THIS LE ROY SITE SEEMS ILL FATED

Fine Masonic Temple Never Used for Its Original Purpose
IN SPITE OF BIG PLANS
Round House Built in 1825 Never Even Finished—
Unfortunate History of Universalist Church That Later Rose on Same Spot

There is one spot in the center of the village of Le Roy which has quite a historical interest, and, while it figures prominently in the past welfare of the place, it seems to be singularly fated, for everything started upon this piece of ground appears to have come to an untimely end. This is the site now occupied by the Universalist church which is no longer used for church services, these having been suspended some two years ago.

The piece of ground was not first occupied by the church, but served an altogether different use. It was way back in the early part of the century just past that this piece of ground was purchased by the Masons and the idea was conceived of building a large temple in which to conduct the meetings. Le Roy from its commencement has had a flourishing lodge of the Masonic fraternity, even as it has at present. In the early days the meetings were held in the schoolhouse on the corner of Craigie street on what was known as the Tuft's lot, and at other times in the ballroom of the Ganson tavern. After the matter had become sufficiently agitated and the forces had become strong enough to warrant the undertaking of a plan, it was decided to build a fit temple and, as has been stated, the site of the present Universalist Church was selected.

It was about the year 1825 that the temple was erected. It was of circular form and, on account of this, took the name of Round House. This building was of brick and forty feet in diameter. The ceiling on the first floor was sixteen feet high; the second, while not as high, was of circular form and was called the Sounding room. This was designed for conducting the ceremonies. In front of the building was a square tower four stories high and above this a belfry of twenty or twenty-four feet, making the whole height about seventy feet. Recorded in the history of Le Roy, is a letter written by a lady who attended the ceremonies of the laying of the cornerstone of this Masonic temple, which was a great day in Le Roy. She says:

"The site of the building is nearly opposite the church and is to unite taste and elegance in an uncommon degree. Its cost is to be about $7,000, $4,000 of which is to be supplied from the different lodges of the state and the remainder by the village. The spirit of Masonry is excessively prevalent in these parts as was evinced at the laying of the cornerstone. Among the novelties of the occasion I was particularly struck with the ladies and babies walking in procession; the latter of course in the arms of the parent whose turn it might be to bear the lovely burden. The procession of Masons, headed by a band of music, marched to the base of the temple, halted, parted to the right and left, while the ladies from youth to old age, two by two marched to the church where an oration was pronounced (it being St. John's day). The ceremonies being over, the crowd went to Ganson's tavern where 250 females took dinner and double that number of men, the former within doors and the latter beneath a bower made for the occasion. The company dispersed without accident in vehicles of various forms and sizes, chiefly drawn by mares with colts in train. The whole was a rare exhibition."

Strange to say this building was never used for the purpose for which it was intended. This was prevented by the popular excitement which followed the taking off of

Morgan, who was spirited through Le Roy in the fall of 1826. The building was never entirely finished as at first planned, and was used for other purposes, but all the other societies which occupied it have since passed away.

After it was decided not to put it to the use for which it was originally intended, the Congregational Church Society, which at that time was quite strong in Le Roy, leased the lower floor and for a number of years held services there, until it finally secured a house of worship of its own. This religious society has long since ceased to exist in Le Roy and is counted among the things of Le Roy's past history.

In about the year 1828 the upper room of this old temple was finished off for use as a school room and until 1859 was used for this purpose. It was here that many of the older residents of Le Roy received their early education. It was used first by Professor Hatch for select school purposes and later by Professor Bradley. In 1834, after his graduation from Harvard, the late William Annin, of Le Roy, secured a lease of the building and for a number of years afterwards kept a private school in it.

After this famous building had served the public as a schoolhouse for many years it finally fell into the hands of the trustees, who were John Lent, I. M. Murphy, Israel Rathbone, William Sheldon, John Jackson, John Clifford, Marshall Smead, James Ganson, Ezekiel Hall and Jonathan Barron, all of whom were of the Masonic fraternity. These men sold this property to John Barbor who kept it until about 1860, when it was purchased by the Universalist Society of Le Roy.

The old Round House was then demolished and on its site began to grow the new Universalist Church building, which was constructed of brick. At this time the Universalist Society in Le Roy included many of the well-to-do and influential citizens of the community and the society was in a flourishing condition. This church edifice cost about $8,000. In 1881 Mrs. Olive Haaze, a member of the society, died and left a legacy of $6,700 to the church, on condition that services must be held regularly for ten years by an ordained Universalist minister. This was done and the society finally came into possession of the money. By this time, however, many of the influential people of the church had died or moved away, and even with this legacy it was impossible to meet the expenses, so that two years ago services were given up and will probably never be resumed again.

So it is seen that this site has been a particularly unfortunate one in that the efforts of those who have planned and built upon it have found that their labor was not permanent. What next will be undertaken upon this spot remains to be seen.

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Transcribed on 23 Sep 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY