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TELLS OF GROWTH OF UNIVERSALISM
And Many Set Backs in Watertown
SERVICES AT ALL SOULS

Rev. Harry Westbrook Reed Outlines History of Church in Watertown

The introduction of the Universalist faith in Watertown and northern New York and the organization of the Universalist church in this city was described by Rev. Harry Westbrook Reed, D.D., pastor of All Souls' church, at 10:30 this morning at a service in observance of the 100th anniversary of the church. The first to profess the Universalist faith to come to Watertown and reside was John Fay, a school master, he said. Mr. Fay came here was a young man and secured a position as teacher in the village school. Subsequently it became known that he was a believer in what was looking then as the awful doctrine of Universalism. He dared to deny the doctrine of eternal and never-ending punishment and to believe in a universal fatherhood. He was questioned regarding the matter and admitted it to be true. He dared to (affirm?) his religious belief even though he knew it would cost him his position, and it did. The admission on the part of John Fay that he was a Universalist immediately became the sensation of the small village and was believed to be sufficient ground to discharge him from his position.

There were many who expressed themselves as sympathizers with John Fay, and there were others who felt the injustice of the dismissal. All of those who were thus friendly to the cause gathered together, and eventually, after hearing itinerant preachers for a while, they asked Pitt Morse, who was preaching in central and western New York, to come to Watertown.

Pitt Morse was born in Brooklyn, Conn., Feb. 21, 1794, son of Elihu and Lucy Palmer Morse. He resided in Pomfret and Woodstock when young, attending Woodstock Academy. When 16 years old he began teaching school and was a clerk in cotton mills when not teaching. His first ventures were in Attleboro, Mass., where, in 1816, he became more interested in religious matters and came in contact with an early Universalist minister.

In 1818 he was teaching school in Pittsford, near Rochester. Here he became acquainted with Rev. Thomas Billingham, an English immigrant, who had been a Baptist minister for many years, but [later?] on coming to America had come to know the doctrine of Universalism. Mr. Morse later came in touch with Rev. Stephen R. Smith, one of the leading ministers of the state, and later read theology with him at his home in Clinton, Oneida county. After being licensed to preach by the Western Association of Universalists, of which Rev. Mr. Smith was the leading spirit, Mr. Morse responded to the call from Watertown in 1819. He arrived on a week day, and so eager were the people to hear him that they held a service in a store occupied by William Smith that evening.

The interest awakened was intense. Attendances at meetings grew rapidly and the success of the movement was soon assured. Mr. Morse soon began preaching in the surrounding towns, and it was not long before he was preaching regularly in Henderson and Brownville. For 40 years he was the leading spirit and spokesman of Universalism in Watertown. He was the Hosea Ballou and Adolphus Skinner of Northern New York, according to Rev. Dr. Reed's characterization.

The first society in Watertown was organized April 26, 1820. The officers of this society were: Levi Butterworth, Chauncey Calhoun, Henry Caswall, Simeon Skeels, Darius Doty.

In May, 1821, Mr. Morse had an oral discussion in Belleville on the distinctive features of Universalism, as against the older types of theology believed in by Methodists and Presbyterians.

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This discussion was with Rev. Rinaldo M. Evarts, an eminent champion of the so-called orthodoxy. While both sides were pleased with the outcome, it added many friends to the cause of Universalism, and increased the desire to have a church edifice in Watertown.

Mr. Morse began Nov. 20, 1821, to issue a semi-monthly religious journal entitled "The Herald of Salvation," which continued for two years. The first year it was printed by S. A. Abbey and the second year by William Woodard. Largely through the labors of Mr. Morse the Black River Association of Universalists, comprising the counties of Lewis, Jefferson, Oswego and St. Lawrence, was organized Jan. 8, 1823. Efforts were then made to effect a church organization. Up to this time it had been simply a society of believers. The ecclesiastical body was thus organized June 21, 1823.

The society was busy for three years planning the erection of a church building. They succeeded and the site selected was that of the first village school house, located at the southeast corner of Public Square, then called the (Mall?), the one from which John Fay had been discharged as teacher because of his Universalistic views—an unusual and interesting coincident, where the testimony of one single man became the fire which lighted the torch of faith, and the ground on which stood the institution which ejected him became the foundation of the church.

The date for the dedication was set for Wednesday, Nov. 10, 1824. Rev. Hosea Ballou had been invited to preach the sermon. The paint on the new church was not dry, however, and while the feeling on the part of the other churches was not always cordial, according to Rev. Dr. Reed, the Methodist church offered the use of their building to the Universalists for the service on Sunday afternoon. In the morning of that day Mr. Ballou preached in the court house which proved much too small. During Monday and Tuesday and for a few days following the dedication Mr. Ballou preached in Brownville, Sackets Harbor, Henderson and Ellisburg.

After Pitt Morse had been here about five years he was induced to accept a call to the Lombard street church in Philadelphia, and a little later his old friend, Stephen R. Smith, settled over the First church of the same city. Here these two men plunged into their work with great zeal. Mr. Morse, in company with Mr. Smith, again began to publish the Herald of Salvation, the religious journal he had published in this city. Finally in answer to constant appeals from their old friends and associates, they resigned from their charges in Philadelphia, Mr. Smith returning to Clinton and Mr. Morse to Watertown.

During the two years of Mr. Morse's absence the church was supplied by Rev. Case and Rev. Robert Bartlett.

Mr. Morse continued as resident minister until 1837, when he removed his residence to Henderson, and while there he extended his preaching circuits to the northward into St. Lawrence county, and rendered pastoral services for 44 miles around.

Among the young men Mr. Morse attracted into the Universalist ministry was H. L. [Henry] Hayward, who later recorded how as a boy of nine or ten he attended a funeral service which Pitt Morse conducted, and Mr. Morse's sermon prompted the boy to take up the ministry.

After Pitt Morse had moved to Henderson the church was ministered to by Rev. William Waggoner, who remained for four years, Rev. Harvey Boughton [Boughton] for five years, and Rev. John H. Stewart for eight years. Rev. Dr. Reed recalled Rev. Mr. [Boughton] as a minister of his home church in Macedon, N.Y., when he was a small boy. When Dr. Reed entered the ministry Rev. Mr. [Boughton's] daughter was his Sunday school teacher.

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During Mr. Stewart's ministry a fire occurred in Watertown on the evening of Sept. 22, 1850, and among the (?) buildings destroyed was the Universalist church. Only the walls were left standing. There was no insurance but the congregation immediately made plans to erect a new edifice, which was dedicated Nov. 2, 1852. Rev. Adolphus Skinner preached the dedicatory sermon and Rev. Pitt Morse made the prayer.

With the opening of the new church the plan of deeding church pews was adopted. In the book, which is in the exhibit of records of All Souls' church, the first name is that of Norris M. Woodruff, who purchased two pews, for which he paid (\$??0). The second name that of Winslow Partridge. Others are John Sigourney, Hiram Converse, Luther G. Hoyte, Henry Keep, Elisha Andrus, John D. Crouner, Nelson W. Streeter, Francis R. Lamon, Elisha Wakefield, Clark Hewitt, John L. Baker, Roswell D. Murray, Solomon Had(?), Baker Murray, Chauncey Calhoun, Tim Hungerford, Marcus Rice and many others.

Rev. A. A. Thayer, D.D. was called as minister July 1, 1864. Dr. Thayer's conviction was that the profession and covenant should be written in the Bible and that each member should sign his or her name. This Bible may be seen in the exhibit of records with many familiar names attached to the covenant.

In the second year of Dr. Thayer's ministry, in 1855, Pitt Morse again took up residence in Watertown. He did not pass away until 1860, and he was a resident of this city during part of the ministries of Dr. Thayer and Rev. E. W. [Elhanan Winchester] Reynolds, who was Thayer's successor in 1853.

Following Dr. Thayer's ministry there were a series of short ministries: Rev. E. W. Reynolds, Rev. I. M. [Isaac Morgan] Atwood, D.D., Rev. D. C. [DeWitt Clinton] Tomlinson, Rev. Harvey Hersey, Rev. G. F. Babbitt; Rev. George J. Porter, Rev. Richmond Fisk, D.D., Rev. D. L. R. Libby, and Rev. B. B. Gibbs.

Two of the three former ministers will attend the anniversary banquet Tuesday evening, Rev. Gibbs and Rev. Porter. The third, Rev. Babbitt, lives in Texas. Dr. Fisk, at one time president of St. Lawrence University, had a ministry of eight years, the longest of any, except that of Pitt Morse, whose ministry covered 15 years.

An outstanding landmark in the history of the church was the ministry of Rev. Moses H. Harris, D.D., which began in 1902. His dream was the present All Souls' church building and it was under his ministry that his dream came true. After using the second edifice for 41 years, the church officials decided to leave Public Square and erect in Washington street one of the most beautiful temples of worship in the city.

The church, All Souls' was dedicated Oct. 4, 1907. Rev. Dr. I. M. Atwood preached the sermon. Rev. Dr. Richmond Fisk assisted in the service and Dr. Moses H. Harris gave the prayer of dedication. When the church was dedicated there was a debt of \$24,000. This was cancelled by Mrs. Emma Flower Taylor, and her mother, Mrs. Roswell P. Flower, in memory of Mrs. Flower's mother, Mrs. Roxanna Woodruff Strong. Other notable gifts to the church have been a lot and parsonage on Winthrop street, which was used for many years by Sylvanus Poole. Mrs. S. T. Bordwell, Byron S. Frisbee, Mrs. Harriet Mack and Miss Caroline Partridge and other made generous gifts.

Three memorial windows have been placed in the church. The Parable of the Sower was placed in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Lotus Ingalls, by their daughter, Mrs. Alice Wooley; the chancel

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window, the theme of the Ascension, being placed by Mr. and Mrs. S. R. Cleveland in memory of Dr. and Mrs. Moses H. Harris; and one with the Resurrection as the theme by Mr. and Mrs. T. C. Matteson and family in memory of Sumner Ryder Matteson who lost his life in France in the world war. When the memorial windows are completed a chronological, pictorial history of the life of Christ will be depicted.

Rev. Dr. Reed mentioned the Ladies' Aid, the Mission Circle, the Bible school, All Souls' Guild, organized by Mrs. Harris, as being auxiliary organizations which have played an important part in the church history.

Eight young men have given themselves to the ministry in these later years and 30 of the young men of this church were in the world war. The church now has 443 members.

"Our church has been foremost in the social, civic, religious and many other movements in the city," said Rev. Dr. Reed. "She has been a leader. Looking back through these 100 years, we realize how rich and abundant is our inheritance. Not alone the material accumulation which, with your generous givings, made possible this wonderful church of ours, but [also] the legacy of their devotion to God, the influence and their consecration as followers of Jesus Christ and their fidelity to the labors of the church. All of these constitute an inheritance which is beyond our power to weigh and measure. It would be mockery indeed for us to recount their glorious deeds, their self-sacrificing labors and their marvelous achievements if we should [would] not show ourselves worthy heirs of such a sacred heritage.

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(from a somewhat poor-quality source)

Transcribed on 29 Mar 2011 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY