

[Rochester, Monroe Co.]

Gives Sketch of Church History on Anniversary
Trustee of Universalist Church is Speaker
MARKS ITS 75TH BIRTHDAY
Universalists Mark Jubilee at Morning Service—Raymond H. Arnot Tells of
Distinguished Preachers Who Served Church in This City

The seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universalist Church of this city was celebrated at services yesterday morning. Raymond H. Arnot, a trustee, gave a historical sketch, and the minister, Rev. William Wallace Rose, D.D., preached on the topic, "Yesterday, To-day and Forever." In the evening, an illustrated lecture on the play "Mary," in the series on "The Ancient Gospel in Modern Drama" was given by the minister.

In his paper on "The First Universalist Church of Rochester—Seventy-Five Years' Record," Mr. Arnot pointed out that in the year 1846, when the First Universalist Church was organized, Rochester had been incorporated as a city for twelve years and had a population of 28,000. Five years before this church came into being, a feeble body of [Universalists] had begun to disseminate the so-called liberal or non-orthodox ideas in Rochester, he said.

Beginnings Obscure

The time when Universalism began to be preached in this city is obscure, he said, but it is known that for probably more than ten years prior to the organization of this society services in the interest of the Universalist theology were held in Rochester and sermons were delivered by some of the most powerful preachers of the time. In 1839 a Sunday-School was organized and somewhat later [1843] a church building at Court and Stone streets was occupied, he said, but this church was subsequently sold to the Presbyterians, and the Universalists, being without a church edifice of their own, were forced to hold their meetings in the basement of the Unitarian Church and later in an auditorium on the fourth story of the Minerva building at Main street east and St. Paul street south.

The speaker paid a tribute to George H. Roberts, founder of the Sunday School and its first superintendent, and John J. Van Zandt, who, he said, were really the founders of Universalism in Rochester, and he urged a tablet be erected to commemorate their labors. Mr. Arnot sketched the career of Rev. George W. Montgomery, D.D., first pastor of the [society], who was instrumental in bringing about the erection of a church.

Organized in 1846

On April 18, 1846 the church was formally organized, he said. Trustees chose a lot in South Clinton street, near Main, and upon this site a church edifice was completed in December, 1847, free of debt, he said. This was occupied by the church until its sale in 1907. Dr. Montgomery relinquished his pastorate in 1853 because of impaired health but he lived in Rochester until his death in 1898.

In the fall of 1853 the Rev. James Harvey Tuttle, D.D., was chosen to succeed Dr. Montgomery, and his services were highly regarded. On March 1, 1860 Rev. Asa Saxe, D.D. succeeded Dr. Tuttle, entering upon one of the most notable pastorates in the history of the denomination or in the history of the city of Rochester, in the speaker's view. Only one other man in Rochester served a church longer here, Dr. Shaw of Brick [Presbyterian] Church, whose continuous ministry of forty-eight years in this city.

Dr. Saxe at the very beginning of his ministry in Rochester met the keen competition of three eminent clergymen, Dr. Shaw, Dr. Albert G. Hall, of the Third [Presbyterian] Church, and Rev. Henry A. Nealy of Christ Church [Episcopal]—subsequently raised to the episcopate as bishop of Maine—but he soon became the equal of these distinguished preachers. In the year 1860, when the foundations of the republic were shaken by the threat of civil war, Dr. Saxe rose to the

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occasion as one inspired and later was a consistent inspiration to the recruiting of regiments in this city. On many occasions Dr. Saxe defended the Universalist faith and liberal religion in general against attack.

Anniversary Notable

On March 1, 1885, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Dr. Saxe's pastorate in Rochester was celebrated. Visiting clergymen present were Dr. James M. Pullman of Lynn, Mass., Dr. Isaac M. Atwood, Dr. Almon Gunnison, Dr. Montgomery, Dr. Tuttle and Professor L. B. Fisher. The occasion was also honored by the presence of Martin Brewer Anderson, first president of the University of Rochester.

Another festival in this church which drew here some eminent men in the denomination was the semi-centennial of the founding of the society, celebrated on Dec. 1, 1885 and the two following days. At that time Rev. Mr. [Lyman Hamilton] Squires was installed as pastor.

The church edifice, which was completed in 1847, stood without material change until 1871, when it was remodeled. The sermon of dedication preached by Dr. Saxe at this festival, entitled "Strength and Beauty," was regarded as a notable pulpit utterance.

Tribute to James Sargent

Rev. Mr. Squires was pastor of the church but three years when he was obliged to leave his work here [because of consumption, which eventually proved fatal], and he was succeeded by Rev. Isaac Philip Coddington, a preacher of distinction. Dr. Coddington, not content with the old church edifice, continually agitated for an improvement in its equipment, and through the munificence of James Sargent, a lot and a substantial building fund were presented to the society. By additions to the building land, the devoted members of the parish, the church structure was enlarged and reconstructed. The rejoicing over the reconstructed church and the dedication of three beautiful memorial windows took place on May 11, 1902.

Mr. Arnot, in paying tribute to James Sargent, said "a history of the seventy-five years of this church would not be adequate without mention in words of respect and veneration of the great laymen whose labors for this society and whose [continued?] generosity to it will ever be cherished."

In 1905 Dr. Coddington was succeeded in the pulpit by Rev. Arthur Wilder Grose, D.D. The society then sold the church property and began the erection of the present building, which was designed by Claude Bragdon. The services of dedication were held October 8, 1908.

Dr. Grose continued to serve the church as pastor until 1918, when he went abroad in the service of his country during the war, and Rev. William Wallace Rose, the present pastor, succeeded him in the pulpit.

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Transcribed on 6 Feb 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY