

A Brief History of the
First Universalist Church of
Henderson, New York



Current History as taken from the Watertown Times Saturday, September 23, 1989

Aside from the removal of the steeple in the 1940's, the building stands as it was originally erected, though over the years interior and exterior improvements have been made. The interior was painted and the vestibule painted, papered, and carpeted in the mid-1970's, and the exterior was painted in 1984. There have also been repairs to the roof, chimney, windows, and electrical system. On Halloween night in 1973, vandals damaged the rear stained glass window. Repairs to the double mural cost thousands of dollars.

Through the years, the church has been the "mother church" of many students from the St. Lawrence University Theological School in Canton. The last student minister was The Rev. Duke Gray, now in Malden, MA. With the merger of the Unitarian and Universalist denominations in 1961, the school at Canton was eventually phased out in a cost saving measure and the source of supply for many of the small churches in upstate New York vanished.

Among those who have served the Henderson church, the Rev. Dr. Max Coots, currently in Canton, NY, is perhaps the best known to area residents.

Since 1967, the church has had scattered activity—weddings, funerals, special services, the exception of some brief interludes when lay-led services were held. Arthur Vissar is remembered for the enthusiasm and spirit he and his family brought to the church. Under his guidance, a choir was formed and activities were plentiful. Following his departure, Neal Warren of Watertown conducted lay led services for a time. In the early 1980's the Rev. George A. Smith provided services by commuting from Rochester every other week.

In 1989, in preparation for the 150th anniversary celebration, the church began holding summer services on an every other week basis during the summer. Attendance averaged 30-35 a week and provided hope to the members that the church could not only continue but could prosper and grow. At the Anniversary service, four new members joined and the membership has made plans to continue services every other week until Christmas.

A Brief history of the Church (As it appeared in the One Hundreth Anniversay Order of Service)

In 1819 in the town of Henderson, thirteen Universalists met and formed the first society but it was not to become permanent until four years later, in 1823. It grew from thirteen members until there were one hundred and fifty members, then they needed a church. Previously they had held their meetings in the school houses and in the private homes. In warm weather they met in the open. They would come in the afternoon for the service and bring their supper with them. At chore time the men would go home and return for the evening service.

In 1839, \$2,200 had finally been raised and they built the church which now stands. On Dec. 25, 1839, the new church was dedicated with the Rev. Pitt Morse as the first pastor. The first trustees were John S. Porter, Roswell Davis and Amasa Hungerford. Some of the people who made it possible to have the church were the Dobsons, Aspinwalls, Carpenters, Wooleys, Kilbys, Joyners, Boyces, Howards, Gleasons, Montagues, Alexanders, Damons, Whitneys, Spragues, Lawrences, Hungerfords, Sias's, Roses, Mathers, Bulls, Bullards, Whittiers, Tylers, Sawyers, and many others and down through the century the same blood has carried on and made it possible to keep up the church. The people today are grand-children and great-grandchildren of the men and women who made the old church possible, and thier children and grandchildren will carry on in the years to come. Barring fire, the old church will stand for another hundren years for these wise men built their House upon a Rock.

Writing of the old church I hardly know which pronoun to use. I cannot say "him" or "it", so I shall have to say "she", because the old church reminds me of a lightship off the coast. When you drive into Henderson from any direction the first thing you see is the spire of this church looming up like the tower on a light-ship, and I know it has been a welcome sight for many a man and woman returning to the old town.

The old church has seen many changes in the past hundred years. She has seen the happy bride and groom march up her aisles to the strain of the wedding march, and later has seen some of the same ones go out the doors as the organ played the funeral dirge. She has passed through three wars. Back in the days of the Civil War the boys and men received a farewell blessing from her pulpit and on their return were given a warm welcome. During the World War a blue flag hung on her walls with a white star for every boy who had gone fro there. Later gold stars appeared in memory of those who were left overseas.

Great men of our country have spoken from her pulpit; great singers have sung from her stage, and great musicians have made her walls ring with grand music. In the old days many plays and dramas were enacted there, some local, some foreign, and before the days of the Central School, the graduation exercises were held in our churches. On Christmas, a large tree was a red letter day in former times. Everyone came to the Christmas exercises with presents for members of their families and friends.

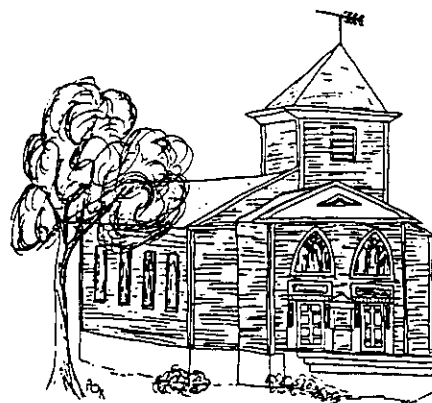
The old church was built by Henderson's own architect and builder, Joseph Barnes. He had as helpers Peter Howard, Hiram Harris, Harry Tyler, Amasy Lawrence, and Asa Sawyer. Today, some of their descendants are supporters of the church.

For the past sixty years the old church has been a clearing house for the Theological School in Canton and a "Mother Church" to more young ministers than any other church in the Universalist denomination. Some great preachers and teachers have made their initial start in Henderson. Some, now, have passed to the larger church beyond. From them and for the faithful members and co-workers throughout the years the church has a right to be proud of the work accomplished. May the present generation and those to come, carry on their hopes and aspirations.

--Historian

First Universalist Church of Henderson, NY

Newsletter Fall, 1989



THE OLD CHURCH STILL SPEAKS

The 150th Anniversary was a rousing success. We had people from all over attend including former ministers and lay-leaders. The Saturday night dinner featured tributes and fine food and the wonderful entertainment of Alan Besaw and Frank Sischo. Gladys Montague is to be congratulated for all the hard work she put in organizing and overseeing the celebration. To the members and friends who worked so hard and with love for the church, we thank you.

Summer Services Held

The summer services were definitely a hit. Starting with MayZin and ending with Sam Thomas, the services were well attended and saw a real spirit of dedication and determination by the members and friends to support and sustain the church. Our attendance ranged from the mid-20's to over 80, with the average Sunday seeing 30-35 people. In addition, there was always something for the children, starting with a children's story and then a special project related to the day's topic. The children assisted in taking up the offering and ringing the bell. (Even some adults offered to help ring the old bell!) We were pleased to have 3-5 children every Sunday, with several of them coming more than once with their parents.

SERVICES TO BE HELD THROUGH DECEMBER

*Interest in
Henderson Church
Continues to Grow*

At a meeting in mid-August, it was decided to continue services on an every other week basis until Christmas. Ray Peterson and John Kinley are heading up the worship committee and could use one more person to assist them. They don't expect to have long meetings, nor many of them, but could use the advice and counsel of some of the older members. So far, they have lined up an exciting list of speakers and ministers.

The first Sunday, October 8, John Joseph Bettinger will speak on American Indian traditions and how the Indians practiced their beliefs. Following Sundays will include a missionary back from Central America, a student minister, a visit from that famous Unitarian president--Thomas Jefferson, and the Rev. Richard C. Crooks with a Christmas message and special Christmas music. All services will be at 11:00 AM.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Put these dates on your calendar and bring a friend:

OCTOBER 8, OCTOBER 22

NOVEMBER 5, NOVEMBER 19

DECEMBER 3, DECEMBER 17

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS!!

*(We continue to grow
and prosper.)*

At the 150th Anniversary Service, four new members signed the book! A warm and friendly welcome to Margaret Cornwall, Noreen David, Sherry Fowler, and John Kinley. Your decision to join and share will help the church as it continues to sustain the liberal religious needs of the North Country.

NEWS FROM AROUND

With this first newsletter in several years, there are some congratulations and thanks that are past due.

--Special thanks to Elizabeth LaLone for playing the piano during the services this summer. Although our voices weren't always in the best of tune, Liz kept us going. And several times we sat in silence as she played the Postlude and then applauded. We hope you will continue to provide us with the spirit and love of music.

--The organ that provided so much enjoyment at the 150th was donated by Lila Bull. We thank you Lila for your gift of love and music.

--Congratulations to Donald and Beth Pierce on the birth of daughter Kristine. She has attended several of our summer services and delighted young and old. It is good to have you all.

--Congratulations also to Ray and Laurie Peterson on the birth of son Luke. Ray and Laurie brought Luke to his first service at just over a week old. He was marvelous and much fawned over by all.

