

[Ridgeway, Orleans Co. NY]

THE RIDGEWAY CENTENNIAL

The one hundredth annual parish meeting was held by the Universalist Society in Ridgeway on the evening of Dec. 14, with the Rev. Donald K. Evans, pastor, presiding. The occasion was a centennial celebration beginning with a banquet that filled the vestry with joyful folks. Mr. Evans prepared a mimeographed booklet for the occasion in which the program, the reports of the church school, the Young People's Club, the Ladies' Aid Society, the Church Helpers, the parish treasurer and the minister were printed.

The congregation filled the church auditorium for the evening's program. Prayer was offered by Mr. Evans, who also read the historical address which was prepared by Mr. Russell J. Waldo. The Rev. L. [Lewis] H. Robinson gave the greetings and congratulations of the Albion church. Letters were read from former ministers and members who were unable to attend the celebration. A piano solo was given by Mrs. Madeline Grimes which was followed by an address by Mr. Alonzo L. Waters, Medina. Mrs. Everett Britt and Mrs. Harley Britt sang a duet, and Mrs. James E. Lunn sang a solo. The closing speaker was Dr. Fred C. Leining.

This church is the only Protestant church in the village and is doing a notable work. Its minister is greeted each Sunday morning with splendid congregations and the hour is 9:30 A.M. so that Mr. Evans may return to Middleport for its morning service. The society has a vigorous church school with a splendid group of young folk. It is a live rural church.

In his annual report, Mr. Evans said: "One hundred years of life! What does it mean? Most individuals who reach the century mark find them selves with a set of ideas which cannot be changed. Thought has been crystallized and opposition to the new is characteristic. A church that is one hundred years old may be in like condition. Its ways may be fixed. New methods and new thoughts may be rejected merely because they are new and have never been tried by that institution. The church may be fossilized. Again, it may not. It may welcome new truth wherever it is found. It may take that truth and make it part of that institution's life. New methods may be constantly searched for and used in the service of the institution to its community. Is this church a seeker or a fossil?"

"One hundred years of life! Great milestones such as this occasion celebrates should make us stop and think. Ponder the questions here proposed as this church society enters the second century of its life."

A Bit of History

In 1809, the Holland Purchase interested Mr. and Mrs. Seymour B. Murdock to the degree of leaving the Hudson Valley with their eight sons for the untamed forest regions of the Holland Purchase in western New York. They traveled in a Pennsylvania wagon over the Ridge Trail which was then only a path in the wilderness to what is now known as Ridgeway. The family lived for six weeks in this wagon until their log home was completed. Other families were attracted to the section by this same pull of cheaper land and by 1830 the section had a good sized population with an inn and a church at Hartland visited by circuit preachers.

Mr. Seymour Murdock was deeply interested in Universalism and agitated for the formation of a Universalist society but he did not live to attend the meeting at which the society was organized. This meeting was held at the home of Joseph Perry on Dec. 14,

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1833; Philo Elmer was moderator and Joseph Craig, clerk. It was decided at this meeting to raise \$1,000 and to build a house of worship which should be completed by Jan. 1, 1835 [sic]. A second meeting, three months later, selected the present site, upon the high ground south of Ridgeway Corners. This land was purchased from Mrs. Julia Ann Perry for \$30. In July, 1835, it was voted to sell slips [pew seatings] to the value of \$1,700 for the cost of the building and the three pulpit chairs which are still in use. The pews were purchased by parishioners at prices ranging from \$26 to \$50. The subscription list for the year's expenses, a century ago, ranged from \$100 downward.

The church edifice was dedicated on June 21, 1835, by the Rev. L. L. Sadler. Twenty years later, it was repaired and re-dedicated by the Rev. J. H. [John Mather] Austin of Auburn. It was again remodeled in 1872, with the dedicatory sermon delivered by the Rev. Mr. Fletcher of Buffalo.

The first pastor of the church was the Rev. Charles Hammond, a Universalist circuit rider, who served the church three years. The following clergymen had pastorates in this society: Rev. Russell Tomlinson, 1838-39; Rev. M. [Moses] B. Smith, 1839-41; Rev. L. L. Spaulding, 1843-45; Rev. T. J. [Thomas Jefferson] Smith, 1845-50; Rev. W. B. Cook, 1851-54; Rev. A. [Alanson] Kelsey, 1845-55; Rev. D. C. [DeWitt Clinton] Tomlinson, 1855-56; Rev. Joseph Hemphill, 1857-62; Rev. Nelson Snell, 1862-63; Rev. D. C. Tomlinson, 1864-66; Rev. J. H. Amies, 1868-69; Rev. H. B. Howell, 1872-74; Rev. J. P. McLean, 1877-85; Rev. W. B. Randolph, 1885-87; Rev. William Knott, 1888-89; Rev. S. A. Whitcomb, 1890-92; Rev. O. F. [Otis Fries] Alvord, 1895-96; Rev. C. L. Paddock, Rev. J. A. Copeland, Rev. G. W. Powell, 1897-1906; Rev. H. Richardson, Rev. Henry Buckner, Rev. C. H. [Charles Henry] Vail, 1906-16; Rev. I. V. Lobdell, 1916-21; Rev. E. H. Carritt, 1921-22; Rev. F. A. Stockwell, 1922-26; Rev. C. C. [Charles Clare] Blauvelt, 1926-27; Rev. O. F. Alvord, 1927-28; Rev. C. J. Cowing, 1928-29; Rev. D. K. Evans, 1930—.

The historian, Mr. Russell J. Waldo, asked in his narrative: "I am wondering if the members and attendants of this church, today, really appreciate the hardships and sacrifices endured by our forefathers in giving us this church?"

Empire State Universalist, Cortland NY, January 1934

Transcribed on 30 Mar 2013 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY