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THE ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS
UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF THE RESTORATION
FEBRUARY 13TH, 1945.

By

Pearce M. Gabell

Mr. Moderator - and members and friends.

You have asked me to prepare a "20 minute" history of this church which is 125 years old. Within the limits of time and my ability, I have attempted to do so.

Historians, I suppose, would - ideally - try to treat facts objectively - and to leave out of the finished product every element of their own personality. Let me caution you at the beginning that I hope to attain no such ideal treatment of my subject matter.

I have been very much amused by many of the quaint happenings that I have found recorded in the early minute books of the church - which thanks to many careful hands are preserved and are on exhibition here tonight. And I have been intrigued by many incidents and personal opinions recorded by Abel C. Thomas in his "A Century of Universalism in Philadelphia and New York" and by many of the recollections recorded in an article by Edward S. Deemer in The Christian Leader of April 23rd, 1938 and by many incidents called to my attention by Bro. Thos. Butler. Many of the things that happened particularly in the very early days - were serious enough to the men and women concerned with them but our viewpoint is changed. If you smile with me over some of the amusing aspects - remembers when you smile that somehow this church has persisted for 125 years.

Now, Universalism rooted in the soil in Philadelphia - November 24th, 1785 when Anthony Cuthbert, a mast maker, and Abraham Collins, a sail maker, bought Mason's Lodge in Lodges Alley - between Second and Third Streets and Walnut and Chestnut Streets for the use of Universalists. This effort to establish a church proved not a permanent one and the property eventually went to foreclosure.

The "First Independent Church of Christ commonly called Universalists meeting in their house of public worship in Lombard Street in the City of Philadelphia" was the name adopted by the first permanent congregation. This congregation purchased a plot of ground on the South side of Lombard Street, 100 feet West of Fourth Street on July 30th, 1793 and built a church which building still stands and is now a synagogue.

In 1818 this first church was served by Rev. Abner Kneeland, who was born in Salubria, Iowa in 1773. He had been a Baptist minister and then was ordained to the Universalist Ministry. He was versatile and liberal and energetic - a man of commanding personality and a promoter. At this time he was 45 years of age.

In the Lombard Street congregation were a number of members from "Northern Liberties" - a section of Philadelphia County roughly north of Callowhill Street and west of Kensington. Mr. Kneeland saw an opportunity to promote a new church. A Universalist society was organized February 15th, 1820 and met in Northern Liberties Commissioner's Hall. Rev. Abner Kneeland presided at meetings. On March 14th, 1820 this organization "Second Independent Church of Christ called Universalist" appointed a committee to raise funds to purchase land and erect a building. The efforts of the committee apparently did not produce much money. But Mr. Kneeland had a friend - Charles Horner Rodgers, in the hardware business on Market Street. He agreed to lend on mortgage \$7,025. to enable the church to

buy a lot on North side of Callowhill Street, east of Fifth Street. This lot was bought in March, 1822 and Mr. Rodgers was induced to increase his loan to \$10,000. to help build. Still more money was raised by the sale of burial lots in the church yard and in addition an association was formed to own the equity in the property. Shares in the association were sold at \$25. each - raised \$8,775. The cornerstone was laid in September, 1822 and the building completed and dedicated on Friday, October 17th, 1823 at 3 P. M. Abner Kneeland "Supplied the desk" in conjunction with Bro. William Morse for \$700. per year.

The Board of Trustees had its own variety of difficulties. In August of 1820 the board contributed \$50. to Mr. Kneeland to "Make a trip to the East ward" evidently to spread the gospel. Mr. Morse, the co-pastor, wanted six weeks vacation in the summer of 1824 to visit New England and to settle his father's estate. In August, 1824 he refused to make a trip to the eastward in accordance with his contract.

In July, 1824, Rev. John Chambers of the Presbyterian Church at Northeast corner of Broad and Sansom Streets attacked Universalism stating "The tendency of the doctrine is the destruction of all morality and religion. In 20 years were it to prevail - there would be scarcely a vestige of Christianity - in 50 years none. There is not a vice that is not the offspring of the doctrine of Universal Salvation - All proved upon the ground that they will escape punishment."

In October it became necessary to expel from the congregation - one who by poetic justice was named Robert Cain for he "was taken up in a riot" and "taken before the mayor" - a committee had waited upon him but not-with-standing he has been seen intoxicated - especially on October 12th, 1824 - with frequent use of profane language.

The arrangement with the Lombard Street Church for common use of the same pastors was proving unsatisfactory and anyway the church was behind with payments

due Rev. William Morse, who had been ordained since coming to the pulpit. Then by the end of 1825 both Kneeland and Morse had left Philadelphia.

Rev. Stephen R. Smith had come to the pulpit of the Second Church in June, 1825 and since Kneeland had left was called upon to serve the First Church also. In January, 1826, our trustees record that the "sister church must pay for Bro. Smith" or not use him. Our trustees were having their own financial trouble. By November of 1826 they owed Bro. Smith \$259. arrears of salary. Bro. Smith left the church October, 1828.

He was succeeded by Zelotes Fuller, who remained until May, 1832. In February of that year he had informed the Trustees that he could not preach unless the money due him was paid.

In October, 1832, Rev. L. F. W. Andrews was called and resigned at the expiration of one year. His salary was \$700.

Rev. Savillion W. Fuller succeeded - beginning his pastorate in October, 1833 - at a salary of \$700. presumably. He was about 30 years of age - and very much loved by the congregation. Perhaps his youthful indiscretion prompted the trustees in September, 1835 to "Resolve that the Board of Trustees do not recognize the right of the pastor to make public (the) private affairs of the society". Mr. Fuller had evidently tried to raise much needed money by an appeal from the pulpit.

The trustees then interested themselves to determine the status of the ownership of the church and the extent of debt. The church was not owned by the members who were represented by the Board of Trustees, but by stockholders in the association formed at the time of construction in 1822, which stockholders were represented by a Board of Managers. The Trustees had by this time acquired nearly half of the stock of the association, but evidently a complete audit of both organizations had to be made to get at the truth - because no one had paid much attention to details for so long a time.

The Trustees granted the use of the church to a National Convention of Business Men at \$10. per day - and requested the Anti Slavery people to pay their back bill and fixed their future rental at \$10. per night - and engaged an attorney to defend the suit for salary of Zelotes Fuller, who was the then third pastor counting backwards - and put the bills for back subscriptions to pastors salary in the hands of the Sexton for collection. Because of the Fuller suit the Board found it necessary to acquire a corporate seal.

Whether the young pastor inspired action I do not know, but at the close of 1838 a concert was suggested to raise money to introduce gas lighting into the church, which was done in the summer of 1839 at a cost of \$230. for piping and \$220. for fixtures, of which there were 31.

In February, 1839, the young pastor notified the Board of a call to Hartford, Connecticut and he was given permission to leave, but was by June offered \$900. per year to remain. In May the trustees offered Zelotes Fuller \$200. to settle his claim and published advertising to distinguish his identity from that of Savillion W. Fuller their beloved present pastor.

The Anti Slavery League was refused the use of the church because "of the present excitement in the public mind" and Bills for subscriptions to the pastors salary were given to a bill collector whose charge was 5%. By this time - November, 1839 a committee was sent to Rev. Savillion W. Fuller to tell him that the \$900. in his contract for 1840 could not be paid. A committee for a concert to be held January 14th, 1840 secured the National Brass Band and enough noise was made to realize \$225.

On May 17th, 1840, the slightly more than 36 year old pastor died and was laid to rest in the church yard and you may read the sincere resolutions on his death on page 154 of the first minute book. A committee of "13 females" was organized to solicit subscriptions for a monument. In December a committee on inscriptions reported 6 different suggestions. The following was accepted - "In

memory of the Rev. Savillion Waterous Fuller, died May 17th, 1840, aged 36 years, 7 months, 7 days, after six years pastor of the Second Independent Church of Christ. The ladies of the Church have erected this monument as the last tribute of respect for their late pastor". Then on the side of the monument toward the street simply "Savillion", inside a wreath.

The Rev. T. D. Cooke accepted a call to the parish at \$1,000. per year, starting January 1st, 1841, specifying quarterly payments and three months notice of renewal of contract from year to year. He must have been a pessimist or else he had wind of the Zelotes Fuller lawsuit - and he was right. His pay was behind as usual after he became pastor and his salary was cut to \$800.

The Abolition Society was again granted use of the church (December, 1840) but the price was now \$25. per day.

What caused Savillion Fuller's death I have not discovered - but I wonder whether it might have been pneumonia as the following committee report in December, 1840 implies.

"The committee has examined the present construction of the pulpit and (the members) have concluded that it presents disadvantages which can be remedied at small expense. One of the greatest inconveniences is that the speaker is compelled to remain in an immediate current of cold air caused by the rarefaction of air in the church and the presence of the atmosphere without and thereby jeopardizing the health if not the life of our pastor. To obviate this difficulty the present doors of ingress to the pulpit should be closed and openings made immediately into the church and thereby causing the speaker to enjoy a uniform temperature in common with the congregation".

The pulpit was fixed by closing the doors and erecting steps for access from the congregation.

The Rev. T. D. Cooke resigned with the close of 1843. Rev. E. Torry was called for three months. Rev. L. B. Mason for six months. "Tather" Ballou for a few Sundays. Rev. A. B. Grosh for July and August and then January 1st, 1845 Rev. C. C. Burr of Troy, New York was called for six months at \$1,000. per year. He was an orator and attracted large audiences, but he was not a pastor in the strict sense.

The trustees again had troubles besides the usual financial ones. In June, 1844 the Pennsylvania State Convention requested them to demand surrender by Bro. C. S. Bailey of his letter of fellowship and a committee reported to them a year later that the letter had been demanded but that Bro. Bailey merely thanked our society for its interest in his moral and christian welfare.

Delinquent Pew Rents were penalized by addition of 10% for lateness and Bro. T. D. Cooke was paid \$50. on account of arrears of salary (he had left the church two years before) and \$25. per month until the debt be cleared.

The Rev. C. C. Burr resigned as of the close of 1847 and there was no pastor for two years.

In the beginning of 1848 a committee was appointed to inquire into the claims against the church. From April of that year until 1850 no minutes are recorded, but somehow Rev. A. B. Grosh became pastor with the advent of 1850.

It is about this time that Edward S. Deemer, to whom we are largely indebted for this building, came to the church as a boy of ten years. His family lived at Eleventh and Girard Avenue and he walked to church at Fifth and Callowhill. He has told us that the Callowhill Street Church stood behind an iron railing with a centre gate, which opened to a path that carried one to a portico. From the portico doors gave access directly into the auditorium and as one entered, one faced the congregation. The pulpit was behind the visitor as he entered. The events that follow were well known to Mr. Deemer.

Early in 1850 the name of the Second Independent Church of Christ called

Universalist of the Northern Liberties of the County of Philadelphia was changed to The Second Universalist Church.

"Ways and Means" were evidently being sought by those who had renewed interest. The basement was rented at \$400. per year and the church itself for a series of lectures on anatomy and physiology at \$12. per night. E. H. Chapin was engaged to lecture on "Ideal and Actual" for \$50. Then Rev. A. B. Grosh resigned August 1st, 1851 after one year and eight months pastorate.

The church was now 28 years old and in need of renovation. How to accomplish this with very little money forthcoming from the congregation presented a problem. A committee waited upon Mr. Charles H. Rodgers, who still held the mortgage, and evidently secured an agreement from him not to call the principal of his mortgage during his lifetime in exchange for payment of the delinquent interest. He must have been much pleased for he made a donation of \$50. The committee had succeeded in having the tenant of the church cellar pay a year's rent in advance, which provided the interest money.

It was now March, 1852. A church meeting called Rev. Nelson Doolittle to the parish at \$1,000. a year.

The trustees had their usual schedule of difficulties. The "spiritual rappers" were refused the use of the church and Bro. Spear, the bill collector, found such difficulty in his work that some of his accounts were directed to be sued out. The German Free Society was refused use of the church because its "belief was not in accord with true Christian doctrine"

A plan of the proposed alteration to the church was submitted by Samuel Ashton and greatly approved. It involved removal of the dead lying in the front church yard and this was arranged with the various lot owners.

Then in the fall of 1852 the front church yard was rented to Samuel Ashton for ten years with privilege to build upon the land. In payment of rent, Mr. Ashton

for \$550. The renovation cost amounted to \$2,145., which surprised the trustees, and they were even more surprised at being unable to find their copy of the lease to Mr. Ashton and his building Agreement. The bill was more than the rent to be paid and Mr. Ashton, being unable to get any action on the amount due him, started suit.

About the same time, Rev. Nelson Doolittle resigned because he felt that he got little more than food, clothing and shelter out of his compensation.

Mr. Ashton had control of the church cellar where the heaters were and refused to give access so that a fire might be kindled on Sundays. His real estate men agreed to build a fire each Sunday for \$3.00 however, and the trustees had to stand for the charge. Mr. Ashton was a hard man to handle. He failed to keep appointments and was generally unsatisfactory. By the end of 1853 it had become quite evident that permitting him to build stores and a hall in front of the church had been a mistake - for reasons indicated in the following advertisement which the trustees had published in the Public Ledger, December 13th, 1853.

"The Board of Trustees of the Second Universalist Church on Callowhill Street, north side above Fifth, are constrained by recent events to say to the public that neither the vestry nor the society of said church was in any way concerned or responsible for the Dancing Association and Ethiopian Concerts, nightly held to the desecration of the spot and serious annoyance of the congregation in certain rooms attached to the church property and claimed to be leased by Mr. Samuel Ashton and further that such occupying meets with their entire reprobation.

This public notice must have hurt attendance at Ashton's Minstrel Show for after much negotiation he purchased the entire property for \$17,500., subject to Mr. Rodgers \$10,000. mortgage. More trouble was had with Mr. Ashton.

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undertook renovation of the church, including among other things a heat furnace in the basement to replace the old stove in the auditorium, venetian blinds and new carpet and furniture for the pulpit. In addition, an organ was purchased for \$300. The renovation cost amounted to \$2,143., which surprised the trustees, and they were even more surprised at being unable to find their copy of the lease from Mr. Ashton and his building Agreement. The bill was more than the rent to be paid and Mr. Ashton, being unable to get any action on the amount due him, started suit.

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This public notice must have hurt attendance at Ashton's Minstrel Show for after much negotiation he purchased the entire property for \$17,500., subject to Mr. Rodgers \$10,000. mortgage. More trouble was had with Mr. Ashton before he

finally settled, but the church came out of the deal very satisfactorily.

On February 19th, 1854, the same day the sale to Ashton was completed, the trustees purchased from the Eighth Street Methodist Church, which had moved to Green Street, west of Tenth Street, its old church on the East Side of Eighth Street above Noble Street, for \$17,000., subject to non-callable incumbrances totalling \$6,500. I do not have a complete record of the buildings acquired, but in addition to the church and sessions room (Sunday School) on Noble Street, there was at least one dwelling house.

Court approval was necessary to complete the moving for each property had had a church burial yard and the bodies had to be transferred to other locations. The Callowhill Street Church acquired lots in Odd Fellows Cemetery for the purpose. Among the transfers was the remains of Savillion W. Fuller. His monument was broken - but a new one was supplied much later.

Although Rev. Nelson Doolittle had resigned, he was still supplying the pulpit, and the congregation - which included many who were not church members - favored him. The trustees had closed the church pending moving, but on June 4th, 1854, Doolittle was accused of breaking open the building and having himself elected by the congregation. The church members followed with a meeting of their own on June 20th and since the congregation had failed to name a term or salary the members interpreted the period to be from June 4th to June 20th at his old salary and he was paid for the time.

Rev. Abel C. Thomas, then pastor of the Lombard Street Church intervened, but the controversy continued and developed into a suit and verdict against the church by Doolittle, which was paid at the end of 1855.

The sale and acquisition of the property required use of the corporate seal. A former secretary of the church had resigned and refused to deliver the seal - admitting the device to belong to the church but claiming the metal as his personal

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property. The trustees declared the old seal lost and adopted the one which we presently use, I think, consisting of "An all seeing eye in the centre of a glory, surmounting a balance, - whose pendant end index - lengthened into the sword of justice - form - with the scale beam - a cross".

In February, 1855, Rev. Richard Eddy was called as pastor at \$1,500. per annum to serve in the new church.

We know that the walls had been frescoed - that the woodwork was grained oak and the venetian blinds flesh color. The pews in the lower portion of the church were lined all around and stuffed with hair. The choir was in the gallery separated from the congregation by railings. The pulpit was of white marble. The Sunday School on Noble Street at this time was rented to the Public School System on weekdays.

The year 1856 brought difficulties - from little ones, like a frozen gas meter to large ones like the inability to meet Bro. Eddy's salary which he cut to \$1,250. - or like the suit and judgement obtained by a sexton for salary or like a protested promissory note. The trustees urged Bro. Eddy to seek another call since they could not pay him and he resigned to go to Canton, New York, in November.

Rev. Moses Ballou came to the church in Nov. of 1857 at a salary of \$1,200.

members of the Eighth Street congregation were in his audience at the time, and having found a willing witness, threatened prosecution for libel and were able to force a withdrawal of the accusation by Mr. Hoffman from his pulpit on the following Sunday.

Rev. Moses Ballou was followed by Rev. B. M. Tillotson and Rev. J. T. Goodrich, who served four and three years respectively. Rev. Moses Ballou returned as pastor in November, 1866 and was to stay until 1872. During his latter pastorate the Eighth and Noble Street Church was sold for \$20,250., excluding the organ and other personalty.

The trustees attempted to purchase the Green Hill Presbyterian Church on North side of Girard Avenue, between 16th and 17th streets, and being unsuccessful, moved the services to a hall at 17th and Poplar Streets and stored the church organ temporarily. After an unsuccessful attempt to purchase a lot at the North-West corner of 17th and Girard Avenue and another at the North-East corner of 16th and Poplar and another at the South-East corner of 16th and Cambridge, the trustees finally acquired the lot at the South-West corner of Greenhill Street and Master Street, 70 feet x 109 feet, for \$9,000.

Benjamin D. Price was retained as Architect and on June 3rd, 1871 a building contract was awarded to Edward Hales - cost, excluding furnishing, \$20,920. The cornerstone was laid in July. In December, 1871, the name of the church was changed to "Church of the Restoration".

In 1910 - 38 years after the building of this structure - Bro. Edward S. Deemer wrote his "recollections" which reflected his keen appreciation of the ministers he had known.

At 17th and Master (Greenhill and Master Streets) the pulpit was occupied

Rev. Moses Ballou until November 1872.

Then by Rev. M. F. Bowers for five years.

Then by Rev. G. W. Bicknell for one year.

Then by Rev. H. R. Nye for three years.

Rev. Frederick A. Bisbee then came to the church - a young man, 28 years of age. During his pastorate, he was made Doctor of Divinity. He left the church to accept the editorship of The Universalist Leader.

Dr. Joseph R. Mason followed for two years and resigned to take charge of St. Paul's in Chicago.

Then came Dr. John Clarence Lee, the first pastor that I remember. With him came Mrs. Helen Crumet Lee - to complement his intellectuality with romance and colorful background. Dr. Lee was greatly respected in religious and intellectual circles in Philadelphia and invited to his pulpit many speakers; whose presense reflected toleration if not mild acceptance of Universalism in intellectual and religious circles. In Dr. Lee's time - specifically in 1903 - the name was changed to The Universalist Church of the Restoration.

Dr. Lee was followed by Rev. Clinton L. Scott for three years and Rev. Francis A. Gray for four years.

Rev. Robert Tipton came to the Church in 1927 and served until 1939. During his pastorate Brother Deemer died on May 9th, 1929, at the ripe age of 89 years. In his will he left a fund to be invested until it reached \$50,000., at which time it was directed to be added to the Building Fund with the reservation that "from the pulpit shall always be promulgated the Faith of the Universalist Church" and to this provision we are indebted for this structure, which was dedicated approximately two years before the close of Mr. Tipton's pastorate.

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This brings my history to the present and to a close. If my story has leaned toward the business side, let me say that I have tried to present difficulties that were overcome and to leave matters of denominational organization and of doctrine for others better fitted than I to discuss at some other time.

May I thank you all for your kind attention and for the opportunity you have given me to read some of the history of this Church.

Respectfully Submitted
R. Haeker
Secty

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