

## History of Universalism in Poughkeepsie

Dedication of the Universalist Church—We inadvertently omitted the report of the dedication of the Universalist Church in Lafayette Square Wednesday evening. Among those present were Dr. J. [James] M. Pullman, Revs. H. R. Nye, W. W. Hooper, A. O. Rogers and C. [Cyrus] H. Fay.

The exercises commenced by singing. When Rev. H. R. Nye made an invocation, Rev. W. W. Hooper read a chapter from the Bible and the congregation sang a dedicatory hymn. Henry D. Myers next followed with a history of Universalism in this section. He read as follows:

The first that is known of the preaching of the final salvation of all men in this vicinity is, that about 60 years ago a preacher of this doctrine preached under some willow trees that stood on the east side of Washington street a short distance north of the Northern hotel.—Who the preacher was, how many were gathered on this occasion to hear this (to them) new doctrine, or whether any converts were made, tradition does not inform us; and but for a trifling incident the fact would not probably have been remembered. It is related that on this occasion, at the close of the morning service, the preacher was invited to dinner by a hospitable and generous citizen of Dutch descent, and while at dinner, the preacher very naturally inquired of his host, “how he liked the new doctrine?” to which he earnestly responded “good, very good, but mein Gott, I only wish it was done den!”

This response must have satisfied the preacher that however others of his hearers might have been affected by the sermon, his host was not to be numbered among his converts.

Nothing further is known of the preaching of Universalism in this vicinity until for a few years prior to 1830; during which period Rev. S. [Shaler] J. Hillyer of North Salem, Rev. Thomas J. Sawyer and Rev. Theophilus Fisk are known to have preached occasionally in the Court House and the Village Hall, to fair audiences, and by their preaching succeeded in awakening an interest in the cause that led to the organization of the “First Universalist Society of Poughkeepsie,” in December, 1836.

At this organization, Peter P. Hayes, Benjamin Gile, George M. Perry, Jas. E. Slater, and James H. Williamson were elected trustees, all of whom have laid down the burden of life and passed to that higher and holier life into which in God’s own time all shall be ushered. And of the number who have thus passed away, one laid down his life upon the altar of his country while fighting for the Union at Fort Donelson.

In February 1838, Rev. I. [Isaac] D. Williamson of Albany was called to the Society and became their pastor, preaching in the Courthouse. Rev. Mr. Williamson continued his pastorate for two years, and was succeeded by Rev. G. [George] W. Gage, who supplied the desk until May 1, 1841.

In November 1841 Rev. A. V. Bartlett was called and became the pastor, and during his pastorate in 1842, the old Baptist Church [on] Mill street, standing upon the site by the present new church, was offered for sale, the Baptist Society having removed to this edifice built for them by Matthew Vassar.

James E. Slater, Benjamin Gile, John C. Holmes and H. D. Myers purchased the old church, and after putting the same in thorough repair, the Universalist Society took possession of the same, dedicated it, and worshipped therein with Brother Bartlett as pastor until 1844, when brother Bartlett was succeeded by Rev. Gibson Smith, who preached for the Society until May 1, 1845, when he was succeeded by Rev. L. P. Rand.

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In the latter of the year 1845, there arose a schism and division in the Baptist Church, and a portion of the members withdrew. These seceders desired to buy back the old church in Mill street, and having made a liberal offer for the same, the persons holding the title, conveyed the same with the approbation and consent of the Society, and after this the Society held their services in the Court House and Village Hall, but had no settled pastor.

In 1850 the Presbyterian Church in Cannon street was bought by the Society and repaired, and regular services were held, but no pastor was called until 1853, when Rev. W. W. King was called and had charge until May 1st, 1855, when he was succeeded by Rev. B. H. Davis, whose pastorate continued until May 1st, 1860.—Rev. [B. F. Connor?] succeeded B. H. Davis, and served as pastor until May 1st, 1862.

At this time, the country being convulsed by war, and many of the young men connected with the Society having entered the army, inexpedient to continue religious services, and the church after this time was rented for various purposes until 1872, when it was sold.

Since 1872 there has been no effort made to resume services until the present time, and now with a fine church and no burden of debt resting upon the Society, it is proposed to resume the preaching of “the grace of God, that bringest salvation to all men;” and as the circumstances, financially, for this Society are in a favorable condition, it requires nothing now but a united effort on the part of the friends of the cause, to insure success.

The legal organization of the First Universalist Society has been regularly kept up, by the election of a Board of Trustees. Of the former members of this Society, many have entered upon the life beyond; others have removed, and there are but few left to begin the work of upbuilding the cause in this city.

The dedicatory sermon was preached by Rev. Dr. Pullman, after which A. O. Rogers read a scripture lesson, when the act of dedication was pronounced, other addresses were made, and the congregation was dismissed with the benediction.

The services connected with the dedication of the Universalist Church in Lafayette Place, were continued yesterday afternoon and evening. At 2:30 p.m. a large audience had assembled to listen to a sermon by Rev. A. Gunnison, who chose as his text John xiv:8, “Philip sayeth, show us the Father and it sufficeth us.” The preacher derived from this text, as his subject, “The Universalist Idea of God.”

In the evening a general conference meeting was held in the basement of the church. Most of those who attended were directly connected with the new organization, though a good number of others who had become interested were present. Addresses were made by the Revs. R. H. Nye, A. Gunnison of Brooklyn, A. O. Rogers of Harlem, and the Rev. A. N. Hutchins, State Missionary. The addresses were interspersed with singing.

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Transcribed on 22 Jan 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY