

History of Universalist Church Dates to 1817

The history of the Universalist Church building in Sherman is much like that of the Presbyterian Church building. That is, both buildings are no more in the village but their good influences are still living on.

But to go back to the early days of our Sherman Village, the first Universalist sermon was preached in Chautauqua County in January of 1817.

The first place of what was known as the place to worship as a Universalist was in a little red school house where Mr. and Mrs. Harry Wake now live—the old school house was torn down about 1940.

The first Universalist Church was really organized in about 1842 but there seems to be no record of where the meetings were held. The following names are some of the original members; however probably there were more but the fire in 1869 which took all the north side of Main probably destroyed the remainder of the list of names. These names were all that could be located: Mr. and Mrs. Lester Dewey; George Bates; Loren Park; John H. Jones; Erastus Gibbs; Mrs. Linus Paine; Ellicott Smith; Mr. Hill and Mrs. John Cushing.

The lot upon which the first church was built (Universalist) was on the same spot where this church in the picture [not shown here] was located. This was about 1846 and it was bought from Walter Strong for fifty dollars. Mr. Strong donated this to the building fund. In 1850 the County Association of Universalists met in the new church and the Rev. W. W. King was ordained.

Then in 1866 the building of the Cross Cut Railroad called many Catholics to the area and when the Universalists decided to build a larger church on this same site the Catholics bought this Universalist church already built and moved it up to what is now Park Street where the Swansons now live.

So this was termed now the Catholic Church, even though it had been built as a Universalist building.

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Now back to the second Universalist Church and its outcome. This was built on the same site as the first. This was about 1868-69. W.H. Dennis was the architect and builder and when completed it was a handsome building with stained glass windows and the walls and ceiling beautifully decorated. It was a peaceful place to worship with all its beauty.

In 1906 this church was greatly improved—steeple taken down, new furniture added and many other changes made, all during the pastorate of the Rev. R. R. Hadley. Then in 1913-1915, an addition to the east end of the church was built on to hold the Sheldon Memorial pipe organ which was installed and dedicated in 1915.

The pastors serving during these years were (Rev. of course for all the names) Linus Paine; E. W.[Winchester] Reynolds; W. W. King; Benjamin Hunt; Joseph Kinney; C. C. Richardson; G.[George] W. Powell; (?) M.

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Getchell; S. L. Roripaugh; J.[James] M. Payson; J. R. Lavelle; F.[Frank] J. Chase; R. D. Towne; Thomas, Hawkes; Eleazer Hathaway; W. (?) Gleason; W. M. Lawrence; H. (?) Graves; O. R. Beardsley; R. (?) Hadley; Albert R. Fiske; O. [Otis] F. Alvord; Wesley G. Price; William P. Farnsworth; F. J. Dressler; G. [Gideon] S. Gowdy, Thomas Borden.

Then as happened to the Presbyterian Church it was decided that those of the Universalist Church would unite with the Community Church and in 1920 the Universalist Church was sold to the Sherman Grange. The pipe organ was moved to the Community Church. And so after almost three quarters of a century the Universalist Church of Sherman ceased to exist as a working body of that name, as did the Presbyterian Church, both uniting as did the Methodist Church with the Community Church. But the latter church (Methodist) was the building decided upon to be the "Community Church."

Sherman Grangers took over and through the years added many improvements to their "Grange Hall" necessary, because as time went on repairs were necessary. The steeple, built by the Universalists was replaced, or remodeled rather, and new windows put in the front part of the hall.

But time moved on and Sherman Grange realized that this high building would have to be repaired through the years and with high rise of cost of repairs and the cost of heating this high building it was too much. So when the new Masonic building on the corner of Park and Kendricks Street was completed, Sherman Grangers decided on change of meeting place for that organization.

Accordingly the last Anniversary dinner and meeting to be held in this one time Universalist Church, then Grange Hall was in January of 1960.

Following the dinner...Master Lloyd Thiem gave a short talk and announced that bids for the lot and the building had been accepted. Said Mr. Thiem: "The Sherman Grange will now be meeting in the former Masonic rooms on Main Street. Eugene Peck's bid for this building has been accepted and he will take this old church down, our Grange Hall for many years. The bid of Ralph Munger for the lot is also accepted and Ralph plans to build a modern Barber Shop right here."

Thus Sherman saw one more landmark about to disappear. Mr. Peck took the building down and sold much lumber from it. He also sold some of the beautiful stained glass windows but he also has many of these left at his home on Park Street, some broken of course but beautiful pieces of the stained glass.

And now comes the saddest note of the occasion. The late Ralph Munger had planned to build a modern Barber Shop on the site of the old church and later the Grange Hall, but he was stricken with a coronary thrombosis and at the age of 43, passed on. He had been a barber for several years; he was also a veteran of World War II.

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The property was then in the Munger estate and after the settlement, Roger Munger, brother of the late Ralph Munger, purchased the lot and just recently we understand that it has been purchased by Ivan Wassink.

And so the story of this is not yet completed for there is still a "vacant lot where the old Universalist Church and later the Sherman Grange Hall stood. Later, understand that the steeple was taken down by the Grangers—but it IS down now anyway."

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Transcribed on 17 Dec 2016 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY