

[Bennington, Wyoming Co. NY]

Cowlesville Churches (excerpt)

A Universalist Society was organized in Cowlesville in 1844, when a group of 40 persons desirous of "advancing the principles of morality and good works among men" gathered for that purpose. A building was erected at a cost of \$2,000 and dedicated in 1845 by the Rev. S. [Stephen] R. Smith of Buffalo. Being the only church edifice in town, it was also shared by Baptist and Methodist societies as well as the Universalists, each had its own special service at different hours. For many years there was a Union Sunday School, and in 1880 there was an average attendance of 60, with Henry McBain superintendent.

The last Universalist pastor was Rev. John Sayles of East Aurora [in Erie County]. He came for a Sunday afternoon service, when a local resident would drive to East Aurora to get him and make another trip to take him home again. That was in the horse and buggy days about sixty years ago. In 1944, the building was sold to the local IOOF Lodge. The lodge has remodeled it since that time and is still using the old church as a meeting hall.

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Old residents recall that the bell was given to the Universalists by Col. John B. Folsom (grandfather of Mrs. Grover Cleveland) and that it was cast in England.

Mrs. Grace A. Willard, Bennington Churches, in *Historical Wyoming*
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