that would seat about one hundred and fifty, and continued their meetings upon every alternate Sunday.

In February, 1842, the Conference of the Niagara Association of Universalists met in the village, the Methodist church being engaged for the services during the two days' session of the association. A number of converts were made to the faith in universal salvation, and united in the bond of church fellowship. About this time the hall occupied for religious worship proved too small to accommodate the congregation, and they moved to Franklin Hall.

On the eleventh day of April, of the same year, a society was organized in accordance with an act passed in 1831, entitled "An act for the incorporation of religious societies," and the following named persons were elected as trustees, to serve in classes as the act provided: For one year, Daniel A. Van Valkenburgh, Harlow V. Wood; for two years, Samuel C. Stevens, David S. Crandall; for three years, Stephen B. Ballou, Abial Eastman. On the fifth day of May, 1842, Elliott Lewis and Samuel C. Stevens appeared before Judge Elias Ransom and certified to the act of incorporation. Steps were immediately taken toward building a meeting-house. A lot on the corner of Church and Ontario streets was purchased at a cost of \$800. The records do not state when the erection of the building was begun or when the corner-stone was laid. There were various delays in the work. Rev. Mr. Hammond closed his labors with the society, and in the spring of 1843 they called the Rev. B. B. Bunker. During his pastorate the church was completed and dedicated in the fall of 1843.

Rev. S. R. [Stephen Rensselaer] Smith, late of Buffalo, preached the dedicatory sermon. Mr. Bunker continued with the society until December, 1844; then there was a

period of supplies, until in April, 1845, Uriah Clark, a young man, was called to the pastorate, and was ordained to the work of the ministry in the church at Lockport, May 23rd, 1845, Rev. S. R. Smith preaching the ordination sermon. The records are silent as to the length of time he served the society, but probably about fifteen months. He was succeeded for a portion of a year by his brother, Rev. George Clark. After this the society called Rev. J. J. Austin, and he remained about six years. A good degree of prosperity was enjoyed under this pastorate. He was succeeded by Rev. Nelson Snell, now of Rochester. This pastorate extended from 1854 to 1862. In November, 1862, Rev. Richmond Fisk, Jr., now of Syracuse, became pastor of the church. His pastorate extended over a period of great political excitement, and a sermon preached by him on the eve of the second election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency of the United States divided the society; a large number left the church and entered other communions, and the church has never fully recovered from the effects of that division. In August, 1865, Mr. Fisk was followed by Rev. E. W. [Elhanan Winchester] Reynolds, who remained only eight months. The next pastor was Rev. William N. Van De Mark, who began his labors in August, 1866, and closed them in April, 1869. During his pastorate the church building was remodeled and enlarged at an expense of about \$6,000. He was a man of much power as a speaker, and drew together a large and admiring congregation. He was followed in July, 1869, by Rev. L. D. Cook, an able and earnest preacher. During his pastorate a large number of persons united with the society, the accession of members being greater than under any previous pastor. He remained about two years, and after a season of candidating, during which many men of note were heard, Rev. Charles F. Lee, now editor of The Christian Leader, a Universalist paper published at Utica, was called to the pastorate. He began his labors September 29th, 1872, and resigned in December, 1873. Although a young man, he possessed marked abilities as a speaker and sermonizer, and was well liked by his people, who parted with him with more than ordinary regret. His immediate successor was Rev. H. B. Smith, now of Stoughton, Massachusetts, who came January 1st, 1874, and remained until June, 1876. After a month's interim, during which time the pulpit was supplied by Rev. A. P. Reiss, a student from the Canton Theological School, Rev. George Adams was called, and became pastor of the society July 1st, 1876, and remained thirteen months. After this, with the exception of an occasional supply, the church was closed until April, 1878. [On] December 23rd, 1877, the present pastor, Miss E. E. Bartlett, preached to a small congregation. She preached again January 20th, 1878, and for three successive Sundays in February, when she was unanimously called to the pastorate of the society, and she began her labors April 7th, 1878. Miss Bartlett is a native of New Haven, Conn., and a graduate of the Theological School at Canton, St. Lawrence county, N. Y. This completes the list of pastors of this society, extending over a period of forty years. The present official control of the society is vested in a board of six trustees, as follows: J. M. Chrysler, J. B. Boyce, Frederick Crosby, John McCue, J. S. Breyfogle, John Reando; clerk, J. Dunham; treasurer, C. C. Parker.

A Sunday-school was organized in 1841, and has continued with varying success since that time. It is now in a healthful and growing condition. The first pastor received

[Lockport, Niagara Co. NY]

a salary of \$500. Others have received as high as \$1,500. The society has always been burdened with more or less debt. Efforts have been made from time to time to cancel the indebtedness, though without success; but at present the outlook is hopeful, and the end so much to be desired by all interested in the welfare of the church seems likely to be attained.

History of Niagara County, New York (New York: Sanford & Co., 1878) p. 208

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