

DAILY PRESS.

MONDAY.....JANUARY 12

Local Department

UNIVERSALISM.

Thirty-one Years of Its History in Iowa City

1841-1873.

Founding of the earliest Church and Dedication of the Latest.

On Sunday, Jan. 12th, occurred the dedication of the new church erected by the First Universalist Parish of Iowa City, on the corner of Iowa Avenue and Clinton St., fronting the campus and halls of the State University.

The Parish, which now finds itself endowed with a house so commodious, was amongst the first religious organizations that crystallized out of our frontier community, nearly a third of a century ago. It was organized at the house of Edward Foster, Nov. 6th, 1841, on which occasion Edward Foster was elected President of the Parish Board, and Seth Baker, Daniel Hess, Robert Walker and Benjamin Weiser were chosen the first board of Trustees. Daniel Hess was elected treasurer and Seth Baker, clerk.

The first member received into the society by vote, was Mrs. Rosella, w of Geo. Townner Andrews.

The first meeting of the Trustees was held on Nov. 19th, 1841, at which a committee was appointed to purchase a house of worship for present use.

The Territorial legislature of Iowa had set aside, for the use of any Christian denomination that would put a church thereon within a specified time, certain grants of quarter blocks in this city. Other denominations were selecting their church sites and this one must not be behind, thus the haste to get a building.

Next in the church record we find the committee purchasing a church ready made for \$90.00, to be paid in two notes of \$45.00 each, at 8 per cent. The vendors of the house were James Hanby and James Aiken. The purchase of this house secured to the church that splendid quarter block, bounded North by the Avenue and West by Dubuque street, of which, through all subsequent vicissitudes, the fee has remained in the Parish until this day.

The \$90.00 temple, though good as any then in the village and, because it was frame, doubtless even fair to the eye of the Indians who were our neighbors, and of the pioneers who dwelt in cabins, was yet not quite so substantial a fold as the flock thought desirable and we find that on March 31st, 1842, additions were made to the building committee and an address was drafted for the use and aid of the first pastor, Rev. A. R. Gardner, whom it was resolved to send East to solicit funds to build a better church. On August 17th, Rev. Mr. Libby was employed as pastor pending Mr. Gardner's absence.

The \$90.00 church appears not to have been large enough, else it was too airy for winter use, as on Dec. 11th, 1842, the Board petitioned the legislature for the use of one of its halls as a place of worship.

On May 13th, 1843, Mr. Libby's pastorate ended and we infer that Mr. Gardner had returned, for on May 22nd, the Board resolved to proceed with the erection of a church, and appointed a committee to confer with the Free Masons as to giving them a lodge room over the church.

June 18th, 1843, Mr. Gardner reported result of his tour East. His collections were made of the following congregations: Bleecker St., and Orchard St. churches N. Y. City.

Prominent amongst the donors in the latter appear the names of P. T. Barnum and Horace Greeley, both then unknown to that fame which has since, in widely diverse connections, sent their names around the world. The congregations at Portsmouth, N. H., Baltimore, Md., Lombard street Philadelphia, First Society of Providence, R. I., Danvers, Mass., Methuen, Mass., Callowhill, Phila., Portland, Me., Middletown, Conn., First and Second Societies, Lowell, Mass., Hartford, Conn., First and Second Societies of Boston, First Society of Lynn, Mass., and Nashua, N. H., all gave. Collections were also made in Ohio and the gross result of Mr. Gardner's mission was cash and material to the amount of \$1402.33. His expenses were \$290.93 1/4.

On August 15th '43 the building committee was ordered to contract for the completion of the church, the brick walls of which appear to have then been finished, and Mr. Gardner was re-employed as pastor. The structure then built and so frequently and long thereafter ordered to be finished, was the old brick church that stood on Dubuque street near the present site of the Mayor's office and City Council room. It was a pretentious structure for its day and bore upon its front gable the good legend

"HE THAT IS OUR GOD IS THE GOD OF SALVATION."

It was outgrown by the stronger organizations that rose around it, the tide of business surged up to its very eaves and finally it was "finished" by conflagration in 1868 and the pride of the pioneers was laid low.

To return to Parish history;—May 22nd, 1844 Messrs. Winchester, Robinson and Fisher were appointed first delegates to the territorial convention of the denomination, held at Burlington.

February 22nd 1845 the Board generously resolved to give the use of the church, when not needed by themselves, to Dr. Wood, a Presbyterian preacher with no house to preach in, and Mr. Fisher was ordered to get lumber to finish the church. No record is left of the termination of Mr. Gardner's pastorate, and on April 2nd 1845 the Board ordered that "Bro. Robinson should offer C. S. Bailey \$100 and board to preach one year!"

There follows no immediate record of Mr. B's acceptance of the tempting proposition, but on March 22nd 1846 it was resolved to hire Rev. Isaac Kelso to preach six months for \$25 per month and board.

May 4th same year a committee was appointed to finish the church gallery and it was prodigally "resolved that this society will bear the expense."

On the 25th of the same month Mr. Kelso resigned the pastorate, and it was ordered to pay him \$118 for services, "which," the record quaintly says "was

thereupon duly done," and Mr. satisfaction may be imagined.

May 26th 1846 Mr. Gaylord was to preach for one month and in record says he was thanked for vices and Mr. Fisher was sent to person River, Illinois associatio preacher. June 19th Mr. H. B chester was requested to occupy vacant pulpit. July 19th a co was ordered to confer with Rev. fall and invite him to the pastorate of Mr. Westfall's answer Macedonian cry and of his entry the pastorate does not appear, first apparent work was the organization of the first Sunday school on Dec 6th 1846, of which the first Supt. J. H. Fisher.

The first bible class had been organized Jan. 8th 1843 at the house Baker.

Mr. Westfall's charge endured un and his pastorate was characterized unvaried success and polemical discussion with ministers of rival which brought his flock speed front rank and himself into the proper prominence. During many accessions came to the church at this day scattered amongst leading congregations of the city settlers who warm into remembrance and grateful mention of the pl warm hearted pioneer preacher, labored so long and well. His pastorate was resigned April, 1849, in favor of Rev. D. P. Bunn.

August 19th, same year Mr. Bunn signed, and shortly after we find the Board indulging in a bit of moral reprobation by resolving "that this society not permit the First Universalist church to be used by skeptics, or other persons." Why this, the records disclose.

On February 18th, 1850, the church became involved in a litigation some lands and employed Hon. Folsom as its attorney.

There appears to have been an interregnum until Sept. 28th, 1851, when Robbings was appointed to cooperate with Rev. Mr. Byington, of Keosauqua, with a view to procuring his services.

August 8th, 1852, another conference was appointed "to finish the church."

June 11th, 1855, it was resolved that Rev. Mr. Peck be allowed \$500 annual rent to preach another year, by which it appears that he had been theretofore in charge.

July 1st, 1855, it appears that the ground rent of the church from ground rent quarter block was \$422.

PERSONAL ITEMS.

Edward Foster, first president of the Parish, was re-elected again and for the last time Nov. 4th, 1855.

Although in his old age, Mr. Fisher removed from the county his warm toward the flock that first gathered under his roof, and when but months ago he was called to rest, his co-workers gone before, his last wish was to be buried in the Parish cemetery.

One of the earliest and most diligent workers was Franklin Kimball, the midst of his active interest in newer and greater work ended yesterday's services, he too was called to rest as no man has been called by the church not only, but by the community; which in him lost a just citizen and the poor the friend.