

[Newfane (Olcott), Niagara Co.]

BR. SAWYER:—Dear sir: As you are not frequently troubled with communications from your “lay brethren,” you will perhaps excuse a few lines from one of that class, written from this locality, and especially as we have no pastor at present to communicate with you in regard to our affairs.

You are aware, no doubt, that there is such a place as “Olcott” on the shore of Lake Ontario, in Niagara county, and that for a long time Universalism has been known and preached in this region, with more or less success. The old *Magazine and Advocate*, under the editorial charge of Br. D. Skinner, was once taken here by about twenty subscribers. Finally, in process of time our cause had almost died out, when in 1854 our young Br. R[oyall] H. Pullman came among us, and we had for a few years a season of prosperity, so much so, that we decided to build a house of worship. It was completed in the fall of 1858 and dedicated. We then supposed we had made provision for the whole cost of the church and its furniture, but on footing up our expenses and collecting our subscriptions, we found ourselves in debt \$900 to \$1000. This, together with other expenses and deficits, increased the debt, till in January, 1864, the whole amounted to \$1700, or over.

Since the building of our church in 1858, we have had constant preaching until the fall of 1862. By deaths, removals, and those who had left for the war, our numbers and pecuniary resources, had at this time been very much reduced, and the prospect, with a heavy debt hanging over us, was gloomy enough.

In the summer of 1862, Br. Wiles, who had been our pastor for two years, decided to enlist for the war, and help to put down the rebellion; he tendered his resignation as pastor, which we, as a loyal people, felt bound to accept, and took a Captain’s commission in the 151st Regiment, N.Y.V. Since that time we have had only occasional preaching, by ministers from abroad.

In December last, Br. Wiles returned, on leave of absence to recruit his health, which was very much impaired, and has since preached to us as often as his health would permit. Finally we decided to have a conference (as had been our former custom) while Br. Wiles was with us. A notice of this meeting, you will recollect, was published in the *Ambassador*, to be held the 20th and 21st of January.

The weather was unpropitious before and during the first day of our meeting; still we had a fair attendance, but no ministers except Br. Whitcomb and Br. Wiles. Some had good and valid excuses, but we remembered that it is said “rats always leave a sinking ship.” In this instance, however, they were premature.

On the second day of our meeting our church affairs and indebtedness was brought forward, and a full statement of our condition presented to the meeting, and the alternative of providing for the debt, or losing the church, was submitted. Before closing the meeting, over twelve hundred dollars was pledged toward payment of our debt, and we have now the whole amount subscribed.

You cannot imagine what a change has taken place in our feelings and prospects. Our little society has contributed largely [i.e. substantially] according to its means [the next words are obliterated]. Of course we have received help from our good friends and neighbors, who are not, do not claim to be, Universalists.

Next summer we expect to have preaching at least half the time, but we determined not to incur any debts. Our church is worth at this time \$6000.

You will excuse this long article—longer than I intended it should be. There are many of your readers, however, who will be glad to hear from us, and who will rejoice in our success.

Olcott, Feb. 1864

Truly yours, J. D. Cooper

Christian Ambassador, New York, Sat. 12 Mar 1864