

[Otsego (Fly Creek), Otsego Co.]

REMINISCENCES OF EARLY FLY CREEK CHURCH ARE TOLD

If my memory serves me correctly, the first Universalist sermon preached west of the Hudson river was delivered by the Rev. John Murray in a log school house in the Eddy school district on Christian Hill in the town of Hartwick, the log building standing about an eighth of a mile west of the present school house.

This event took place about 1800 and among those present was my grandfather, Ephriam Carr. From this beginning services became frequent being held in private homes and public places.

This mode of worship was continued until 1820. Prior to this, meetings were held for the purpose of discussing the question of building a church. At the first gathering William Sprague was chosen chairman and Dwight Jarvis clerk. In 1820 the frame of the Universalist church at Fly Creek was raised, two days being required for the task and a barrel of liquor consumed during the operation. I mention this incident, not in the spirit of levity, but as an historical fact.

The Rev. Mr. [Nathaniel M.] Stacey, a Universalist minister, came to Hartwick, in or about 1805, preaching for the society and elsewhere about the county. Soon after his arrival he began the organization of an association for the development of a larger field, and the first state association was formed, the Eddy school house society being the first church unit formed in the state.

Success seems to have crowned the efforts of the faithful so rapidly that a meeting comprising much of the state of New York was called in 1808 to convene in the Baptist church in Hartwick village. Members came from far and near, a most enthusiastic gathering.

In 1847 a conference of Universalists convened at the Eddy school house in the town of Hartwick in honor of the preaching of the first Universalist sermon and the organization of the first society of Universalists.

To the writer it would seem most fitting for the Universalist church to erect a monument or marker on the spot these historical events took place. As the years pass, such incidents are forgotten and events of note like this are soon lost in the dim mists of oblivion. May the great Universalist denomination act ere it is too late.

From the completion of the Universalist church at Fly Creek continuous services have been maintained until within a few years past. It is to be hoped that this old church, with so many hallowed memories of bygone days will be again open to the public.

The writer remembers most vividly attending worship in the Presbyterian church across the street with his honored father, and as the service progressed and the wooden seats became harder the time was occupied in counting the window panes, looking into the graveyard, and watching the people come out of the Universalist church. As I sat there how many times I have wished we could go there to church because the minister did not preach long sermons like Dr. McHarg of pleasant thought.

While penning these lines I look back through the memory of boyhood and see coming out of the church, Sheldon H. Elderkin, Frank G. Jarvis, Lester Colman, "Old Dr.

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Sib" and Mrs. Crim wearing that particular head gear called a "Jockey," the like of which I shall never forget.

About 1860 the church was repaired and the spire surmounted by a cross. At the completion of the work Wesley Houck, one of the carpenters, stood on his head on the arms of the cross. About 1900 Howard E. Jones, while repairing the steeple, removed the cross on account of decay.

At the annual meeting of the society held at the church January 24, 1863, "On motion it was restored to hold a festival." "On motion a committee of ten was appointed to make arrangements for same": Fay Taylor, Marietta Taylor, Chester Babbitt, Mary Babbitt, Everett Preston, Charlotte Preston, Frederic Roberts, Louisa Roberts, German Potter, Lucretia Potter and Mr. and Mrs. S. W. Alger. This seems to have been the beginning of the "Universalist festivals" so popular during my boyhood days.

These gatherings were held at Oaksville as a get-together of the church members and their friends. Large crowds attended and they were a great success both socially and financially. Old Dan Babbitt, a neighbor living near the Carr homestead, and evidently not in sympathy [sic] with such gatherings named it the "religious dance." These festivals continued until within a few years past when they were abandoned. While the writer never attended those delightful socials it recalls most vividly those days of youth when private gatherings were held at the homes of Frank G. Jarvis, James C. Camp, Jared Smith, and others. These were the days when Spencer Irish and his wife furnished the music and the girls would "bake and fetch."

At this time the "fox trot," "shimmy" and the "bunny hug" had not made their debut in the ball room. The writer never hears such familiar "calls" as "Salute your partner!," "Ladies change!" and "Balance!" without a most ardent desire to give it one more whirl!

My first introduction to the three "R's" began in the school house at Fork Shop many years ago. How vividly I remember going out of the gate and turning north in my quest for knowledge, the first object in the distance to attract my attention was the spire on the Universalist church. To me that shaft has been a "cloud by day" and I find myself many times looking northward to see the inspiration of my youth.

The writer remembers with pleasure some of the able ministers that have preached within those historic walls. The Rev. Mr. Dodge, a small man wearing a high hat, who boarded with Naaman Perkins; the Rev. Mr. Fisher; the Rev. Mr. Perry and the Rev. Charles Kramer, of all of whom I have pleasant memories.

Cuyler E. Carr

*Otsego Farmer*, Cooperstown NY, Fri. 26 Oct 1928

Transcribed on 19 Dec 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester NY