

[Potsdam, St. Lawrence Co. NY]

CENTENNIAL IS CELEBRATED
Anniversary of Universalist Church
One Hundred Years Progress Celebrated With Appropriate Exercises

The celebration of the centennial of the founding of the Potsdam Universalist Church took place Saturday evening [sic] and Sunday and was very greatly enjoyed by all attending.

The celebration opened with a supper in the vestry of the church at 6:30 p.m. Saturday, served by the ladies of the Church. This supper was largely attended and all enjoyed not only the excellent food, for the preparing of which the Universalist ladies have such a reputation, but the reminiscential [sic] nature of the occasion.

At 8:00 o'clock in the auditorium a service was held to which the public was invited. Greetings were brought from other Churches and the occasion was one showing great harmony and good feeling among the congregations. Rev. H. V. Frelick spoke for the Presbyterian Church, Rev. M. D. Sill for the Methodist Church, Rev. A. H. McKnight for the Baptist Church, Rev. H. A. Hersey for the Canton Universalist Church, L. E. Ellison for the Winthrop Universalist Church, and Rev. H. P. Morrill [Morrell] of Canton for the Universalist General Convention.

Mrs. D. L. Blackmon and Howard R. Sanford rendered excellent solos, and the choir, under the direction of Miss Helen Hosmer, was fine.

Sunday morning at 10:30 the program as given in this paper last week was carried out, as follows:

Opening Sentences, Rev. O. F. Alvord, the Pastor.

Hymn.

Scripture Reading, Rev. J. M. Atwood of Canton.

Anthem.

Prayer, Rev. H. P. Morrill [Morrell].

Violin Solo, Orren B. Alvord.

Historical Sketh, [sic] Rev. Alvord.

Solo, Mrs. Florence H. McKee of Waddington.

Commemorative Sermon, Rev. J. M. Atwood, Canton, President of Universalist General Convention.

Mrs. McKee's solo was greatly enjoyed as was also Mr. Orren Alvord's violin solo. Dr. Atwood's commemorative sermon was good and showed the thought and finish which mark all of Dr. Atwood's utterances.

The historical sketch of the Society as given by Rev. O. F. Alvord is of such interest that we are justified in publishing the same in its entirety. It follows:

"One of the chief requirements of a good historian is a vivid imagination, one that can bring to the mental vision of reader or hearer the scenes and actors the historian would record. And to really enjoy history the imagination of the student must be vivid. For instance: To calmly say a company of men settled in Potsdam in any year might be interesting to the analyst. But to have the ability

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to bring before the mind's eye that little company of adventurous spirits that set out from old Fort Stanwix and toiled down Woods Creek, through Oneida Lake and its outlet to Oswego, then on the breast of blue Ontario and down the St. Lawrence through the network of the Thousand Islands to near Waddington; then packing on their backs their supplies, plodding through the wilderness to the 'Falls of the Racket,' [e.g. Raquette River] is to make history a living thing, to make real living men and women like you and me of what to the mere analyst is simply a list of names. Likewise the history of the institutions needs this same vivid picturing. Unless we can really sense the actuality of real men and women gathering together under the leadership of Rev. Jonathan Wallace on January 3, 1824, to form the First Universalist Society of Potsdam, the mere repetition of their names will mean little. They were not like the images used on a chess board, moved here and there according to whim of a historian, but real flesh and blood people with like virtues and weaknesses as you and I. With this consciousness of the requirement of a historian and of my own lack of it, I am reluctant to make the attempt to do justice to the story of a century of Universalist activity in this community.

"As just remarked, the Reverend Jonathan Wallace called together a company of the settlers of the young town of Potsdam on January 3, 1824, and organized a Universalist Society with the following officers: Rev. Jonathan Wallace, Pastor; Eliphalet Holbrook, Moderator; Joseph Parkhurst, Clerk; Nathaniel Parmeter, Treasurer and Collector; Gurdon Smith, James Whitcomb and William Perkins, Trustees. Rev. Wallace was one of the pioneer preachers of our Church, having entered the work of the ministry in 1816. For nearly twenty years he had charge of the new movement, preaching not only here but also in the neighboring hamlets. He made his home in Potsdam, living at what is now No. 99 Market street. He was a man of much native ability and left his mark upon the new community. He died in Potsdam about 1874, his name appearing in the Universalist year book for the last time in 1873. This first organization, for some reason, was defective in a legal sense, so the following year a new Society duly incorporated under the laws of New York State was formed with a membership of 70.

"On December 22, 1827, the Highway Commissioner of the town executed a deed to the trustees of the society of the N.W. corner of the Public Square. And here is a side light upon the condition of the times. There was a large plot of land set apart for public purposes known as the Square. This was reserved strictly for public purposes. On it from time to time were erected buildings for public use... The only consideration that seems to have been exacted of the Society [sic] was that it build a 'meeting house' on the lot within five years, 'otherwise this deed shall be null and void'. The records show that the religious services were held in the 'Academy on Raymond Lane', now Union street. There seems to be a little discrepancy as to the date of the building of the wooden church on this site. According to the deed it would have to be built not later than 1832. Most accounts give it as 1833; some as late as 1835-6. But at least

a church was built and it has been described to me as a beautiful white church much resembling the other two on the Square. Here the Society worshipped for more than four decades. During this time it was served by the following pastors: Jonathan Wallace, as above mentioned, W. H. Wagoner, Jonathan Douglass, U. M. Fisk, Ebenezer Fisher, D. D., Massena Goodrich, Frank E. Hicks, Moses Marston, Eleazer Hathaway, A. U. Hutchins.

"Up to 1852 the organization seems to have been what the historians of the county call a "secular" one. Those familiar with the traditional policy of our Church will at once recognize it as a parish. But upon January 17th of that year a Church, i.e. an ecclesiastical organization was formed with 24 members. From time to time new members have been received by formal act, usually by baptism and right hand of fellowship, until to date there have been received into Christian fellowship a total of 296 men and women. In this number may be found many still active in christian activities in many parts of this great country of ours including several in the active work of the ministry. Of course many also, as St. Paul so beautifully expressed it, have 'fallen asleep.'

"In looking through the documents in the possession of the clerk of the parish I found several dating way back to the '20's of the last century, including the actual deed of the lot executed by the Highway Commissioners. In this number were two or three conveying small parcels of land for sheds, and one curious phrase in or two of them speak of a line passing through a well which at that time must have been somewhere near the rear of the present parsonage , but so far it has not been discovered by the present occupants...

"As I have already mentioned the Society worshipped in the beautiful white meeting house for fully forty years... But in the Centennial year of 1876 the Society, judging by the records, suddenly decided its old home had become inadequate to its needs. But probably the records as hastily scanned are deceptive. No doubt there had been much talk and agitation on the subject of a new church for some time. But the psychological influence of the 100th birthday of our nation may have transformed this talk and half formed purpose into action. At any rate great energy was manifested for, in what seems to me a remarkably short time, the purpose was formed, the old church removed and the new one started.

"The corner stone of the new building was laid June 3, 1876, with impressive ceremonies. Rev. Dr. Ebenezer Fisher, Rev. Dr. J. S. Lee, Rev. Dr. A. G. Gaines, Professor O. [Orello] Cone [all] of St. Lawrence University, and Rev. Crehore, pastor of the Canton Church participated in the exercises. The completed structure was dedicated the first Sunday in July, 1877, Rev. L. J. Fletcher of Buffalo preaching the sermon.

"There is one more item of the material genesis of our Society that should be mentioned. I presume the various pastors here had the usual difficulty of newly arrived ministers finding a suitable place in which to set up their household goods. So in 1884 a good brother and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Post, purchased a house and lot on Main street and leased it to the parish on

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condition that the property be kept insured and in good condition, and the interest on its value—a little less than \$100—be paid each year, during the lifetime of each. And if upon the death of the survivor the conditions had been fully met the premises should become the property in fee of the Church. These conditions seem to have been fully met and for nearly a decade this house was known as the parsonage. Meanwhile the town ceased to use the old school house of District No. 8 which was located on [the] lot adjoining the church and the trustees of the Church obtained permission of the court to sell the Main street parsonage and then purchased of the school trustees the premises used for so many years as a public school. The deed is dated March 17, 1893. On this site the present commodious parsonage was erected. In this act the parish seems to have used wisdom in thus consolidating its property.

"This Church has been peculiarly fortunate in its pastors. All have been truly consecrated men. I have enumerated those whose ministry was in the old church. Since 1876 the following have served the parish: Orlando A. Rounds, E. J. Chaffee, F. E. Webster, W. A. Tuttle, E. J. Chaffee (recalled), Thomas Stratton, Edward B. Saunders, Charles Edward Lund, Frank Lincoln Masseck, D. L. Fisher, and the present incumbent.

"Also several students of the Theological School have served the Church between pastorates.

"In a brief sketch like this it is impossible to do justice to the many faithful laymen who have so nobly held up the hands of these various pastors and so no attempt has been made to enumerate them. As one runs his eye down the records of the Church, he sees for many years the recurrence of the same name and then it ceases to be seen. I do not know that it is a peculiarity of a liberal church alone, but certainly these churches do lose heavily by the removal of its members, particularly of the younger individuals. So there is no one of the name left to take the place of the zealous father. Of the score and more who were exceedingly active in the building of the present structure, I doubt if more than the names of five will be found as those of individuals active in our church today. But this Church has not only given of its young to other and distant Churches, it has also profitted [sic] from the same influences at work in other Churches.

"The fathers wrought, and we, the strangers have entered into their labors and their children's inheritance."

Herald-Recorder, Potsdam NY, Fri. 7 Nov 1924

Transcribed on 8 Jun 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY