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UNIVERSALISTS CAME TO LOCKPORT SOON AFTER QUAKERS

In 1835 Itinerant Preachers First Brought the Creed to Lockport
CHURCH IN 1843

(By Rev. William J. Metz)

Universalism, or as then interpreted the Doctrine of Impartial Grace came into Western New York following hard on the heels of the earliest pioneers.

About 1835 itinerant preachers began proclaiming the Universality of God's Love in Lockport. But the names of those missionaries and also of the early residents who became interested seem to be lost. However, Rev. Job Potter and Rev. Luther [Liscomb] Knapp were here during 1836 and 1837 and after preaching a number of times to fairly large audiences in the Court House, organized "The First Universalist Society of Lockport." This, however, did not seem the opportune time, for the organization seems to have died very soon, leaving the friends of the cause very discouraged and disheartened.

So conditions remained until 1841 when the Rev. Charles Hammond came "determined to make a trial and see what could be done for the cause of truth," as he understood it. Being refused the use of the Court House, a hall seating about 150 persons was rented and services held. In 1842 the Niagara Association of Universalists met in the village for a two days' session, using the Methodist Church. A number of converts were made. And on April 11 of the same year an organization was completed with the following men serving as the first board of trustees: Daniel A. Van Valkenburgh and Harlow V. Wood for one year; Samuel C. Stevens and David S. Crandall for two years; Stephen B. Ballou and Abial Eastman, for three years.

Church Organized

On May 5, 1842, Elliott Lewis and Samuel C. Stevens certified to the act of incorporation before Judge Elias Ransom. The procuring of a building lot at a cost of \$800 at the corner of Church and Ontario streets was the next step and between that time and the fall of 1843 the present church edifice was erected. Rev. Hammond having closed his work during the spring months, Rev. B. B. Bunker became the pastor.

War Caused Trouble

The society under the leadership of several different ministers seems to have had a more or less smooth career and presumably continued adding to its membership until about 1846. With the feeling over the issues of the war running high and with many "Copperheads" living in Lockport, it was not to be unexpected that a strong Unionistic sermon preached by Rev. Richmond P. Fisk—then pastor—should cause trouble. A number of members and their families immediately withdrew and it is said several years passed by before the society recovered, even in part, from the shock.

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In August, 1866, William N. Van De Mark became pastor and during his three years' work the church, at considerable expense, was enlarged and thoroughly renovated and redecorated.

Rev. L. [Theodore] D. Cook, who became the next minister, had the distinction of receiving more people into the fellowship of the church than any of his predecessors.

Again quite a period of years passed by during which the church was served by different ministers as the accompanying list shows, and during which also there was had a fair amount of success.

Rev. Powell Here.

In 1888 Rev. G. W. Powell became pastor. He was according to reports a powerful preacher whose sermons drew such crowds that often times chairs needed to be placed in the aisles. But while crowds heard the sermons, somehow few, if any, became permanently associated with the society. And unfortunately, when Brother Powell left after a pastorate of four years many families withdrew their membership, leaving the society so weak for a time that the question of closing the doors permanently was debated.

But through the persevering efforts of the loyal few and the consecrated work of the several pastors—one of whom, Rev. F. H. York, admittedly worked himself to death while trying to minister to the churches at Niagara Falls, Lockport and Olcott each Sunday—the church continued to serve the needs of the liberal religious element.

A very important part of the work carried on by the church through all these years has been the Sunday School. In this department perhaps no one individual did more work or served more faithfully through eighteen long years than the late E. J. Williams. His period of superintending will always be remembered by those who knew the man as one in which [whom] the thought of service was ever uppermost.

Women Helped Greatly

And surely the record of the Lockport Universalist church can never be truly written without giving a prominent place to the women of the parish, as they have worked and served thru the Women's Aid Association. It has always been efficiently officered and were it not for the persevering efforts of the good women in raising large sums of money through suppers, fairs and the like, the problem of financing the church would often have been a task too large to meet. But now the vision is looming large in the minds of many of these faithful ones of seeing the church thoroughly renovated and redecorated. Thus the good work goes on.

The following ministers have served the Lockport Church:

Rev. Luther [Liscomb] Knapp, Rev. Job Potter, 1836-1837.

Rev. Charles Hammond, 1841-1843.

Rev. B. B. Bunker, 1843-Dec. 1844, 1846.

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Rev. George Clark, part of one year.

Rev. J. J. Austin, 1847-1852.

Rev. Nelson Snell, 1854-1862.

Rev. Richmond P. Fisk, Nov. 1862-Aug. 1865.

Rev. E. W. [Elhanan Winchester] Reynolds, eight months. [Fatally ill with consumption and asthma, he died in August 1868.]

Rev. Wm. N. Van De Mark, Aug. 1866?-Apr. 1869.

Rev. L. D. Cook, July 1869-Dec. 1871.

Rev. Charles F. Lee, Sept. 1872-Dec. 1873.

Rev. H. B. Smith, Jan. 1874-June 1876.

Rev. A. P. Reiss, supply one month.

Rev. George Adams, July 1876-Aug. 1877.

Rev. Miss E. E. Bartlett, Apr. 1878

Rev. H. A. Westfall, 1882.

Rev. J. H. Farnsworth, 1883.

Rev. F. A. Gray, 1884-1887.

Rev. G. W. Powell, 1888-1892.

Rev. T. B. T. Fisher, 1893-1895.

Rev. J. A. Copeland, 1896-1897.

Closed 2 years.

Rev. A. V. Hutchins, 1900.

Rev. O. [Otis] F. Alvord, 1901-Oct. 1903.

Rev. F. H. York Apr. 1904-Oct. 1905 (died).

Rev. T. J. Farmer, Jan. 1906-Oct. 1908.

Rev. L. C. Nichols, Jan. 1909-Dec. 1910.

Rev. H. M. Wright, Apr. 1911-Apr. 1917.

Rev. L. G. Williams, Nov. 1917-May 1918.

Rev. William J. Metz, Oct. 1918.

Metz Cleared Mortgage

The Rev. William J. Metz, pastor of this church since the autumn of 1918, came to our city with his family from southern Ohio. He has been preaching about fourteen years and has had the pleasure of serving several churches in Northern and Central New York. He also had charge during the war period of two churches in Ohio combining there with some missionary work across the line in West Virginia.

During his pastorate the big work accomplished by the church has been the elimination and clearing up of a long standing mortgage. The culmination came in a rousing celebration and burning last April.

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Besides this, however, many special helpful services had been held, the Sunday School doubled in its average attendance and the church membership increased about forty per cent.

In denominational circles he has been for some time the secretary-treasurer of the Universalist Ministers Institute of New York State as well as the President of the Niagara Association of Universalists of Western New York. Locally he is secretary of the Lockport Council of Churches and a member of the Council of Religious Education as well as one of the nine members of the Board of Religious Education having as its specific work the maintenance and management of the Community Religious School.

He is a graduate of the Canton Theological School at Canton, New York and holds the degree of Bachelor of Sacred Theology from St. Lawrence University. At the present time he is also serving as pastor of the Universalist Church at Olcott, N.Y.

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