

[Royalton, Niagara Co. NY]

Cobblestone Church in Middleport Withstands Ravages of 86 Years
Peculiarities of construction place edifice in class with only two others in United States

Building of a church nowadays is largely a matter of business. A site is selected, funds raised and a contractor employed to erect the building. Times were much different in 1840, when the First Universalist Church of Middleport was constructed. Contractors then were unheard of and the making of a church was a work of love and devotion.

Today the Middleport church stands at Main and Church streets in the village and is a model of quaint architecture for buildings of its kind in America. In fact, there are said to be but two other similar edifices in the country. The construction material is uniform sized cobble stones which were hauled to the site by oxen teams from the shores of Lake Ontario, 30 miles away. It has not been recorded how many years were required to build the church.

Although the church proper was built around 1840, the history of the church goes back many years before that. It was formed as a result of preaching in the village begun by the Rev. Linus S. Everett, who was brought to Middleport by Judge A. S. Baker. He started his services in a small frame school house at a place then known as Ewing's Corners, one-half mile south of the village.

Later the Universalist congregation met for worship in the brick school house which formerly was occupied as a residence by Dr. E. L. Cole, on the site of the present Methodist church. Meetings were held here until the present church was built. The Rev. Mr. [Isaac] Whitnall was the first official pastor after the church society was formally organized. Before entering the ministry, the Rev. Whitnall had been a sailor, was on Nelson's flagship at the battle of Trafalgar and helped carry Nelson below when the famous admiral was mortally wounded.

For a long time, Mrs. A. S. Baker, wife of the judge who brought the first Universalist minister to Middleport, was the only woman who attended the meetings and the only woman member of the church for years after it was formally organized.

The old church has seen several changes during its long history. In 1871, 30 years after it was erected, it underwent repairs and was equipped with a pipe organ. The pews were replaced with new ones in 1904, the organ moved to a different part of the church, and more than eight years ago, in 1918, the exterior of the building was noticeably altered. At that time the entrance was remodeled and memorial windows took the place of the old ones.

Last year the church society purchased a \$9,000 piece of property, including a house adjacent to the church which now is used as a parsonage, and land adjoining the church building, on which a parish house at the rear of the church is expected to be built this year. The three units, church, parish house and parsonage will then be connected by means of an arcade.

Estimated cost of the new parish house is \$15,000. The building will include, besides class rooms for the church school work, a kitchen and dining room, gymnasium, auditorium and stage.

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The Rev. Charles C. Blauvelt, present pastor of the church, was graduated from St. Lawrence University with the class of 1922. Two years later he finished his theological school training and was ordained. He was elected to the Phi Beta Kappa honor scholarship fraternity.

Following is a list, in chronological order, of the ministers who have preached in the Middleport Universalist Church since the time of the Rev. Whitnall:

The Revs. [Charles] Hammond, [Liscomb] Knapp, [Alanson] Kelsey, Van Campen, [Jacob] Chase, [Isaac] George, (1854), Hempel (1858), Tomlinson (1866), Leighton (1869), Baker (1870), Hutchison (1876), Hathaway (1881), Druley (1885), Pratt (1890), Towsley (1891), Sawyer (1896), G. A. Kratzer (1897), Buckner (1904), L. C. Nichols (1910), L. C. Lobdell (1914), E. C. Carrit (1921), and the present minister, C. C. [Charles Clare] Blauvelt (1924).

Leroy E. Fess, *Buffalo Express*, Buffalo NY, Sunday, May 9, 1926

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