

[Rushford, Allegany Co. NY]

The Universalist Church

The first I remember of the Universalist Church is attending a meeting with my mother and father in the old district schoolhouse which stood opposite my present residence on West Main street. I could not have been more than three years old but it was made very impressive by my being taken home and punished for unchurchly behavior. It must have been about 1846. Elder Hunt was then the pastor and the parsonage was the house now owned by William Beaumont. Soon after this the Universalist church was built. A goodly number of people attended that church and good work was done. The preachers who ministered to them at different times were Nathaniel Stacy, ___ Hunt, J. B. Saxe, J. J. Brayton, J. Whitney, I. B. Sharp and Wm. Gowdy. Some of them preached the second term. Elder Whitney built the house that N. J. Gilbert now owns. A daguerrean [sic] shop which he built on the same lot was moved across the street and used by Edward Brooks as a shoe shop. Those who were prominent in building up the church were Isaiah Lathrop, Galusha Leavens, Charles Colburn, James Green, Alpheus Howser, Samuel White, Luther Woodworth, Emerson Kendall, Oliver Benjamin, E. P. Richards, David Board, Holton Colburn, Ira Bishop, the Bannisters and Jonathan Charles. They took great pride in their choir which was called the best in town. Barnes Blanchard played the bass viol, Grover Leavens the violin, someone else played the flute, and Marion Angel the melodeon. Later players on the melodeon were Amelia Bannister, Georgia Woodworth, Ellen Lathrop and Albert Bishop. Hollister Chapin led the choir. Instrumental music was not very popular in some of the other churches at that time and their members thought that the Universalists were surely going to be lost.

The Sabbath School was held in the gallery over the pulpit. The only superintendent I remember is Galusha Leavens. His wife and Mrs. Howser were teachers. I was in Mrs. Howser's class; she was much loved as a teacher. They had a fine Sabbath School library. I do not remember ever taking out a book that was not interesting. We each had a little Testament and learned chapter after chapter and repeated them by rote. Sometimes I thought it was not very interesting and was too much work.

(I am indebted to Miss Gratie Colburn for the following.) On Christmas eve about the year 1850 there was an entertainment given that would hold an honorable place beside those of today. The church was trimmed with green and across the center of each window was a row of lighted candles. Invisibly suspended was a snow-white dove with out-spread wings, about to alight on the altar. In the distance amid the green was the star that led the

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Wise Men across the plains. The heavenly-loaded branches of the Christmas tree hung low over the orchestra rail. These with music, recitations and interchange of friendly greetings made the evening one long to be remembered.

The Sewing Society was well attended. There were many men in town learning trades and working in the manufactories. Being away from home they would hire the society to do sewing for them. The money was used to carry on the work of the church. The socials were very pleasant and large numbers attended. The Association was held here occasionally. Ministers and delegates came from other towns so the meetings were interesting and profitable. The Universalists met with a good deal of opposition from the other churches and this spirit affected the children. It was well the children of the Universalists had so much confidence in their parents, else their lives would have been very sad. Other children when angry would say, "You believe everybody is going to be saved, and you'll go to the bad place and burn and burn forever." The Universalist children would go home and tell their parents, who would say, "Don't worry about the forever, God will take care of that. You must watch out for the bad places here." There was not so much said about the "Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man" as now, but when times of great emergency or trouble came, they forgot all about the creed and sect and arose as one man and worked in the spirit of Christ. The questions of Woman's Rights and Spiritualism came up and caused a division in the church. Services were held [only] occasionally after this. Wm. Gowdy was the last minister. The church edifice was sold to the Free Methodists in 1873.

Ellen Green Nye, *Rushford and Rushford People* (1910), PP. 236-7

Transcribed 8 Oct 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY