

Universalism in Newburgh, NY: A Documentary History



Newburgh, N. Y.

This is one of the river towns which has for a long time been destitute of “the Bread of life.” Our friends there lately have rallied, and the prospect is now that occasional preaching will be enjoyed there from ministers of our faith. The sum of \$150 has been subscribed for this object... We hope this is the beginning of a bright era for our friends and the cause in Newburgh.

(*Christian Ambassador*, Auburn NY, 21 Jun 1851)



From the Report of the Committee on the State of the Church
to the New-York State Convention of Universalists, 28 May 1851

Orange County—No Societies, but an effort is making to secure the ministry of the word at Newburgh.

(*Christian Ambassador*¹, Auburn NY, 2 Aug 1851)



The New Effort in Newburgh

Newburgh, N. Y., Dec. 10

Br. Austin:—Newburgh is the largest village in the State, and contains about 15000 inhabitants.—Three Sundays ago was the first organized effort to have the proclamation of Liberal Christianity in this place. Rev. T. Borden of Hudson preached for us. The attendance was good, although the day was very stormy. The following Sunday, Rev. A. Norwood was with us, and preached three good sermons. The weather was still worse than the previous Sunday.— In the evening a drifting snow storm prevailed, and but few churches were open at all. However we had a very respectable audience, in which were quite a number of ladies. Last Sunday Br. I. M. Windsor of Brooklyn preached for us. We had another stormy day. The attendance in the morning was good, and in the evening the Court House where we held our meetings was comfortably filled.

This, Br. Austin, is a history of our efforts up to this date. Some half dozen of us have enlisted for the war, and we are determined to exert every energy there is about us to make this movement a success. All we want now is a good pastor to lead us. A young man whose heart is in the work can make his mark here. We could insure such a preacher as would suit us, a reasonable salary to begin with, and its increase would be certain. We feel sure of final success.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 18 Dec 1858

¹ The *Christian Ambassador* was a weekly Universalist newspaper published in Auburn, NY 1851-1862 and in New York City 1863-1868.

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New Society in Newburgh

The friends in Newburgh, N. Y., after holding meetings for some two months, have met with such encouragement that they have organized themselves into a society under the name of “The First Congregational Universalist Society of Newburgh.”—Seven trustees have been appointed, and we trust a pastor will soon be secured. This movement promises well; and we think the excellent friends in Newburgh will not fail by God’s blessing, to carry forward successfully the good work they have begun.

H. L. [Rev. Henry Lyon]

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 5 Mar 1859



From the Report of the New York Association of Universalists, 12 May 1859

In Newburgh, where till within a few months Universalism has rarely been preached, a Society has recently been organized and measures are being taken both to secure the constant [full-time] services of a preacher, and to build a house of worship. The population of that place, and the judicious zeal with which this important movement has been begun, give us reason to hope that the most satisfactory success will attend its efforts.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 4 Jun 1859



“Excommunication in Newburgh”

A lady in Newburgh, N. Y. has been excommunicated from the Baptist church in that place, on a charge of attending a Universalist meeting, and believing that doctrine. Her husband states the case as follows...:

My poor, dear wife has been a member of the Hard Shell Baptist Church for many years. Her standing in the Church was without question until those “emissaries of the devil” (so the Baptist Elders designate the preachers we have had in the Court House), came and preached the Gospel of God’s unlimited grace. She went and listened to the new doctrine and drank in the words of truth and life. They filled her soul with joy and gladness, awakened new thoughts and new aspirations, removing all doubts and every gloomy foreboding of the future. For this she was arraigned before the Elders, who vexed her sorely, but she stood up boldly for the truth. They found they could not intimidate her, so they cast her out of the Church, and here are the charges against her, viz:-

1. Embracing erroneous doctrine
2. Setting a pernicious example to the Church
3. And in her own words, “If my husband goes to hell, I want to go with him.”

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Further: We withdraw the hand of fellowship for the following reasons: 1. Attending the Universalist Church; 2. Advocating their doctrines; 3. Not keeping the covenant vows of the Church.

These proceedings of the Elders weigh heavily on the mind of my wife in her feeble state of health, as she did not want to leave the Church she had been a member of so many years. She dreaded the severing of so many old associations, and hoped that they would permit her to go occasionally with her husband to the Universalist meeting, but she found that she was hoping against hope. These things are nothing new to you, for you have, I doubt not, met with many just such cases, but you know we all think our troubles the worst.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 8 Oct 1859



Letter from Rev. E. W. Reynolds

Newburgh, N. Y., July 13, 1859

Dear Br. Austin:—It is now about three months since the lake air drove me from Jamestown, and sent me in quest of a more congenial climate. I had no other motive for leaving the ripe and ample field of Chautauque [sic], the thriving village that furnished so much to interest and engage me, and the intelligent and cordial society whose zeal and kindness never failed. Could I have remained without loss of health and peril of life, I think I might have been content to have labored there for as many years as are allotted to me in this world. Things being as they are, I must relinquish the idea of ever having a home in Western New-York....

I have spent three Sundays in this beautiful highland village, and here I am invited to live and labor for a year at least. I have enjoyed for some weeks good average health, and the highlands of the Hudson are famed—are they not?—for the salubrity of the air, as well as for the sublimity of the scenery. Wandering Bedouin as I am, can I do better than pitch my tent on their picturesque height, and help these brethren—“few and undismayed”—renew the Kingdom of the Lord with the righteous truth that makes the desert bloom as the rose? A few resolute and devoted families form the *nucleus* of the first movement for liberal Christianity ever made in this town of fifteen thousand souls, or indeed anywhere on this bank of the Hudson, so far as I recollect, between Albany and New-York. I will only add that I am sanguine enough to labor here with cheerfulness, but much hard work must be done before any hosannahs are sung.

Very Truly Yours,

E. W. Reynolds²

[Rev. Elthanan Winchester Reynolds]

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 23 Jul 1859

² Rev. Reynolds did not remain very long at Newburgh. By 15 Oct 1859 he had accepted the pastorate of the congregation in Watertown, NY. (*Christian Ambassador*, Auburn NY, 15 Oct 1859)

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New Church in Newburgh, N. Y.

We are pleased to learn by the following paragraph, which we copy from the *Newburgh Times* of the 16th inst., that the Universalists in that village have commenced the erection of a new church.—This is a token of earnest devotion on their part and gives the hope that our cause is on a permanent basis in their midst.

The Society of the First Universalist Congregational Church of the Village of Newburgh broke ground for their new Church Edifice on Tues., Nov. 15th, on their lot of ground purchased some months ago for that purpose. The lot is on the west side of Liberty st. between South and Farrington streets, and next to the homestead of the late Rev. John Johnson, D. D. This lot is considered to be the most beautiful location for a church in the village.

The building will be of brick with brown stone trimmings, two towers or spires, its depth 54 feet by 30 feet front, and is calculated to seat 400 persons. We have examined the drawings and are compelled to acknowledge that for beauty and style it excels any church in our village, and if carried out in accordance to the design, it will be an ornament to our village. The builders, Messrs. Little & Kelley, calculate to have it ready for dedication on the first of February, 1860.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 26 Nov 1859



Death of Mrs. Martha Jane Marsh

Newburgh, N. Y., Nov 23d, 1859

Br. Austin:³ - We have met with a sad bereavement, in the removal by death from our little circle, of Mrs. Martha Jane Marsh, in the 41st year of her age. She was a woman of rare moral excellence, which exemplified itself more in deeds than in words. No suffering mortal ever left her door cold or hungry. She was formerly connected with the Baptists, but since we had been preaching here, she took great interest in our efforts to establish Universalism in this place. But she is taken from us in the midst of her usefulness, and we humbly bow in meek submission to the will of our Father in heaven. She suffered a most painful illness of some eight months' duration, without a murmur or complaint, and on the 5th day of November, death came to her relief, and she passed away to realms of bliss.

Rev. W. B. Cook⁴ was fortunately here and preached her funeral sermon, from Isaiah XL:8—“The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever.” The discourse was listened to with marked attention by a large concourse of people.

D. R. F.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 3 Dec 1859

³ Rev. John Mather Austin, Editor of the *Christian Ambassador* from 1851-1862

⁴ Rev. William B. Cook, son of Lyman and Mary (Norton) Cook and brother of Rev. James M. Cook, was their pastor.

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Newburgh, N. Y.

Br. Austin: In behalf of our infant society in Newburgh, I enclose an engraving of the new church, and also the Circular which the Board of Trustees have sent out to some of the older Societies, asking a collection to help them in this, their time of need. I trust the Circulars will be kindly received by the Societies to which they are sent, and that their pastors will ask them to take up *one* collection for our benefit. Could they for a moment realize the powerful opposition which the few friends here have had to encounter, and the self sacrificing spirit which they have manifested in sustaining the truth thus far—could they but witness the noble struggles which have been made to plant the principles of our faith on a permanent foundation in this village of fifteen thousand inhabitants—could they see these things as they have been enacted in the history of the past fifteen months, I think that each Society to whom these Circulars have been sent, would not only be willing, but anxious to take up a collection for assisting the few friends here in their labor of love. The engraving when framed will make a very pretty ornament for a minister's study. Will the clergymen who receive the Circular and engraving lend us their influence? We all know that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Our friends here have assured me that should such an appeal come to them even now, amidst their struggles, they would at least give the benefit of one collection. Help one another, is the voice of philanthropy. We therefore send out our Circular with the confident expectation that it will be kindly received. Their new church is nearly ready for dedication. In its erection a debt has been incurred, which they are anxious to liquidate as soon as possible. Hence this appeal.

Yours truly and forever,
[Rev.] W[m.] B. Cook

In behalf of the First Universalist Society, Newburgh, N. Y., Feb. 29, 1860

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 10 Mar 1860

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Letter from Newburgh, N. Y.

Newburgh, May 1st, 1860

Br. Austin:- I feel constrained to say a few words through the *Ambassador*, in relation to our late effort to raise a little material aid from the Societies in the denomination. Notwithstanding the failure of the plan we adopted, I still firmly believe it to be a good one.

For example, we have in the United States some thirteen hundred Universalist churches or Societies. Say that five or six hundred of these are alive and active. Then suppose that each of these live societies contribute *one dollar*. This would realize five or six hundred dollars, which, to a society away from large cities, would be a great help. Now grant this aid to such Societies in the denomination as are earnestly endeavoring to build churches, but are not quite able, and it would aid them very much....

For the information of those parties who have received our Circular and print of our church, I would here state that our building is 34 feet front, by 54 feet deep, and will seat some three hundred persons. The material is brick, with brown stone trimmings. The contract price was \$2800.

Yours Respectfully,
D. K. F.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 12 May 1860



From the Abstract of the Minutes of the New-York Association for 1860

Received into Fellowship the First Congregational Society of Newburgh...

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 19 May 1860



from the Report of the New York Association of Universalists, 9 May 1859

Within the last eighteen months a new Society of our faith has sprung up at Newburgh. [Forty years ago] the Rev. Mr. [Edward] Mitchell is said to have preached a few times at Newburg. It is remembered that he occupied the ball room of the old Mansion House of that place, and that he always had a medallion hung on the wall behind him, inscribed in letters of gold—*God is Love*. Some of the first men of the village attended his meetings, but no Society was formed, and the effect of his labors was either transient or only lingered in individual hearts. Fourteen or fifteen years ago Rev. Mr. Parker, now of Troy, as well as Rev. Mr. Lynn of this city [New York] are said to have preached to very small audiences here.

In Nov., 1858, a few friends of Universalism resolved to make an attempt to establish the ministry of the word in that place, and Rev. Mr. Borden, then of Hudson, preached for the first time on the 21st of that month in the Court House, to respectable audiences. On the Monday following, a meeting was held and a committee appointed to provide for the regular supply of ministerial labor amongst them, and from that time to this they have enjoyed stated weekly services on the Sabbath.

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On the 21st of February, 1859, a meeting was held, a Society organized according to law, and the proper officers duly elected, under the title of the First Universalist Congregational Church of the village of Newburg. On the 25th of July subsequent, a favorable lot of ground was purchased as the site of a proposed church edifice. Contracts were subsequently made, and on the 15th of Nov. last, ground was broken and the work commenced. The building, designed to seat about 300 persons, and to cost \$2,800, is now up and nearly completed; but disappointed in some of their expectations, the Society now finds itself in pressing need of \$500 to finish the work. The Society is small, and has already raised and paid eleven hundred dollars, and could it obtain the sum above named, it would be able to finish its house and by giving a mortgage, leave itself in debt about \$3000, under an interest scarcely greater than the rent it now pays for the use of the Court House.

It is a case that appeals very loudly to the interest and charities of our wealthy friends.

Since October last, the Society has enjoyed the ministerial labors of Rev. W. B. Cook. It has a recently organized Sunday School and Bible Class, holds weekly Conference meetings, and seems earnestly engaged in the use of all the means in its power, not only for its own growth and prosperity, but also for the promotion of the cause of truth in the place and neighborhood.

[Rev.] Thomas J. Sawyer

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 2 Jun 1860



Dedication at Newburgh

We are requested to give notice that the new Universalist church in Newburgh, Orange co. N. Y. will be dedicated to the worship of God on Wednesday, the 1st day of August. Services to commence at 10½ o'clock, A. M.

(Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 21 Jul 1860)



Festival at Newburgh, N. Y.

Br. Austin: - On Monday, June 11th, the Trustees of our Society met together at our church (which is nearly completed), for the purpose of ascertaining what it would cost to carpet and otherwise furnish the church. The cost was soon ascertained, but the most perplexing point was how or where to get the money. This was discussed at some length; finally it was decided we get up a strawberry festival on the following Friday.

It must be remembered that not one of our friends ever had the least practical experience in these matters; but we went to work in earnest, on Thursday afternoon, June 14th, and the next afternoon we had our rooms open for the reception of visitors.

The ladies worked with a will. The walls were hung with paintings and pictures, and surrounded with wreaths of flowers. We had a number of beautiful flags. These were tastefully arranged in the different parts of the hall. The floral display was magnificent. The tables were loaded with strawberries, cakes, confectionaries, beautiful bouquets of flowers, etc. Our excellent Brass Band kindly volunteered their services, and discoursed excellent music during

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the evening, and added much to the general enjoyment. The rooms were filled with a happy throng who appeared well pleased with their entertainment. In short the whole affair was a success. We realized almost enough to furnish our church. In addition, we will be benefitted by the evidence that we are not afraid to show ourselves, and that everything was conducted in the most orderly manner, so that all were enabled to enjoy themselves without interruption.

I think that our church will be dedicated sometime next month.

D. R. F.

(*Christian Ambassador*, Auburn NY, 30 Jun 1860)

Dedication at Newburgh

The new Universalist church in Newburgh, N. Y. was dedicated to the worship of our Heavenly Father on Wednesday of last week. Prayer was offered by Rev. Moses Ballou, and Rev. Dr. [Thomas J.] Sawyer preached the sermon. Text St. John IV:23. The weather was pleasant, the house full, and all passed off to entire satisfaction.

There was a second service in the evening, and a discourse delivered by Rev. Moses Ballou.

Our friends in Newburgh have now a neat and convenient church, well located, and a well-tried minister with whom they are well-pleased, and are full of faith and hope in regard to the future. May their most sanguine expectations be more than realized.

H. L. Rev. Henry Lyon]

(*Christian Ambassador*, Auburn NY, 11 Aug 1860)



Newburgh, N. Y.

Newburgh, Jan. 7th, 1861

Br. Austin: - The following in reference to the Sabbath School of the First Universalist Society in this place, I have taken from the *Newburgh Daily* of to-day. It gives strong evidence that even in Newburgh, the good influences of Universalism are being felt and appreciated. The new church is finely located, and very pleasant inside. Rev. W. B. Cook breaks the Bread of Life and “feeds the multitude” with his usual zeal and a bountiful hand; and the rank errors of false creeds are met and swept away as strong wind drives the autumn leaves. Universalism will flourish yet in Newburgh.

Fraternally yours,
M. R. B.

“ A thing of beauty, is a joy forever.”

So those emotions of pleasure derived from witnessing the pure and good are lasting and beneficial. Those who attended the Sabbath School Entertainment at the Universalist Church on Thursday and Friday evenings, must have left with minds and hearts filled with pleasurable emotions, and grateful for the privilege of attending an exhibition of such a high moral and elevating a character.

