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Corner Stone of Universalist Church Layed Fifty Years Ago—Celebration Planned
CHURCH OF MESSIAH WILL HAVE FOUR-DAY ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

On Thursday, Friday and Saturday, May 2, 3, 4, the Congregation of the First Universalist Church of the Messiah of Fort Plain will hold observances celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone of the present church on May 2, 1896. The celebration not only marks an important event in the history of the Universalist Society, which extends back over a century of time, but it also serves to commemorate the great contribution to the religious life of the community, which has been made by this liberal church, the first to be erected in Fort Plain.

The several observances, scheduled by the Church Society, will attract widespread interest and large attendance.

The Fiftieth Anniversary Banquet opens the series of three-day observances on Thursday evening, May 2, with the promise of a large attendance and an interesting program of addresses and toasts by prominent Universalists.

The Rededication Service is scheduled for Friday evening, May 3. A Universalist Town Meeting is listed for Saturday evening, May 4.

The Sunday morning Services, on May 5, will afford an interesting religious program and the Communion Services, on Sunday evening, will conclude what promises to be an eventful and interesting three-day celebration schedule.

THE NEW CHURCH

"The prospect for the erecting [of] a new church was discussed and favorably considered" are the first words to be found in the Church's records, indicating that the original building, twice remodeled and redecorated, had become inadequate to the needs of the parish. This entry is found under the date of April 22, 1895. The men present at the meeting of the Board of Trustees for which is [sic] was made were Lester M. Weller, chairman; Will J. Diefendorf, William Yerdon, and M. McCann, clerk.

The Church was then without a minister, the Rev. E. A. Perry having terminated his second pastorate on May 1, 1895. He had served the Church from 1886-1887 and then, after the brief pastorate of the Rev. Ure Mitchell, had returned in 1889 to serve for six years. He was a man of resourcefulness and courage, and was sensitive to the call of duty. Who shall estimate the impetus which he gave to the conviction that a new church building was necessary?

Whatever the preliminary cogitations, we find the Board of Trustees of the Church of the Messiah transacting two important contracts on May 27, 1895. And note the order in which they came! First, "the subject of building

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a new Church Edifice here was then discussed, and decided favorably by the Trustees.

"Subscriptions were then in order, and the amount in aggregate subscribed by the Gentlemen present decided the Trustees to contract for the erecting of a New Church Building here."

The "Gentlemen present" were Lester M. Weller, chairman; Daniel L. Devoe, William Yerdon, Sylvester P. Dillenback of the Board; also the Rev. Daniel Wright, Syracuse, N.Y., Edwin W. Wood, Robert H. Shearer, Joseph Smith, and M. McCann, clerk of the Board.

The item of business which came second to the above historical episode was the no less important hiring of a minister. The optimism of them! They would have a new church, minister or no! Decide that first, and then hire the minister. And so they proceeded: "On motion," so runs the record, "it was resolved to call Rev. Daniel Wright of Syracuse, N.Y., as Pastor for one year from May first, 1895, to April 30th, 1896, at twelve hundred dollars a year. The Rev. Mr. Wright being present accepted the call."

Has any church or any minister ever proceeded on anything stronger than this faith which both these parties exhibited?

We have no record of the official minutes of the Church as to whom the contract for the construction of the building was let[,] nor as to the date upon which it was consummated. The memory of some people whose experience goes back to that day reveals that Adam Pickard was the builder.

The Building Committee consisted of Lester M. Weller, chairman; Abram Diefendorf and William Yerdon. An advisory Board supplementing this Committee was composed of E. W. Wood, R. H. Shearer, and Joseph Smith. Mr. Daniel I. Devoe was appointed treasurer of the Building Fund.

We know that work had proceeded apace and that on May 2, 1896, at 2 o'clock on a hot afternoon an impressive ceremony of the laying of the cornerstone was held. Masons of the Fort Plain Lodge opened the exercises with the impressive and actual laying of the stone. "Send Out Thy Light" by Charles Gounod was sung by the Church Quartette. Addresses by the Rev. J. D. Corby, Secretary of the New York State Convention of Universalists, the Rev. Vincent E. Tomlinson, and the Rev. C. B. Lynn impressed all present with the solemnity and challenge of the occasion. "Dedication" by Robert Franz was sung by Ida Evelyn Canfield and was followed by the benediction.

A photograph of the occasion, the prized possession of the Hufnail family, which will be exhibited at the Church during the Fiftieth Anniversary celebration and which is reproduced on these page shows these ceremonies in progress. In stovepipe hat, Mr. Joseph Duncan is speaking, surrounded by a ring of Masons. The tripod presumably marks the spot where the cornerstone lies. Only the foundation and part of a back wall have been constructed. Views of the Finehout, Shumway and Smith residences are

clearly seen. The numerous umbrellas [i.e. parasols] denote the great heat of the day.

Work on the building had progressed so rapidly that on January 9, 1897, the annual meeting of the society was held in the lecture room of the new church. The Rev. H. W. Carr had been called to be minister on the first of the new year, and on Tuesday afternoon, February 16, 1897, the dedicatory services of the Church of the Messiah were held. The music was under the direction of Mrs. Fenton O. Diefendorf and both Miss Ida Evelyn Canfield and Mr. Diefendorf sang. A dedicatory hymn, written by the Rev. L. C. [Lewis Cresaba] Browne for the dedication of the first church, December 25, 1833, and used also on December 30, 1874, was sung by the congregation. The Rev. Daniel Ballou, minister of the Church from 1872-1873, gave the invocation. Scripture was read by the Rev. Vincent E. Tomlinson; the sermon was preached by the Rev. John Coleman Adams, D.D.; the address to the Parish was made by the Rev. Frederick W. Betts, the prayer was given by the Rev. Isaac M. Atwood, D.D., and the benediction was pronounced by the minister, the Rev. H. W. Carr.

The new Church of the Messiah (Universalist) was headed for the twentieth century with a full boiler of steam and all brakes released.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE FORT PLAIN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

At an early date, perhaps 1825, in that portion of the township known as Dutchtown, about two miles from the village of Fort Plain, there was held a discussion, lasting two days, between the Rev. Messrs. Stephen R. Smith and George B. Lester, Universalists, on one side, and two clergymen from an orthodox group, on the other side. The Universalist interest was powerfully expounded by these gentlemen, and these discussions seem to have been the beginning of the Universalist influence in this section of the Mohawk Valley.

During the years 1832-33, the Rev. Job Potter of Cooperstown had regular appointments to preach in Fort Plain once in four weeks, showing that a strong attention had been called to the Universalist beliefs during the previous seven years. The meetings with Mr. Potter were held in the village school-house. He exchanged occasionally with the Rev. Dolphus Skinner of Utica. At times the meetings were held in the old Dutch church on the hill, and on one occasion in a large barn at Stone Arabia, four miles north of Fort Plain. Mr. Skinner drew large audiences; and through the active exertions of Mr. Solomon Saunders, his paper, the "Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate," obtained wide circulation in Fort Plain and vicinity.

Sometime in 1832 Mr. Skinner and Dominie Ketchum each preached a discourse in Palatine, each setting forth his own and combatting his opponent's views. This meeting told heavily in favor of the Liberal cause.

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Late in the year 1832, Mr. Solomon Saunders purchased the lot on which the Universalist Church stands, taking the deed in his own name, and concealing the purpose for which it was intended, as the owner would not have sold it had he known the object! Mr. Saunders called a meeting at his house of a few prominent friends of the cause, to consider the subject of building a church, and offering the lot at the reasonable price it had cost. The gentlemen present were Henry Adams, Henry Cook, Daniel Casler, Daniel Ellis, William Haslett, Adam A. Nestell, Solomon Saunders, and L. C. Browne. Several of these gentlemen were willing to contribute one hundred dollars each if two thousand dollars could be raised. But one of the number felt sure that this amount could not be raised, that the attempt would be a failure, and that it would be "better to sit still than to get up and then fall down." Gradually this became the prevailing thought.

Mr. Saunders was greatly disheartened and somewhat disgusted. Mr. Browne, who had come to reside here the previous fall as teacher of the village school, and who was contemplating entering the ministry, fully sympathized with Mr. Saunders. As the meeting was about to break up without taking any action, he suggested that the meeting adjourn for one week, that Mr. Saunders call upon all who were supposed [e.g. believed] to be friendly and ascertain how much each would contribute on condition that \$2,000 were raised, and that he report at the adjourned meeting.

When the same friends came together again, Mr. Saunders reported an informal subscription of \$2,300! Later, a formal subscription was drawn up and some \$2,500 was pledged; the contract was let to Messrs. Norton and Dillenback, and the enterprise pushed with much enthusiasm.

A meeting was soon called for the purpose of organizing a society. Mr. Browne, by request, had drawn up and presented a constitution which was adopted. The name given the new organization was "The First Universalist Society of Minden."

There was at this time no church building in the village. The Dutch Reformed and Methodist people alternately held union meetings in a hall. Their ministers frequently assailed the views and character of the Universalists. On two occasions, Mr. Browne reviewed their discourses on Sunday evenings in the school-house, with a full attendance.

After the work on the church had begun, a movement was made to provide a bell. The following gentlemen each gave \$100 for this object and their names were cast upon the bell: John Wagner, Robert Crouse, Joseph Wagner.

On Christmas Day, 1833, the new church was dedicated. On the evening previous there had been a service for which the new edifice had been elaborately decorated in the spirit of the season. The Rev. S. R. Smith was

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the preacher for both occasions. People came from far and near, and the audiences were large.

At the beginning of 1834, by the recommendation of Mr. Browne, the Rev. Jesse Bushnell, his early friend and schoolmate, was called to the pastorate. He was a man of fair ability, fine presence, great earnestness, and high character, and under his ministry, the old prejudices toward Universalism began to decline. Near the end of 1835, his health failed and he never resumed the ministerial work. The Rev. L. C. Browne, who had been ordained a year before, succeeded Mr. Bushnell.

The new minister, in the summer of 1837, organized a Sabbath school. Having been the teacher of the village school, he had largely the friendship of the young people, and there was no scarcity of material for pupils or teachers. Mr. Daniel Zoller was the superintendent.

By 1874 it was found necessary to remodel the building and rededication services were held. Again in 1880 the building was enlarged and remodeled. As years passed the old building was found inadequate for the needs of a modern church. By 1896 plans for razing the old and building the new had taken shape and the cornerstone was laid May 2, 1896 at 2 p.m. It was completed and dedicated February 16, 1897, in the pastorate of the Rev. Herbert W. Carr.

MINISTERS OF THE UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH 1830-1946

Job Potter	1832-1833
Jesse Bushnell	1834-1835
L. C. Browne	1836-1837
Henry Lyon	1838-1839
H. Belding	1839-1840
H. [Henry] B. Soule	1841-
W. [Walter] Bullard	1842-
A. C. Barry [Barray], D.D.	1843-1846
H. [Henry] L. Hayward	1847-
G. [George] Gage	1848-
A. B. [Aaron Bort] Grosh	1853-1856
C. E. Hewes	1857-1860
H. H. Baker	1861-1865
D. Skinner	1866-1867
B. L. Bennett	1867-1871
Daniel Ballou	1872-1873
E. W. [Elhanan Winchester] Fuller	1875-1878

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L. J. [Luther Jacobs] Fletcher, D.D.	1879-1881
L. M. Burrington	1882-1883
M. W. Tabor	1884-1885
E. [Edward] A. Perry	1886-1887
Ure Mitchell	1887-1888
E. [Edward] A. Perry	1889-1895
Daniel Wright	1895-1896
H. [Herbert] W. Carr	1897-1900
A. [Arnold] S. Yantis	1901-1902
Stannard D. Butler, D.D.	1902-1904
Louis J. Richards	1905-1910
Edwin Evans	1910-
George A. Gay	1910-1914
H. Elmer Gilchrist	1914-1915
Herbert F. Moulton, D.D.	1915-1925
Benjamin F. Butler	1925-
Henry B. Taylor, D.D.	1926-1928
Rufus H. Dix	1928-1934
Gustave H. Ulrich	1934-1937
William A. Haney	1937-1943
Warren B. Lovejoy	1943-

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Observances at Fort Plain Church Close

FORT PLAIN, May 6.—The 50th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone of the Universalist Church of the Messiah came to a successful close last evening with Communion of the Lord's Supper.

The sermon for the occasion was given by Dean John Murray Atwood, D.D., dean of the Canton Theological School of St. Lawrence University, entitled "The Enabling Power in Triumphant Living." The several different sessions of the four-day observances were well attended by interested people.

Sunday morning the sermon was given by the Rev. Gustav H. Ulrich, D.D., minister of the churches in Kinston, Outlaws [Outlaw's] Bridge, Shelter Neck and Woodington, North Carolina. He was minister of the Fort Plain Church from 1934 to 1937.

Saturday night at the church a Universalist Town Meeting was held with Dean Atwood presiding and the theme was "Liberalism—Dynamite." The panel taking part was composed of the Rev. Clinton A. Moulton, Dolgeville; the Rev. Charles G. Girelius, pastor of the Reformed Christian Church, Unitarian, Barneveld, and the Rev. John S. McPhee, minister of the Church of the Reconciliation, Universalist-Unitarian, Utica.

At Friday night's session a re-dedication service was held with the sermon delivered by the Rev. Cornelius Greenway, D.D., minister of All Souls' Universalist Church of Brooklyn.

Evening Recorder, Amsterdam NY, Mon. 6 May 1946

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