

[Royalton (Middleport), Niagara Co. NY]

Church Will Observe 116th Birthday at Special Dinner

MIDDLEPORT—The 116th birthday of the First Universalist Church, the Rev. Charles Wood, pastor, will be observed at an Anniversary Dinner tomorrow evening at the church.

The church was started in 1941 [1841]. Prior to this the families of the village and surrounding countryside held religious services in cabins, barns and in the open. But always their plans were stubbornly directed toward a church building they could call their own.

With the completion of the Erie Barge¹ Canal, the community center changed from Freeman's Corners to what is now called Middleport.

John Craig donated land for the church in the center of town and early in 1941 [1841], the present Universalist Church was begun. Cobblestones from the shores of Lake Ontario were drawn to the site in ox-carts² and were carefully sorted by the women and children.

Only egg-shaped stones of similar size were used for the front of the church, the others being used on the sides and back.

The Rev. Charles Hammond³ was the first pastor of the church along with the deacons and trustees, Francis Lane, Thomas Barker, Elijah Mather, Mr. Craig, Dudley Watson, Linus Spalding and Asher Freeman.

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Transcribed and footnoted on 14 Dec 2012 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY

¹ It was never called the Barge Canal that early in its development; the term was used beginning around 1905.

² The Lake Ontario shoreline was much closer to the church location in 1841 than it was in 1957. It had receded considerably by that time.

³ During the mid-1850's Charles Hammond became enamored with the new cult of spiritualism, visited the Fox sisters in Wayne County, and eventually left the Universalist faith.