

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #38 Part 5

(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)

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The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the newsletter, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

THE MADISON UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

The First Universalist Church of Madison was formally organized on July 13, 1828. The Rev. Nathaniel Stacy, who lived in East Hamilton, and was the first Universalist preacher in this part of the country, was an early pastor of this church and was, it is believed, instrumental in its organization and later Society formation.

Records of the early years of the church are incomplete, but it seems that itinerant preachers served the needs of the congregation until 1828. To show the dedication of this congregation, the church edifice was built in 1821 but the church was not formally dedicated until 1828.

Following organization, the church for many years, had only one settled pastor, Rev. Wright. After he left, the church was supplied occasionally by ministers from Utica and Clinton, until July 1859. After that time, Rev. A.H. Marshall officiated at the church and then located in Madison in 1860. He served the church until c.1880.

A Universalist Society was organized on July 10, 1852, at which time there were 18 male and 24 female members. This again shows the dedication of the congregation because they did not even have a full-time pastor at that point. Well-known family names such as Curtis, Washburn, Lewis, Phelps, Parker, Peckham, Bridge, and Spencer were included in the congregation.

In 1880 there were fifty members of the church. Services were held once in two weeks, the pastor also preaching in East Hamilton, North Brookfield, and Hubbardsville.

In 1902 a unique story appeared in the Oneida Democratic Union newspaper. It was titled: A Near Miss at the Church.

“The chimney of the Universalist Church gave way, Sunday morning, during services, and crashed through the ceiling, falling near the pastor, Rev. Mr. Herrick. He heard the sound of the falling brick, and moved a few feet to one side. Had he not done so he would probably have been instantly killed by the pile of brick and mortar, which weighed several hundred pounds. A hole six feet long and two feet wide was made in the ceiling.”

Soon after 1902 there were no formal services in the church. Individual members tried to maintain the building as best they could. The building continued to deteriorate until it was purchased and became the home of American Legion Post 1556 in 1947. Their first meeting in the new facility was held on Monday, February 24, 1947.

A fire at the Legion Hall on April 12, 1956 caused \$5,000 worth of damage to the roof and second floor of the structure. Water damage was extensive in the remainder of the building. When repairs were completed, the second floor was removed and we now have the one-story building that we are used to seeing. In recent years the Legion Post has sold the building to the Madison Historical Society for their use. While maintenance continues to be a challenge, the Legion continues to meet there, courtesy of the Historical Society and the Historical Society holds dances and receptions in the former church building.