

[Mount Vernon, Westchester Co. NY]

## EARLY DAYS IN MOUNT VERNON

### Historical Sketch

#### CITY AND CHURCH HISTORY INTIMATELY ASSOCIATED

Sermon by Rev. C. H. Pennoyer on the History of the Universalist Church Brings  
Out Many Interesting Incidents Connected With the History of the Community

It is always interesting to gather a gleam of history from the events that have transpired in Mount Vernon since the days of the Home Industrial Association in 1850, and on Sunday morning, it being an anniversary day, Rev. Charles H. Pennoyer, pastor of the First Universalist Society, preached the anniversary sermon on the history of the church. The Argus last week gave a list of the number of pastors who have occupied the pulpit of the church, so it will not be necessary to repeat the list at this time. There are others who took, perhaps, just as important a part in the up building of the first church in this city, as did the ministers, and of these we make record.

Mr. Pennoyer took as his text the following words from Mat. 13:17: "For verily I say unto you that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them."

Mount Vernon was incorporated Dec. 13, 1853. In 1851 Messrs. John Stevens, Cornelius A. Cooper, John A. Cornell and George W. Cooper met over a hardware store in Hudson St., New York, and planned the co-operative settlement of Mount Vernon. Cornelius Cooper compiled the constitution and bylaws of the Industrial Home Association. At that time 1,000 lots, 100x110, were laid out in the farms that this association had purchased, and these lots were drawn by the members of the association.

After stores and school-houses had been arranged for, and this took a year or more, three churches began their existence here. They were the Dutch Reformed, Methodist and Universalist, and shortly thereafter Trinity. Horace Greeley, who was a Universalist, was interested in the Association at that time.

Services had previously been held in private houses and then the Universalists met for the first time in Journaux Hall, over a carpenter shop, corner Fifth avenue and Fourth street, that being the place where they stately attended "Divine worship with occasional preaching."

The first meeting was held in the spring of 1852. In the summer Cornelius Cooper and Horace M. Gowan, two Universalists, took George W. Cooper and John W. Cornell to Hoboken, N.J., to inspect a church, after which to pattern the church to be built here.

After this, meetings were held at Central Hall, over the grocery store corner of Third avenue and Fourth street, which was destroyed by fire about eighteen years ago. These meetings were like Sunday-school sessions, with church service and sermon by lay readers.

The meeting preliminary to organization was held Aug. 12, 1854, when Horace M. Gowan, David R. Cooper, Cornelius A. Cooper, Thomas W. Atkinson, Anthony Bennett, and Myron Harris were appointed a committee to organize. Myron Harris was chairman of the meeting, and Mr. C. Cooper, Mr. Gowan, and Mr. William Bertine were elected trustees.

The society was to be forever known as the "First Universalist Society of Mount Vernon," with Mr. Gowan and Mr. Thomas W. Atkinson as signers of the certificate of

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incorporation. The second general meeting was held on May 6, 1855, and plans were prepared and the church was built by Henry Webb, and dedicated Sept. 23, 1856, being the oldest church edifice now in Mount Vernon used continuously for church services. Mr. Cooper was chairman of the Board of Trustees at that time.

The lot corner of Fourth street and Third avenue, where the church is located, was drawn by Mr. James A. Smith, No. 201, and sold to the society.

The first parish meeting was held Oct. 12, 1856; David Cooper, who was a justice of the peace, a prominent man in the Industrial Association, and a carpenter and builder, no relation to Cornelius Cooper, was prominently identified with the church at that time.

Thomas W. Atkinson, one of the first president[s] of the village of Mount Vernon and a prominent iron merchant, was one of the charter members, and later he was identified with Trinity church, as a charter member.

Horace M. Gowen, a trustee, drew lot 607 in Seventh avenue. He was a hatter in New York.

William Bertine, justice of [the] peace, resided in Eastchester, a large owner of property, also one of the first trustees and charter members.

Cornelius A. Cooper, a man of considerable note in New York and Mount Vernon, drew lot 89, on S. first avenue, where his widow now lives, was one of the first trustees, charter member, secretary and treasurer of the church. He was the first Sunday-school superintendent and an able and fine man, second to no one in the pioneer settlement in Mount Vernon.

He organized a [military] company of his own and went to the front in 1860 as captain, serving at Bull Run and being soon afterward appointed judge advocate. He became sick and died [in Virginia]. The funeral services were very large, and were held [on 1 Dec 1862] at the Bleecker street Universalist Church, New York. He was principal of one of the public schools before the war and at the time of his funeral the public schools were closed, the children attended the funeral and the flags were placed at half mast.

Amos Cheney, who drew lot No. 229, on S. Third avenue, was a charter member.

James Longstreet, Edwin J. Small, John M. Blomer, Mrs. Julia A. Needham, Thomas Shute, George L. Baxter, Mr. and Mrs. Berry, Mrs. Mary A. Chambers, James M. Chichester, Henry Dearborn, E. B. Eston, W. Esterbrook, Mrs. Flandreaux, Mrs. Ida Giles, Mrs. Charles W. Hatfield, Mrs. J. C. Higgs, Mrs. W. H. Hills Williams, Mrs. Sarah May Johnson, Mrs. Louise Rider Kennedy, Mrs. Hannah Beach, the Misses Caroline and Adeline Kitchen, Mrs. W. Levinis, Frank Logee, Mrs. McDonald, Mrs. E. M. Manning, Mrs. Lizzy Hazen Quanz, Robert Owen, C. F. Rieger, Mrs. H. C. Scharff, Robert Shields, Ralph H. Smith, Miss Julia L. Stoothoff, Mrs. E. M. Davis, Mr. Rankin, Mr. and Mrs. N. L. Stubbings, Mrs. L. Dearborn Thompson, were some of the older members.

Other names Caleb Morgan, Justice of Peace, thirty years vestryman of St. Paul's Eastchester became a member and trustee in 1856.

After the war services were discontinued for a while when the society united with the Swedenborgian's Rev. Oliver Dyer, preached sermons.

The society was revived after the funeral services of Caleb Morgan held in the Methodist church, in 1876, when Dr. James M. Pullman preached with such great force and effect.

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Mr. Morgan at the time of his death was the most aged Freemason in Westchester County.

Gilbert W. Barnes, who was an active member, entered the ministry as did also his son.

Among the moderators of the church were Ministers Lyon, Lombard, Shepard; Bertine, David Quackenbush, president of the village of Mount Vernon, Charles H. Ostrander, Thomas M. Taylor, M. B. Sloat, and James M. Blanchard.

Clerks of the church, George W. White, C. E. Cooper, John W. Coombs, R. G. Spicer, C. T. Hazen, D. H. Pell Secor, C. E. King, J. McFarland, R. C. Covert, Clarence E. Holmes, J. J. Lellanheur, D. D. Russell, Dwight E. Wheeler, Jr.

Treasurers: Myron Harris, James Longstreet, E. I. Small, J. W. Coombs, A. Cheney, C. T. Hazen, Beekman Van Gosbeck, C. H. Ostrander, G. T. Lovell, W. B. Lascelle, James A. Blanchard and Chas. E. Fogg.

Sunday-school superintendents: C. A. Cooper, E. I. Small, C. King, C. E. Holmes, M. B. Sloat.

Those who helped with the church music were: Henry Chapman, Mrs. Dederer, C. McKenzie, Mr. Johnson, M. B. Sloat, Miss Alice Fogg, Dr. H. G. Sloat.

Others who have been trustees and officers were: Caleb Morgan, A. Bennett, W. D. Bauerman, A. Scott, M. Odell, G. W. Barnes, C. I. Hathaway, M. B. May, A. Cornwall, T. B. Simmons, D. E. Wheeler, S. W. Carpenter, W. J. Sageman, L. E. Field, Dr. J. E. House, R. H. Stettson, H. J. Robinson, E. B. Barquet, C. W. Bean, W. A. Trowbridge.

Over 300 families have passed through this church, and while it has not grown strong in members and in wealth as some of the other churches have done, Mr. Pennoyer feels that it has had its influence for much good in this community.

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Transcribed on 16 Oct 2012 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester NY