

[Perry, Wyoming Co. NY]

The First Universalist Parish of Perry, N.Y., having worshipped in its present building for three quarters of a century, decided that such service as a church edifice should not go unnoticed. Therefore a celebration extending over three days was planned.

This celebration was of note because only about one hundred twenty years have elapsed since the first white settler came to these regions from Connecticut. Among the first dozen families to settle here and build their primitive log cabins, we note a majority who were believers in Universalism. So it was natural that not many years should elapse until religious services according to their persuasion should be held. In 1831 or nearly one hundred years ago some forty-one individuals under the leadership of Rev. J. [John] S. Flagler organized a Universalist Society. Soon the constituency numbered more than sixty.

Although there were few means of transportation other than the ox cart or sled over mere trails through the virgin timber and these often almost impassable because of snow drifts in winter or deep mud in spring and autumn, yet these faithful souls attended services of worship according to the Universalist belief whenever a preacher could be had.

This last statement is made because during the first twelve years existence, this society had the attention of twelve ministers. A few of these made their headquarters in Perry but most of them lived in other communities and came here at stated periods or whenever road conditions would permit.

In 1833 a small church building was purchased from the Methodists. This was used for nineteen years or until the present edifice was erected in 1852 at total cost of \$3,775.00. We realize today how inadequate such a sum of money would be in building a church.

On February 9, 1853, Rev. Dolphus Skinner of Utica preached the dedicatory sermon. Since then the church has had eighteen ministers including the present pastor, Rev. William J. Metz, who soon will complete five years of service. There have been several notably long pastorates, Rev. Stephen Crane serving for eleven years, Rev. Charles Palmatier for nine years, and Rev. Clara E. Morgan for nearly seventeen years. But [only] five of the former pastors are living, the Rev. John Clarence Lee, D.D., Gloucester, Mass.; Rev. J. E. June, Long Beach, Calif.; Rev. Charles Palmatier, Newark, N.Y.; Rev. John Evans, now with the Congregationalists at Bay Shore, N.Y.; and Rev. Clara E. Morgan, Hornell, N.Y.

The first pipe organ in all this section of the country and the very first one built in the factory now owned by C. E. Morey of Utica, was installed in this church in 1854 at a cost of \$800.00. It is still serving its purpose. In the past fifty years we have had but two organists, Miss Isabelle Cole, the present incumbent, never having missed a regular service in 28 years.

The Perry church has always numbered among its adherents a large proportion of the leading men and women of the village and surrounding

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country. As a consequence the church has been a real force for uplift and betterment, maintaining at all times a broad vision.

The celebration began on Thursday, February 9<sup>th</sup> with a reception to the women of Perry by the women of the Universalist church. During the program, the vice president of the Social Circle, Mrs. John Macomber, presided in a most acceptable manner. Besides scripture reading and prayer by Mrs. Minerva L. Metz, reminiscent responses were made by Mrs. Carrie Wood, younger sister of the first organist of this church; by Mrs. Agnes Tomlinson, dressed in the wedding gown of her grandmother; and by Mrs. Walter Gillett, who has with her husband been a life long member. Special musical numbers included a group of period songs by Mrs. Harry C. Smith, and Miss Isabelle Cole, the presiding organist, had procured some of the favorite voluntaries used by her predecessors at the organ. Miss Anna Welch, another one of the younger members, was also attired in a gown belonging to the period about 75 years ago. Mr. Frank D. Roberts, who recently had the privilege and pleasure of sharing by invitation in some of the solemn religious rites on a nearby Indian reservation, spoke on "The Religion of the Indians and the Pioneers."

The social room of the church was furnished with real antiques to represent homes 75 years ago, and an exhibit consisting of song books, Bibles, other heirlooms, and photographs of many of the outstanding workers of yesterday and their families, attracted much attention. About one hundred fifty were in attendance.

On Friday evening, February 10<sup>th</sup> in the banquet room of Hotel Commodore, with tables beautifully decorated in pink and white, one of the finest banquets ever had in Perry, was held. Ninety-eight people sat down and enjoyed the feast in every part.

Dr. F. M. Crocker presided as toastmaster in a most capable manner while Harry C. Smith as song leader allowed no one to feel strange. Dr. F. M. Washburn as chairman of the Trustees spoke briefly on behalf of the Official Board. Rev. J. Wesley Searles, pastor of the M. E. [Methodist Episcopal] church and president of the Ministers' Association, paid tribute to the pioneers of Universalism who often times[,] in the face of ostracism and severe persecution, remained firm in their faith in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. Brother Searles said in part, "The world has not always been ruled by the majority. In fact in many instances[,] particularly in the field of religion, the smaller groups have shaken the foundations from under, and by their foresight, their insight and their abiding faith, have literally made the world move on. Had not it been for the Universalists and their faith in an ever-present, loving God[,] who can say where the larger denominations would be today or how far-sighted the leaders of religious thought would be."

Miss Anna Welch, a great-great-granddaughter of one of the earliest white settlers[,] responded fittingly to the toast, "Their Day and Ours." Mr. C. G. Clarke, editor and owner of the Perry Record and for twenty-one years chairman of the Trustees, spoke feelingly of "The Faithful Workers." Rev.

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Charles Palmatier gave a graphic pictures of the way in which he is endeavoring to make his Christianity practical. Rev. Clara E. Morgan, using as her topic, "What About It?" pointed out some of the changes occurring in the past and then directed the thought of the group to the work ahead.

Rev. George Delbert Walker, D.D., State Superintendent [of the NY State Convention of Universalists], made the long journey from Carthage against doctor's orders, and as is usual gave a most helpful and inspiring address. Besides group singing, Mrs. Harry C. Smith and Mrs. Archie Waterbury sang two beautiful duet numbers. Mr. A. R. Watrous, a natural musician of ability, played several selections as though inspired. Thus ended one of the best banquets ever held in which the entire program was carried out to the letter and although the hour was late no one seemed ready to go home.

The celebration came to a close with the Sunday morning service when, to an unusually large congregation for Perry, Rev. John Murray Atwood, D.D., Dean of Canton Theological School and President of our State Convention, preached a wonderful sermon.

Universalism in Perry has taken a decided step forward as a result of these several gatherings.

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