The singing by the school, and also by the choir attached to the church, was excellent throughout, and was received with much applause. The addresses, and dialogues, and singing

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by the scholars, were listened to with much interest. All performed their parts well. But we cannot refrain from noticing some of the more striking pieces. The introductory, by Master Cobb, was well received. "The Strawberry Girl" and the "Swiss Toy Girl" by Miss Kate Wiltsie were touchingly beautiful, and reached the tenderest chords of sympathy in every heart. "Love One Another," a dialogue by two misses, was well spoken. An address, "The Saviour", by Miss S. Cook, was spoken with much effect. The distinct utterances and melting pathos of her voice reached every heart, and manifested itself in the deep silence and moist eyes of the audience. "No Tears in Heaven," by Miss E. Welling, was listened to with thrilling interest, and was highly applauded. "The Mother's Gift," a dialogue, was well received. "Lost Child and the Gypsies," by thirteen misses, was beautiful, and excited an increasing interest to the last. And when at last little "Ida" was found by her sister, and clasped to her bosom in transports of joy, and the Gypsies all sang "Rejoice, the lost is found," the effect was powerful and thrilling, and the audience were moved to the very depths of feeling. The little masters and misses performed their parts with credit to themselves and to the delight of their hearers.

A new feature was introduced into the entertainment, consisting of several "Tableaux," which were received with many demonstrations of delight. Take it all in all, we think this was one of the most successful entertainments of the season. Many have expressed a wish that it may be repeated. We are unable to state whether that wish will be complied with. The more such Exhibitions we have the better.

Too much praise cannot be awarded to Miss H. Wiltsie, who, we understand, assumed the management of the whole affair.

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 19 Jan 1861



Death of O. S. Starr

Br. Austin:-Our infant Society here in Newburgh has met with a very great loss in the death of our worthy brother Oliver S. Starr, who passed on from this state of mortality... on the 14th inst., aged about 48 years. His wife had already been confined to her room three or four weeks when he was taken down, and being very sick at the time, she was deprived the privilege of ministering to his wants. He was confined to his bed a little over two weeks, and was blessed with all the care and attention which sympathy and affection could bestow. It was a scene that touched the sympathy of many hearts to view the husband sick unto death, and in the adjoining room the wife not expected to recover. But by the blessing of God she is now convalescent, and hopes are now entertained of her speedy restoration to health.

Br. Starr was one of the most active members of our Church and Society. He was elected one of the deacons of the Church, and was one of the Trustees of the Society from its first organization—was one of the building committee, and did far more than any other one toward the erection of our house of worship and for the support of our meetings. He was deeply interested in the success of our enterprise here, and hence was liberal and generous even beyond his means. "He being dead, yet speaketh." May that "still small voice," "go and do likewise," be duly heeded by the remaining members of the Society.

He was connected with the business portion of the community for a long number of years, and gained a reputation for integrity and uprightness of character—he was esteemed by those who knew him best as an honest man. But he has fallen in the full strength of manhood, and in the midst of usefulness. "Peace be to his ashes." A wife mourns the loss of an indulgent husband, five children of a kind father, aged parents of a dutiful son, one brother and four sisters of an affectionate brother. A large circle of relatives are also left to mourn. He was an obliging neighbor and a generous friend.

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His funeral was attended on the Sabbath following his decease, when a very large concourse of citizens assembled to pay the last sad office of respect. The fraternity of the I. O. of O. F. were present in their associated capacity, and took charge of the remains after leaving the house. The religious services were conducted by the writer, and a discourse preached from Romans XIV: 7-9.

W. B. Cook

Newburgh, N. Y. March 18, 1861

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 30 Mar 1861



from the Report of the New York Association of Universalists, 8 May 1861

We next come to Newburgh. The Society here was organized Feb. 20, 1859, and Br. W. B. Cook commenced his labors as pastor the following October. The congregation averages about 150, and the annual expenditure is \$1300. A church was organized last October, and at present numbers 14—one member, Br. O. S. Starr, having been removed by death. The pastor is Superintendent of the Sabbath School, which has an average attendance of about 30 scholars, and is served by a librarian and 6 teachers. There are 80 volumes in the library, and \$20 is annually expended for the support of the school. A weekly Bible Class of 12 to 15 members has been substituted for the conference meeting. Our friends here have had many difficulties to struggle against, but have prospered, the return says, “far more than they could have dared to hope in the beginning.” They have a tasty little church edifice, which was finished by means of aid contributed by Societies of New-York city and vicinity, and dedicated last August. But they have suffered a severe blow in the death of Br. Starr, who had assumed large pecuniary obligations toward the completion of the building, and unless they can be helped to raise about \$400, are likely to lose it. They have sent out an appeal for aid, and the case is one that urges strong claims to our sympathy which, it is to be hoped, will not be urged in vain.

E. G. [Rev. Elbridge Gerry] Brooks

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 8 Jun 1861



Rev. S. T. Aldrich

We understand that Rev. S. T. Aldridge has accepted an invitation to take the pastoral charge of the Universalist Society in Newburgh, N. Y.—Rev. W. B. Cook, former pastor of the Society, sometime since resigned. Br. Aldrich is a new man in our denomination. We trust he may find a pleasant home in Newburgh, and that his labors there may be greatly blessed for the advancement of Divine truth.

H. L. [Rev. Henry Lyon]

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 8 Jun 1861

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From the Report of the New York Association of Universalists, 8 May 1862

Br. S. T. Aldrich writes from Newburgh very discouragingly. As I hope he will be present with the [NY] Association [of Universalists], I omit any further notice, as I do not feel prepared to form any judgment.

[Rev.] Henry Blanchard

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 24 May 1862



Affairs in Newburgh, N. Y.

Br. Austin:-Recent events intimately connected with the Universalist Society, and in fact the maintenance of liberal christian worship in Newburgh—together with Br. Blanchard's obscure allusion to us in his Report to the New York Association in May [above]—seem to call for some statement of the condition of our cause in this village.

First in order, I wish to say that I do not *quite* understand why it was that Br. B. should allude so vaguely to my response to his letter of inquiry, since what I did say was definite; while at the same time I gave as a reason for brevity, the fact that I expected to be present at the Meeting of the Association, and should [would] be happy to answer any questions that the Committee or Council might think proper to ask. I *was* present, was invited to make a statement, and undertook to make one, as definite and plain as the few moments allotted me would permit. Yet it seems that nothing was said sufficiently important or clear to warrant an insertion in the Report before sending it to press.

Last September I accepted the urgent and unanimous invitation of this Society to serve them one year, with this admitted state of things: the Society was unhealthy; not only was it unhealthy but dangerously sick; and unless something could be done to rally its ebbing life, it must shortly cease to exist. Three months' labor, and a careful examination of the patient, convinced me that the motion of the muscles and the twitching of the eyes, mistaken by friends for signs of life, were abnormal and galvanic; and that even to produce or perpetrate such illusory symptoms, the *battery* must be vigorously and constantly worked. In a word, the Universalist Society was dead. For the benefit of friends of the Society in general, and those who have contributed for the purpose of relieving it from embarrassment, in particular, I will now give a few reasons why the Society did not succeed.

First: the place: Newburgh, like most of the large towns along the Hudson, is not only very orthodox, but also intensely foggy. This element of fogyism (orthodoxy gone to seed) is *immensely* aristocratic, and controls the town. In none of our metropolitan cities can you find a place in which the lines of cast[e] are more carefully, but tightly drawn, than here; frowning the face and curling the lip at any who may dare make a single innovation upon their ancient patrimony, or question the divine right of kinds and the sacredness of the Thirty-nine articles. So while the friends of liberal christianity and christian tolerance may justly regard Newburgh as a place in which it should be very desirable to see a healthy and growing church, there can be none in which it is more difficult to plant one.

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The Liberal Congregation composed of Universalists, Unitarians, and a few that sympathized with them, in all enough to make a respectable beginning, opened regular worship in the Court House some three or four years since. The enterprise enjoyed the patronage usually accorded to novel beginnings—especially those that orthodoxy concludes are in no danger of rooting. Shortly the question of organization was mooted, and a Universalist Society formed. This looked a little too much like setting up housekeeping to please the self-appointed custodians of religious worship in the place, so they began to sneer at Universalism and laughed at its sympathizers. How fully these jesuitical and cowardly representatives of a vindictive and revengeful religion controlled the people became speedily evident in the diminution of the congregation, and those significant objections to the place of meeting, or going to meeting alone, while other members of the family go elsewhere.

Although few of them were wealthy, or commanding in social position, our people were hopeful—too hopeful. This I regard as their mistake and their weakness. The objections were supposed to be sincere and honest, so they must be removed. A church must be built *some way*. But unfortunately it did not occur to them that *money* was about the first thing to be looked after in such an undertaking. A Committee was appointed to purchase a lot of ground. The ground was bought at two thousand dollars; a Building Committee was also appointed who soon succeeded in contracting for a church edifice at three thousand more. The building was begun and carried up to the windows, and all without money. A subscription was now circulated and a small amount of money raised and paid. While the books afford little light on the subject, from what I can learn from other sources, I am satisfied that the entire amount of paid subscriptions and donations for church building, *at home*, did not reach one third of the contract price for the church edifice. Bills were *arranged* and provided for; the church was completed and dedicated. But at no time did the receipts of the Society, from all sources, exceed half the amount of contingent expenses and salary. Of course with a debt of four thousand dollars, and such a state of finances, it was plain that the Society was drifting rapidly into hopeless bankruptcy.

Now it is well known that a proposition from the few, but wealthy Unitarians making up the congregation to organize on some anti-sectarian, but christian, ground of common meeting, was declined. In such circumstances, of course, the Society must look chiefly to Universalists for sympathy and help. First, an appeal was made to such of its own congregation as they knew could help them, if so disposed. They respectfully declined. The Society then made application to the sister churches in the Association. They responded in the aggregate to about six hundred dollars, all of which was used to meet contingent expenses and salary. [With] the debt still increasing, and the builder on the eve of selling the church, the Unitarian whose proposition was so promptly tabled, was now appealed to, to save the church. He came forward and gave five hundred dollars, nearly twice as much, simply for temporary relief, as any other person had given for the enterprise.

By this time all had become fully convinced that it was impossible to go on as a Universalist Society any longer. Moreover, it would be unfair and uncalled for to beg of liberal men not Universalists, the money to maintain a given form of organization for the benefit of persons who were doing nothing for themselves.

This state of things was anticipated, and thoroughly talked over as a possible event, by the Trustees and myself, at the time of settlement, and the conclusion reached that in such a state of things, it would be wise in us to accept the proposition made by the Unitarians and their friends—if after all that had transpired, they were still willing to meet us half way. They did

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meet us cordially and freely, for by this time they had added to their number two or three men of influence and money, while the old Society had diminished in an equal ratio.

The plan agreed on was this:—Sell the property under foreclosure of mortgage, to the highest bidder, and pay off the Society's debts. If it sells at such a figure as to make it desirable property for the new Society, let their friends buy it; but should others want it more than they, let them take it, and the new Society will furnish other accommodations for worship. The property was sold; others saw fit to over bid our maximum figure and took it.

The new Society was formed under favorable auspices, and upon broad and liberal, but essentially Christian, ground, and took the name of "Church of the Messiah," a name mutually acceptable since it is one frequently used by both Unitarians and Universalists.

Thus with briefest possible space, I have outlined the condition of Liberal Christian worship in Newburgh. There are things which, if written, would make the case still plainer, but I shall not speak of them unless called out. I shall endeavor to do as efficiently as I may, what I can do for our cause here; and when circumstances indicate that my work is done, I hope to have the good sense to take myself quietly away.

S. T. Aldrich

Newburgh, July 2, 1862

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, 18 Jul 1862



Rev. S. T. Aldrich

Rev. S. T. Aldrich has resigned his office as pastor of the Universalist Society in Newburgh, N.Y. He has met with many discouragements, which he cannot surmount, and feels that he may be more useful in some other locality. Newburgh will probably continue to be his post office address until he secures a new settlement.

Notwithstanding the misfortunes which have attended the efforts of our Newburgh brethren to build up a Universalist Society in that place, we trust they will not abandon the enterprise. Wherever measures are taken to plant the seed of impartial grace, those engaged in the noble cause are generally compelled to endure trials and overcome obstacles which tax their fidelity and perseverance to the highest degree. But by patient working, wise management, and a full reliance on the power of the truth in their charge and the blessing of God, success, strength and permanent prosperity, in due time, are the reward of their devotion. Thus it will be, sooner or later, in Newburgh, if our friends there keep their courage, and judiciously avail themselves of whatever means, great or small, Divine Providence may place within their reach.

Christian Ambassador, New York, 9 Aug 1862

Universalism in Newburgh, NY: A Documentary History



From the Report of the New York Association of Universalists, 6 May 1863

By the loss of the church at Newburgh, the society that existed there has been practically dissolved. I am informed that there is no prospect at present of its resuscitation.

[Rev.] B[ernard] Peters

Christian Ambassador, New York, 23 May 1863



Newburgh, N. Y.

We learn, with satisfaction, that our friends in the Highland City are making an effort to revive our Society there. Rev. J. H. Willis, of Boston, was to preach there last Sunday and next, with a view toward permanent organization. We hope that success may attend the effort. It would be a pity for a region abounding so in picturesque beauty to be long without a religion and a worship to *match*.

The Ambassador, New York, 9 Jun 1866



Newburgh, N. Y.

Rev. E[lbridge] G. Brooks will preach in Newburgh on the first and second Sundays in August, the 5th and the 12th.

The Ambassador, New York, 9 Jun 1866

Universalism in Newburgh, NY: A Documentary History

To all whom these presents may come we the subscribers of the First Universalist Congregational Society of Newburgh, N. Y. do hereby certify that at an election held at this place where the said society stately attend divine worship (the courthouse of the county of Orange in the village of Newburgh) on the Twentieth day of February (instant) at one o'clock in the afternoon of that day the said election having been duly notified according to law fifteen days previous thereto and for two successive Sabbaths [? illegible] this said election by public notice given to this [? illegible] society by O. R. Franklin member [? illegible] those at the stated meetings of the said society for public worship. And that the following persons [were?] chosen Trustees of said Society to the [? illegible] hereafter called and known by the name of the "First Universalist Congregational Church of Newburgh Orange County New York[.]" Named Clarence Cook, E. Vandenburg, William Coventry H. Waddell, C. S. Monroe, O. R. Franklin, Benjamin Sears and W^m P. Marsh. And we do for this certify that we the subscribers being two of the members of said society were at the meeting aforesaid duly chosen by a majority of the [votes?] of the said society [illegible] of the election for the said Trustees and performs the other duties recognized by law for such presiding officers[.] [S]et under our hands and seals this seventeenth day of February in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty-nine. Signed sealed and concluded in presence of M. D. Washburn and N. R. Emmet witnesses.

William Coventry H. Waddell ⊖

Daniel R. Franklin ⊖

State of New York, Orange County on this twenty-first day of February 1859 personally appeared before me William Coventry H. Waddell and Daniel R. Franklin to me known to be the parties named and who executed the foregoing instrument and severally acknowledged that they executed the same.

W^m C. Miller Justice of the Peace
in and for Orange County

A true record entered Feb. 23, 1859 at 9h am by C. G. Elliott, Deputy Clerk

From the Orange County Religious Incorporations Records
Book 1, p. 215
Orange County Courthouse, Goshen NY

Universalism in Newburgh, NY: A Documentary History

To all whom these presents may come—we the subscribers being members of a Society to be called the Church of the Messiah, do hereby certify that at a meeting held in the Court House of the county of Orange in the village of Newburgh on the second day of June, the said meeting having been duly notified according to law fifteen days previous thereto [.]

And that the following persons were duly chosen Trustees of the Society to be hereafter called the Church of the Messiah of Newburgh Orange County New York namely J. Brownler Brown [.] O. H. Heron [.] J. R. Delbert, Charles Alden, M. D. Washburn.

And we do further certify that we the subscribers being two of the members of said Society were at the meeting aforesaid duly chosen by a majority of the members of the said Society present at said meeting to preside at and to receive the votes of the electors for the said Trustees and to perform the other duties required by law of such presiding officers.

Given under our hands and seals this ninth day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two.

G. P. Welling ⊖

O. H. Heron ⊖

Signed sealed and delivered in presence of Charles Alden & M. D. Washburn witnesses

Orange County, on this 10th day of June one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two before me personally came G. P. Welling and O. H. Heron to me known to be the individuals described in and who executed the foregoing instrument and severally acknowledged that they had executed the same.

Jno. Miller Justice of the Peace

in & for Orange County

A true record entered June 12, 1862 at 11h am

C. G. Elliott, deputy clerk

From the Orange County Religious Incorporations Records

Book 1, p. 229

Orange County Courthouse, Goshen NY

This record was compiled in 2003 by Karen E. Dau, Rochester, NY
Archivist, New York State Convention of Universalists