--Congratulations also to Christine Henderson, Hattie and Bill Trowbridge's daughter, on the birth of son Timothy Clayton. Although they live in Otisco, with a name like Timothy Clayton Henderson, we know the family will not be strangers to the North Country.

CLUSTER IN THE NORTH COUNTRY, OCTOBER 21

Let's make a day of it!!

Several times this summer Trish Kinley has mentioned the cluster meeting in Gananoque, Ontario, on October 21. You could choose to go for Friday-Sunday, but most will probably be interested in just the Saturday meeting. Here is an excellent chance to meet others, many from small fellowships and churches, and learn from them. There will be workshops and fellowship and good food for all. Why not plan on carpooling up? It would be great to have representatives from Henderson there.

Among the topics being discussed at the cluster will be "The Gaia Hypothesis: The World as an immense living organism", "What's New In RE", "Music in Religion", "Exploring New Directions in Worship Services", and "Professional Leadership". Cost for the Saturday session is under \$35 and provides you with a wonderful dinner and social hour.

NYCU wants delegates

And speaking of representatives, the New York Convention of Universalists is meeting in Rochester on October 27-28. We are eligible to send delegates. The organization will help subsidize part of the travel and overnight accommodations. If you are interested, contact Gladys and she will have more information.

HARVEST SUPPER SUGGESTED

Members and friends to join in Potluck

Although our Sunday services have been meaningful and spiritual this summer and promise to be so throughout the Fall, a church is also fellowship and social. Hattie Trowbridge has suggested a Harvest Supper (Potluck) sometime in late October or early November. What a grand way to meet new members, relive old times, and have a rousing good time. Contact Hattie or John Kinley and give them your ideas.

In Memoriam

Alice Hill

1895-1989

Know that you are missed by all

LIFE GOES ON

Not the TV series, but our church

Congratulations to Floyd and Margaret Hill Parks on their 50th Anniversary. The official date is November 25 but a gala celebration was held this summer with guests including the Rev. Al Niles from Maine. He had married them and was delighted to attend. We wish for them many more years together.

We are pleased to see Hattie Trowbridge up and about and busy as ever. She had a bout with pneumonia this summer and was not feeling well. But she seems to be much better. Good to have you back on your feet, Hattie.

At the same time, we were distressed to learn that Hattie's daughter, Christine, was ill shortly after the birth of their son. We understand she is better and we hope she will be well enough to visit some Sunday.

Letters to the Church on the 150th Anniversary

"I pray that the love of God will embrace you always, and that the weekend itself shall be a blessed and memorable event. I cherish dearly my time with you in 1962 and 1963 and send personal greetings to all who might remember me."

--Rev. Duke T. Gray

"Perhaps more than any single church in the denomination, the Universalist Church in Henderson served Universalism for generations as the springboard for vital ministerial careers, a contribution to our denomination far exceeding the size of the congregation. One can but hope that the church can continue to enrich those whose lives it touches.

--Rev. Robert Wolley

"...appreciation must be expressed for the patience, tolerance, endurance - and encouragement given to "budding" young Ministers by the People of the Church and Community. God bless them all and blessings to those who follow."

--Rev. Wallace G. Fiske

St. Lawrence UU District Board Meets in Henderson

The St. Lawrence District Board met in Henderson September 22-23. Henderson was chosen so that Board members could join in the 150th Anniversary. Several board members, including the District Consultant, Rev. Wendy L. Colby, took part in the service. We thank them all for coming.

The First Universalist Church of Henderson, N.D.

**cordially and proudly invites you to our
150th Anniversary Celebration
September 23 & 24, 1989**

Schedule of Events

September 23 **Roast Beef Dinner at Community
Building
Dinner at 6:30 PM, Entertainment
after
Reservations by September 15 to
(315) 938-5447**

September 24 **Church Service 10:30 A.M.
First Universalist Church**

**The Reverend Albert Niles,
celebrating 50 years of ministry,
will preach. His sermon topic:
"The Old Church Still Speaks"**

**Coffee and Fellowship to follow
the service**

**We hope you will join us in our celebration as we affirm through
fellowship and worship our gratitude for the past, our blessings in
the present, and our aspirations for the future.**

One Hundred and Fifty Year Anniversary



**First Universalist Church
Henderson, New York
September 24, 1989**

(Sketch done for the 150th Anniversary
by Lila Bull)

**Service of Rededication
Sunday, September 24, 1989
10:30 A.M.**

Prelude,

"Largo"

G.F. Handel

Lighting of the Chalice

Rev. Martha Munson

Hymn: (Congregation standing)

O day of rest and gladness, O day of joy and light,
O balm of care and sadness, Most beautiful, most bright,
O day of sweet refection, Thou art a day of love,
O day of resurrection From earth to things above!

Thou art a cooling fountain in life's dry, dreary sand;
From thee, like Pisgah's mountain, We view our promised land.
Thou art a port protected From storms that round us rise,
A garden intersected With streams of paradise.

Today on weary nations The heavenly manna falls;
To holy convocations The silver trumpet calls,
Where gospel light is glowing with pure and radiant beams,
And living water flowing With soul refreshing streams.

New graces ever gaining From this our day of rest,
We reach the rest remaining To spirits of the blest.
O day of rest and gladness, O day of joy and light,
O balm of care and sadness, Most beautiful, most bright!

Affirmation of Faith: (Congregation Standing)

Love is the doctrine of this church;
The quest of truth is its sacrament;
And service is its prayer.
To dwell together in peace;
To seek knowledge in freedom;
To serve mankind in fellowship;
To the end that all souls shall grow into harmony
with the Divine ---
Thus do we covenant with each other and with God.

A Brief History of the Church

Rev. Leon (Toby) Schilling

The Old Church Speaks

*(Written on the occasion of the 100th Anniversary
of the Henderson First Universalist Church, 1939)*

For a century I have reigned upon this hill
And through the eastern gates have watched
The glory of the dawn;
I have seen the slow years work their will
Upon the lives of those now passed and gone.

The many generations came and went,
Men and women with their hearts aglow.
With love toward God, their lives well spent
With courage in their souls.
All this I know, for I have watched them through
This hundred years and knew them well;
I knew them in their goodness and their sins,
Their joys and tears--and in the end
I listened to the tolling of their bell.

Through my wide open doors I hear the mighty throng,
Still young, some sober-minded and some gay;
I hear their many voices raised in song
With the coming of each holy Sabbath Day.
Within my walls they keep the lamp of love alight,
The love of God; to all, his kindly will.
At morning, noontide, dark of night
My spire guides them homeward, heavenward still.

--Mrs. Lula S. McCumber

(Mrs. McCumber was received into the church by
Rev. Harold H. Niles, father of Rev. Albert C. Niles)

These Ministers Have Served This Church

Rev. Pit Morse	Rev. Harriet Druley
Rev. Seth Jones	Rev. Gustav H. Ulrich
Rev. Luther Rice	Rev. Truman Menadue
Rev. Alfred Peck	Rev. Wallace Fiske
Rev. Harvey Haynes	Rev. Robert Killam
Rev. S.W. Remington	Rev. Charles A. Wyman
Dr. L.B. Fisher	Mr. Ernest Young
Rev. D.L. Fisher	Rev. Raymond Scott
Rev. H.P. Morrell	Rev. Albert C. Niles
Rev. Arthur Roberts	Rev. Herbert Weeks
Rev. Charles Lund	Rev. Robert Cope
Rev. Samuel Ayres	Rev. Carl Westman
Rev. L.M. Clement	Rev. Robert Wolley
Rev. Flora Bronis	Dr. Max Coots
Rev. George Adams	Rev. Donald Jacobsen
Rev. Loomis O. Black	Rev. Ronald Marcy
Rev. William J. Metz	Rev. David Weisbard
Rev. Elmo A. Robinson	Rev. Duke T. Grey
Rev. Harold H. Niles	Mr. Arthur Visser (Lay-led)
Rev. Weston Atwood Cate	Mr. Neal Warren (Lay-led)
	Rev. George A. Smith

Responsive Reading:

Rev. Wendy L. Colby

Let this church ever seek the oneness of God, and never turn from that venture to the dark byways and competitive struggles which interrupt the pilgrimage of all.

We aspire to be catholic and take into account all people.

We reject that which scatters us into ghettos, or forces upon us an ultimate loneliness.

Ours is a church which holds the dead in sacred memory, and the living in a goodly fellowship.

We desire to live together in such affection as will not allow us to feel threatened by our differences—

Happy in the liberty which encourages us to make our words correspond with our thoughts, our acts with our conscience.

Ours is a non-creedal church—not because we have no beliefs, but because we will not be restrained in our beliefs.

Ours is a church of conscience—not because we hold that conscience is infallible, but because it is the meeting place of God and the human spirit.

Ours is a church of reason—not because the mind is free of errors, but because the dialogue of mind with mind, and mind with itself, refines religious thought.

Ours is a church of moral work—not because we think morality is a sufficient religion, but because we know no better way of showing our gratitude to God, and our confidence in one another.

We dare not fence the spirit, nor close off the sincerity of conversation with which souls must meet in religious association.

As others have their ways of religion, so do we have this faith; and, in honest difference, we order our lives together.

Prayer and Meditation

Musical Selection

*"Ave Maria" and "I Believe"
Ruth and Alex Whitney
(Sister and Brother)*

*Mrs. Merrill Scott
Accompanist*

Greetings from The St. Lawrence District

Mr. Doug Sloan

Other Greetings

Mr. John Kinley

Offertory

"A Closer Walk With Thee"

Hymn: (Congregation Standing)

Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy in heav'n, to earth come down;
Fix in us thy humble dwelling, All thy mercies crown.
Father, thou art all compassion, Pure unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation, Enter into ev'ry trembling heart.

Breath, O breath thy loving Spirit Into ev'ry troubled breast;
Let us all in thee inherit, Let us find thy promised rest.
Come, almighty to deliver, Let us all thy life receive;
Graciously return, and never, Never more thy temples leave.

Readings

Service of Christening for

*Stephany Eva Fowler
daughter of
Allen and Sherry Fowler*

Musical Selection

*"Angel's Serenade" G. Braga
Mrs. Blanche Fishel with Mrs. Merrill Scott, Accomp.*

Sermon:

"The Old Church Still Speaks"

Rev. Albert C. Niles

Reception of New Members

Rev. Herbert Weeks

Act of Rededication

Charge by the minister

Reaffirmation by the congregation (Responsively)

*As a house of light, where all knowledge shall be honored and all
true seeking fostered, where the lessons of the heart shall be added
to the studies of the mind, where ventures of faith shall open new
pathways to that far light to which we move:*

*As a house where many shall find that truth which makes us free; as a
place of light, we set apart this house.*

*As a house of goodwill, where right and wrong shall be capably
discerned, where better modes and customs of life may be foretold
and purposed, where the affairs of all people and nations shall be
remembered and ever wider fellowships realized:*

*As a house where many shall find that divine presence which is our
solemn joy and hope according as it is our continual devotion; as a
place of joy we set apart this house.*

*There is a life enfolding our lives and all our fellow- mortals, from
which we come, to which we go, in which all things natural have
their being, by which all things spiritual are accomplished. It is
that life universal of which we are a part, by whose laws alone we
are enabled to do good, yet which is not perfected without us. To
that life we must commit all our works if they are to be established.*

*To that life, that it may carry blessings to many people, even unto
generations yet unborn, we offer this building anew; to the service of
all we rededicate this church.*

Hymn: (Congregation Standing)

O Master, let me walk with thee In lowly paths of service free;
Tell me thy secret; help me to bear The strain of toil, the fret of care

Help me the slow of heart to move By some clear winning word of love;
Teach me the wayward feet to stay, And guide them in the homeward way.

Teach me they patience; still with thee In closer, dearer company,
In work that keeps faith sweet and strong, In trust that triumphs over wrong;

In hope that sends a shining ray Far down the future's broadening way;
In peace that only thou canst give, With thee, O Master, let me live!

Benediction

Rev. Martha Munson

Postlude

**We wish to thank the following people
for their contributions to this morning's service:**

**St. Lawrence Unitarian Universalist District
Mrs. Margaret Hill Parks -- Organist
Rhodes Florist and Greenhouses for Floral Decorations
Patricia Kinley for the cakes**

and most importantly--

**The members and friends of the First Universalist Church of Henderson
for their support, loyalty, and work to make this service a success**