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CENTENNIAL OF UNIVERSALIST CHURCH MARKED
Appropriate Services Held at the Church of the Messiah
PROMINENT SPEAKERS

Local Organization Founded in 1831, Two Years Before First Edifice Erected

Fitting observance of the Centennial of the Universalist church in Cooperstown was made at the Church of the Messiah on Friday evening of last week with a service which brought several of the leaders of the denomination to the village as speakers and a congregation which included not only members of the local church, but goodly delegations from those of surrounding towns.

The Centennial year of 1933 is the anniversary of the erection of the first place of worship by the society here, but the church itself antedates that event by two years, as it was organized April 26, 1831. The roll of its founders includes such local names as Ellery Cory, Holder Cory, Henry Beadle, B. Taylor Comstock, Seth Doubleday, Isaac Fitch, Esek Bradford, Joseph Perkins, Levi H. Pierce, Levi Wood, James I. Paul, William Wilson, Richard Cooley, Stephen Gregory and Abram Van Horne, and throughout the century that has elapsed a large number of Cooperstown's best citizens, both men and women, have been included in its membership, while the able men who have filled the pulpit have made a deep impress upon the village life. Except for brief intervals when there was no resident pastor, the church has held services her continuously during all the years since its organization.

The pastor, Rev. Charles Kramer, presided at the service. Appropriate music was provided by the choir and organist, Mrs. Douglas O. Walrath, and Miss Ruth Kramer sang the soprano solo, "Twilight and Dawn," with beautiful expression. The Rev. Mr. Kramer devoted the major portion of his opening remarks to a brief sketch of the history of the church, which is given below, following which the service took the form of a platform meeting with the following distinguished guest speakers: the Rev. H. W. Skeels of Herkimer, general secretary of the national Universalist convention and for many years president of the state convention; the Rev. Clinton A. Moulton, the newly elected president of the state convention and for twenty years the pastor at Dolgeville; the Rev. Rufus H. Dix, pastor of the church at Fort Plain; and the Rev. Fred C. Leining, D.D., of Syracuse, state superintendent of Universalist churches.

The Rev. Mr. Skeels, who discussed the subject, "The Way in Which We Have Come," opened his remarks by stating that he was always glad to come to Cooperstown because it was here that base ball [sic] originated. He led up to his subject by remarking that he had motored to Cooperstown from Herkimer on route 28 and as he passed through Fly Creek he remembered the labors of Father Stacey [Stacy], who, according to his memoirs, preached in 1828 to a large assemblage at Fly Creek. Presumably, said the speaker, his labors overflowed to Cooperstown.

Left Deep Impress

The Herkimer pastor said that Father Stacey rode his white horse on his travels up and down these roads and he imagined the modern pavements over the hoof-prints of that faithful animal. The early pioneer had one advantage in that he never was the victim of flat tires, said Mr. Skeels. He left an indelible impression upon nearly all the

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Universalist people who have come and gone and also upon the communities where he organized societies.

The speaker said the church had gone through various periods of development and progress. In the matter of church government he remarked that it had originated the superintendence system despite the fact that some thought that it was trying to elect Bishops, and not long afterward the Methodist church changed the name of its presiding elders to superintendents; so that in this respect it may be said that the Universalists led the way.

The Rev. Mr. Skeels also spoke of the development along the lines of theology; of the Winchester statement of faith of a hundred years ago which had been superceded [sic] by the five articles of 1896, in turn replaced at the General Convention at Worcester, Mass., this year by a statement which will probably come to be known as the Worcester statement. The latter, he said, expresses our faith in modern terms.

The Rev. Mr. Skeels brought a cordial greeting from the Herkimer church to the Universalists of Cooperstown and paid a high tribute to the pastor, the Rev. Mr. Kramer and Mrs. [Anna] Kramer, declaring that under their leadership the future of the church was bright.

The Rev. Mr. Moulton, whose topic was "Here We Are, Facing the Present Issue," said that it would be possible to enter into an argument regarding the material issues faced by the world at the present time, but he felt that it would be inappropriate at such a gathering and in consideration of the time at his disposal. He said that people are likely to forget that every generation has a "present issue" and that every generation must make its own decisions and carry on its work.

These material issues change, he said, from day to day, but from the standpoint of the spiritual the basic problems remain unchanged. The present issue of the church, said he, is "the eternal issue of making God real to men and the gospel of Jesus Christ effective in the life of the world."

A Brighter Faith

That was the issue one hundred years ago, he said, when the fathers brought a scriptural quotation, "God is love," in answer to the bitter theology of the day, which pictured God something like a drunken capitalist threatening human beings with everlasting punishment and turning them away to melt in the fire of hell. This concept is changed today but we have our present issues which involve the mighty task of making the message of good will which Jesus taught effective in the world today. If we live as Christian men should live, we shall be doing our part to meet the issues. If we fall down in this respect we shall fail to do so.

