

[Greenfield (Porter Corners), Saratoga Co. NY]

Universalist Church, Noted Area Landmark, Sold to Community
by Jean McGregor

A Universalist Church in 1816—An attractive community center in 1950 briefly describes the historic building at Porter Corners which has linked the austere past with the lively and serviceable present.

A recent letter from Miss Helen F Travers, 66 Martense Ave., Brooklyn, brings us the news: "You might be interested to know that I sold the old Universalist Church at Porter Corners to be used as a Community House. The residents are converting it into a nice community hall."

Oftentime a letter such as this brings back a happy train of memories of yesteryear.

In interesting data loaned us by Mrs. Charles C. Weirman, who is one of the many women active in the making of the Community Center a successful achievement, we find the first records of the church.

A statement 105 years ago, signed by Lorenzo Rowland, architect, and John S. Peacock, clerk, dated at Greenfield Apr. 3, 1844, establishes the first date of erection:

"The first Universalist Church was erected in the year of Our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixteen under the direction of Mark A. Child, John Harris, John W. Creal, Abner Medbery, and Frederick Parkmann, was thoroughly repaired in March and April, year of Our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and forty-four under the direction of George Riddle, Henry Peacock and Daniel Morehouse.

...

The sale of the church was completed May 3, this year.

Every resident in the community is a part of the work of restoration of the historic building into a Community Center and to date, the foundations have been strengthened and repairs made on two and a half sides of the building. All of the windows have been taken out. Those without glass have been refitted with glass, others strengthened with putty, all have been sized. Many of the windows have been repaired and put back.

Other repair work is in process with everyone contributing time and painstaking work. The building generally is in good condition and with the replacing of clapboards and other damage done by the weather and vandals since the church closed in the 1890s, will present a new and attractive face to the village.

Perhaps, the fact that the upper part of the church was used prior to 1870 by the Free Masons and others, for a hall has inspired the present descendants of the early pioneers to preserve the building, and make it useful to the community as a center of activity.

The building is now held by the Porter Corner's Community Hall Corporation, with five trustees: Frank L. Middlebrook, chairman; Joseph Doherty, treasurer and secretary; Leslie Rodgers, Charles C. Weirman and Kenneth Hendrie.

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Of the trustees, Mr. Hendrie is the grandson of John Hewitt, active in the latter day existence of the church, and Mr. Weirman is a descendant of the Whipplés, mentioned in the history of the church and early days of Porter Corners.

As in the old days, 26 who became charter members are: Mr. and Mrs. Frank L. Middlebrook, Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Menshausen, Mr. and Mrs. John Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Burton, Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Rodgers, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Campbell.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles C. Weirman, John Kavicky, Mr. and Mrs. Earl Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Henry J. Winne, Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Hendrie, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Doherty, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Wadsley, Miss Ella Wadsley.

The new group is raising funds for the restoration and conversion into a community hall through dances, several of which have been barn dances given in the Charles C. Weirman barn, food sales, game socials, and other benefits.

So worthy is the object of the community in seeking to create its own community center where all may have recreation and relaxation, that we anticipate, many of the descendants of the pioneers of Porter Corners who have gone to other cities and states will assist, sending in contributions. These will be acceptable and may be sent to any of the trustees listed above.

Another record is the Incorporation of the Universalian Church in the Town of Greenfield "recorded in Book of Religious Societies, Page 167," Dec. 1, 1820, by Thomas Palmer, Saratoga County Clerk's office. This records, in part, that Mark A. Child and John Harris were chosen by a majority of electors to preside at the election, Dec. 16, 1819, at which Frederick Parkman, Abner Medbery and John W. Creal, "three discreet persons," were elected as trustees.

The wording preserves the quaint style of the period.

The first minute book of the church (later written as Universalist Church) records the trustees elected annually, May 27, 1833, each year until 1838. In that year first mention is made of election of delegates to attend a convention to be held at the village of Fort Ann, Oct. 3 and 4. Delegates elected were John Harris and Plunichas Hathaway. They were recommended "as in good standing," and the last named as an "ordained preacher."

At a meeting, Mar, 31, 1839, John S. Peacock was the standing clerk, and a committee of five appointed to present Articles of Faith.

The articles and constitution were unanimously adopted Apr. 31, 1839.

First of the Articles of Faith was: "We believe that The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament contain a revelation of the church of God and of the duty, interest and final destination of Man.

Second was: "We believe that there is one God whose nature is love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of Grace who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to Holiness and Happiness."

Third Article: "We believe that Holiness and true Happiness are inseparably connected and that believers ought to be careful to maintain order and promote good works for these things are good and profitable unto man."

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The Constitution provided for a committee of man to be elected annually to provide preaching and direct where meetings were to be held. They also were to constitute a committee of "discipline to labour with disorderly members and report them to the Society if they will not conform to the rules of the Gospel.

The Society provided for elections [sic] a delegate to the annual meeting of the Hudson River Association.

Any person became a member by subscribing to the articles of Faith and the rules, and "conforming their lives to the rules of the Gospel."

Charter members of who signed, from which many residents of the community will trace their ancestry. They are: Mark A. Child, Ezekial Harris, Abner Medbery, Henry Peacock, George Sax, Rensselaer Sax, George Riddell, John E. Harris, Hiram Medbery, Benjamin M. Williams, Joseph Williams, Samuel Gregory, John W. Medbery, Ephraim Harris 3d, Henry Barton, Henry Wilsey, Ephraim Harris, William Harris.

Seth Austin, Henry Medbery, Leonard Palmer, John S. Peacock, Chauncey D. Medbery, Daniel Morehouse, Israel Riddell, Samuel G. Gibbs, Cephas Rose, Nelson D. Morehouse, Thomas W. Gwinn, David R. Riddell, Mrs. A. Olde.

Orron Peacock, Luther Cady, Joseph Bartlett, Lewis S. Mills, E. G. Mills, George Brennan, George A. Peacock, Henry A. Scott, Eli R. Peck, Chester Harris, Wellington Peck, Nathan Merling, S. H. Gregory, John R. Harris, Charles G. Latham, Seth Hill, Henry D. Rowland, William A. Rowland, Harry J. Peacock.

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