

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OBSERVES 75TH ANNIVERSARY

(Continued from Preceding Page)

The name "Congregational" had been growing in popularity, even the weekly paper had for years made it a part of its mail address and location. Throughout the world the great wooden bridge with its high towers of stone and masonry cables had become famous, but those who favored the change to name little thought that the great bridge structure they so much admired would become obsolete as to be replaced by a bridge of more modern design. Little did they realize that the sands of the life of the bridge were daily flowing away as the sands of the hour glass that mark the passage of time and human life. The First Congregational church stood high on the river bank when the first railway bridge was built. It has been a witness of the passing of great wooden and steel suspension bridges and of the cantilever bridge. It watched the coming and completion of the wonderful steel arches which now span the gorge and to those who guide the affairs of the church it seems that the church in the sublime arch extending from creek to heaven, as the gorge, the chasm, which is everlastingly and so lately crossed by the hanging fared of the church.

In connection with this second change of name in the place location of the church, it is worthy of note that in 1868 Niagara City was created with a population of 2,118, having gained 308 from 1862. In the same year the village of Niagara Falls had but 434, and the town of Niagara St. Niagara City was growing, and it became Suspension Bridge in a beautiful condition. The field of the church was enlarging.

A Noble Marriage

Charles Wilson, nearly 70 years old, has been on his knees for some time, but the day there came a marriage that gave a new zest to the home life of the First Congregational church. Even when the village was named Niagara City there was talk about marrying in with Niagara Falls. In November, 1854, the Niagara Times of Niagara Falls printed an article favoring the union of the two places. This was opposed by an editorial in the Niagara Herald on November 15, 1854. Residents expressed objections because they didn't agree with the printed word. The years rolled along. DeWitt was working on the bridge, and the two villages advanced until on March 17, 1862, the then village of Suspension Bridge and Niagara Falls were merged under the name of Niagara Falls. Thus the First Congregational church in this way became located in Niagara Falls. Its infancy was passed in Bellevue. Its years of early manhood were passed in Niagara City. In Suspension Bridge it began to age, reaching well advanced years in the most promising city in the Empire State.

When the two villages were merged, the population of the city was 13,111. The last census before the merger gave Suspension Bridge a population of 5,285. The population of Niagara Falls was a little more, and as the city grew, it was a little more. In 1880, with the coming of the present century, the population of the city was 18,607. Today it is over 75,000. Thus from a village of a village with 827 population, the church is today holding its head up in a population of 75,000 and more. These figures indicate how the field served by the church has grown since the infancy of the church, and as the City of Niagara Falls is said to be the fastest growing city in New York state, it is evident there is work in the future for the church and its members. At no time in the noble career has the church faltered. It meant not better now.

Golden Jubilee Celebration

The semi-centennial or Golden Jubilee celebration of the First Congregational church was observed on Sunday and Monday, March 24 and 25, 1928, and on this occasion Rev. Franklin J. Estabrook was installed pastor.

The celebration of this important period in the career of the church was entered into with great joy as the past of the members of the church. There was rejoicing that the church had, in its growth, kept pace with the advance made by the City of Niagara Falls; the reason of the fact it was maintaining itself in the vital spirit. The new pastor and congregation faced the then future years confident that the First Congregational church would meet the century of its existence fully equipped of its responsibility in caring for the welfare of souls, and still holding a prominent place in the affections of the people. All who participate in the event of the observance of the 75th anniversary of the church will spend the chapel and the cause of Christ, onward with step in the last quarter-century past to record the 100 years of service. God.

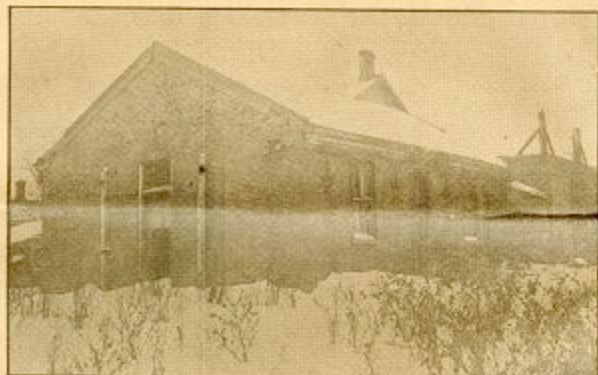
The Golden Jubilee celebration began at 11 A. M., Sunday morning, at the club house mentioned with Rev. Franklin J. Estabrook and Rev. E. J. Klock of Stratford, Conn., in the pulpit and officiating, Rev. Klock having been pastor of the church at Stratford before. The choir was directed by Mr. H. H.



Prof. N. F. Rosewing

Prof. Rosewing sang in the choir, was superintendent of the First Congregational Sunday school, and was president of the public schools of the former village of Suspension Bridge.

First Gathering Place of Founders of Church



In this little old brick school house, located on Ontario avenue and Superior street (now 11th street) the movement which ultimately resulted in the organization of the First Congregational Church was started. Here the Sunday School movement began. Men and women who were big in vision in the church progress went in and out of this beautiful building. Here public school was held. High over the roof projects the gable of a larger school that succeeded it, while a portion of the old frame school that stood in front of it as Ontario avenue had been torn down when this picture was taken. Scared indeed, are the necessities of this old red brick schoolhouse.



Mrs. Wilson



Mrs. Childs



Mrs. Graves

Pointon. The service was well attended and proved an inspiration.

Sunday afternoon at 4 o'clock Vespers service and communion were held. Encouraging letters were read from Rev. W. H. Webb, Rev. Abel S. Wood, and Rev. A. C. Hall, all former pastors.

Mrs. Sarah Watson Johnson, a daughter of the late James Watson, now of California, read an historical sketch of the church while Miss J. W. Adams, pastor of the Epworth, read a paper on "Christian Endeavor Work at the Church."

Rev. E. J. Klock delivered an address on "Lovingly" in which he paid high tributes to the late James Watson. Religious poems were taken into the church that day, and there were five baptisms.

In the evening, the service was conducted by the Rev. George A. Brown, then of Lockport, but a former resident who grew to manhood in the church. Mr. George A. White sang.

At the late James Watson was the only surviving member of the original board of trustees, and Mrs. Margaret Wilson was the only living woman charter member. The trustees in 1925 were: James Low, G. M. Thorpe, Lewis J. Johnston, James Yedder, Dr. John Orr and Nelson J. Bowler.

The program on Monday, or the second day of the Golden Jubilee celebration included a meeting of the school-aided school, when Rev. Franklin J. Estabrook was installed pastor. At 8 P. M. the anniversary dinner was held, followed by address of greeting and entertainment. In the evening at 8 o'clock, Rev. Amory H. Bradford, D.D., made an address. The strains was by the Niagara Male Quartette and Miss Ethel Perry.

Church Enlarged in 1923

In the year 1923 the trustees and members of the church were inspired to make an addition to the original church structure, and this was done by building on a plot of ground to the rear of the church proper, which ground had long been owned by the church. The new building constructed at this time has proved a very substantial and useful addition to the church, adding materially to the convenience and service it is able to render. At the foundation, it is 68 feet wide and 35 feet deep, and two stories high. It is built of brick and is faced with stone to correspond to the original building in appearance. On the lower floor there is a spacious auditorium, a boiler room, ladies' room and two cloak rooms, and on the second floor there are two rooms for the primary department, a large room for the Christian Endeavor, a choir robing room, and the pastor's study. The cost of the improvement was about \$25,000.

Little Chapters Tell Their Story

In 1853 the church obtained and dedicated a new organ.

In 1868 the name of the Ladies' Aid Society was changed to the Congregational Workers, and in the same year the Women's Missionary Society was organized.

The year 1885 brought the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor into the church.

In considering the past popularity of the Sunday school, credit must be given to James Watson, Elias J. Graves, William H. Childs and N. P. Browning who served as superintendents in the years long gone by.

So great was the interest in the Sunday school that the pastor of the church made "Our Sunday School" the theme of his sermon on Sunday, October 14, 1906.

On the evening of Sunday, November 4, 1888, the choir was first lighted by a gas main having been laid from the gas plant in Niagara Falls to Niagara City. A discourse appropriate to the significant event was preached by the pastor.

On April 28, 1907, Misses Lincoln issued a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States "to their most weekly assemblages in their accustomed places of worship" to credit thanks to our Heavenly Father for victories that had come to the land and saved lives of the government, and in



Deacon William B. Childs

accordance with this proclamation Rev. Joshua Cooks of Lewiston occupied the pulpit of the First Congregational church on Sunday, April 21, 1907, and preached an appropriate sermon.

When Prof. N. P. Browning was principal of the public school of Suspension Bridge, the Commemoration exercises were usually held in the auditorium of the First Congregational church, and there are recorded in the city books quite a number who received their diploma in this sacred edifice.

The spirit of the church has been struck by lightning several times, but in each case, repairs were promptly made. Some of the bolts were quite severe in damage done.

The frame dwelling which for years served as a parsonage was in 1911 replaced by a double dwelling at brick at a cost of about \$10,000.

The church was beautified on July 27, 1886, by the addition of stained glass windows.

In the fall of 1923 a debt-making

campaign was held and the church debt was paid.

Rev. Amory H. Bradford, who assisted in the installation of Rev. Franklin J. Estabrook, preached his first sermon from the pulpit of the First Congregational church when his father was pastor.

Following the semi-centennial celebration, the church interior was reconstructed at an expense of about \$2,000.

The organ installed in 1884 was replaced in 1925 making an improvement greatly appreciated.

In 1857 the church began to enlarge its activities and that year the Ladies' Aid Society was organized.

The first child baptisms under the auspices of the First Congregational Church is said to have been Robertson White Watson, and the date October 14, 1856. He is the eldest son of the late James Watson.

On Thursday, April 26, 1885, in accordance with a resolution by Chairman R. E. Penrose, a service of thanksgiving, prayer and praise was held in the church over the ending of the Civil War.

On September 1, 1868, during the Spanish-American war, Rev. Willa E. DeWitt, pastor of the church, went to Camp Meade, Middletown, Pa., as a commissioner appointed by Hon. A. C. Hastings, mayor, to investigate the conditions and treatment at Camp Meade, Pa. He found the Company was well cared for.

From 1886 to 1890, as required, the church has been registered and its income re-estimated. Early in 1892, the main auditorium was beautifully redecorated, and on Sunday, February 17, it was reopened for service with a large attendance. Rev. H. F. Childs, pastor, spoke briefly and congratulated the members of the congregation on the success of their efforts in beautifying the church. An inspiring sermon was preached by Rev. H. H. Childs of New York City, state superintendent of Congregational churches. The service was under the direction of Mrs. William Estabrook, a feature being a duet by Mrs. Koch and Mrs. Strauss.



"Jerry" Steep

He was the last bear in Bellevue in front of the Congregational Church.