"Progress in Religious Thinking," was the subject briefly discussed by the Rev. Mr. Dix. "Business houses," said he, "are established with the ideal of service, to be sure, but primarily for financial gain. How many business establishments can you name that have been in existence here for 100 years? But yet this church stands because it was founded for a deeper purpose than financial gain."

The work of this church for a hundred years has called for sacrifice, loyalty and service and it has received these things largely from the people of this community. One may say yes, but what has been the result? Perhaps a building and a few people. But

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you cannot count results from these things. We do not know how many men and women have gone forth from this church to be a blessing to society for what they have received in these walls.

I simply want to say, he declared, that progress has been made in religious thinking in spite of those who would hold us back. Thank God, there were some who were not afraid; some who knew that religion could not succeed unless it dealt with human affairs. It is no longer necessary to combat the idea of a cruel and vindictive God, but as we look about us we must see that our great job is to influence people to live together in the spirit of Jesus.

In closing Mr. Dix said that it was not important whether the various denominations united organically. There seemed to be insurmountable difficulties in the way, he thought, but the question was whether Christians could work together for human uplift, placing that above creed and personal belief. Civilization, he said, is changing with dizzy rapidity. Let us attain a spirit which will enable us to pass through any change with tranquility. The religious thought of the coming age will not deal with the building up of any uniform creed, but an uplifting social endeavor.

Church's Contribution

The Rev. Dr. Leining, the last speaker of the evening, observing that a hundred years ago the country was saturated with the Jonathan Edwards theology which painted the sinner in the hands of an angry God, outlined the origin of the Universalist church, telling of its leaders, of the opposition which it met and the success which it achieved. The treatise by Hosea Ballou on the atonement, published in 1805, he declared, revolutionized the theology of the western hemisphere and did away with a philosophy which had nothing to offer for the uplift of mankind.

Dr. Leining spoke of other contributions made by Universalists to humanity, "not as a bigot, but as glorious souls of our family to whom we pay homage." Among these were Dr. Benjamin Rush who in 1795 began the first temperance movement; the declaration against slavery by the Universalist general convention early in the last century; the foundation of the first profit-sharing industry in Massachusetts in 1844; the first observance of Children's Day in 1856 by Dr. Charles Leonard; of Clara Barton, the Angel of the Battlefield, of the '60's; of Mary A. Livermore and Arthur Nash and Thomas Mott Osborne and Owen D. Young, well known leaders of the present day.

In closing he asked, "What about your own heart and your own allegiance? As we were distinctive one hundred years ago, it remains for us to be, not peculiar, but distinctive today in moral heroism. We need here in this church to be more honest, more just, more sympathetic and more decent than the average. Unfortunately there aren't enough Universalists to go around today. The world needs more of those who have the wider faith and the deeper love."

In presenting the historical sketch of the church, the Rev. Mr. Kramer said that King George III of England on November 30, 1769, issued a grant of 109,000 acres of land to George Crogan who became the first individual owner of lands in this section. The grant was originally given to Col Crogan and ninety-nine others, but a short time later the ninety-nine ceded their interests to Crogan.

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In 1770 Col. Crogan issued a mortgage on 40,000 acres, which included the site of Cooperstown, to William Franklin, the Governor of New Jersey and a son of Benjamin Franklin. The land was subsequently sold by the sheriff of Montgomery county at foreclosure and Judge William Cooper, the founder of Cooperstown, became one of the purchasers.

The site on which the Church of the Messiah stands and upon which the first church was erected in 1833 was, therefore, owned by Judge Cooper. Judge Cooper owned the grounds and the first building. He deeded it to the Otsego Academy for ten shillings. Later the school property was acquired by John and Katharine Davidson. They transferred the property to the Second Universalist society of Otsego [official name of the Cooperstown congregation], which had been organized in 1831, for \$268.73. Services were held regularly in the school building until the first church was erected in 1833. The deed for the property was recorded by George Merrell, the first judge of Otsego county, May 9, 1831, at 6 p.m.

The church has had twenty-three pastors in the last hundred years. Among those who had the longest tenure were the Rev. E. A. Perry, who served from 1895 to 1907; the Rev. O. [Obadiah] Whiston, from 1836 to 1846; the Rev. Charles W. Tomlinson, from 1854 to 1865; and the Rev. Mr. Kramer, whose first pastorate was from 1916 to 1924. He then went to Bridgeport, Conn., where he served for nine years, returning to Cooperstown the present year to resume a work in which he had gained a great popularity not only with the members of his own community at large, and which all his friends hope may continue for a long time to come.

Following the services the Rev. and Mrs. Kramer kept open house at the parsonage to which all their friends were invited.

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Transcribed on 26 Mar 2011 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY