

A History of the
Universalists and
Unitarians
of
Brunswick, Maine
1812 - 1952

Being a Collection of
the Writings of the
Rev. Sheldon Christian,
Pastor of the Universalist
Church of Brunswick,
1933-1945

**BICENTENNIAL
EDITION**

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This book contains the text of the original *125 Years of Religious Pioneering* written and published in 1937 by the Rev. Sheldon Christian. It also includes additional material written in 1952 by Rev. Christian and material taken from the February 27, 1937, edition of the *Christian Leader*.

Unitarian Universalist Church of Brunswick

P.O. Box 129

Brunswick, Maine 04011

(207) 729-8515

www.uubrunswick.org

Introduction

You hold in your hand a reprint of two historical sketches written by the Reverend Sheldon Christian (*see Figure 1*) in 1937 and 1952. He wrote them for the commemoration of the 125th and 150th anniversaries of the Universalist Church of Brunswick.

Rev. Christian was quite an accomplished individual. He had a complete printing shop in his house. In addition to being a printer as well as a minister, Rev. Christian was also a poet, playwright, drama critic, and lecturer on the history of the theater.

The text matches the original except for one significant error correction. Rev. Christian made a mistake in his edition, which he discovered only when it was too late to correct it. He mistakenly identified the minister who served during the Mason Street fire and the building of the Pleasant Street church as “Marion Crosley.” Marion was instead the minister of a Universalist church in Portland at the time. Marion did deliver the sermon at the dedication service of the rebuilt church on September 9, 1886, but it was his brother, Lucan Seneca Crosley, who was the minister of our church and headed the successful fund-raising effort to raise the \$4,500 needed to rebuild the church without incurring any debt.

The text of Rev. Christian’s original 1937 publication begins on Page 1. A brief review of that document begins on Page 19. The review originally appeared in the February 27, 1937, *Christian Leader*. Finally, an article Rev. Christian wrote in 1952 about the history of the Universalist Church in Brunswick begins on Page 21.

– *The Unitarian Universalist Church of Brunswick, Maine, Bicentennial Committee:*

*Chris and Rev. Brad Mitchell, Debbie Zorach, Rev. Sylvia Stocker,
Albert Moore, Sharon Brown, Sally Horne, Ann Spencer
Steve Wellcome, Editor*

One Hundred and Twenty-Five Years
of
Religious Pioneering

Being
The History of the First Universalist Parish
in Brunswick, Maine

BY THE REV. SHELDON CHRISTIAN, PASTOR

*"I have fought a good fight. I have finished the course.
I have kept the faith." – II TIMOTHY 4:7.*

1937

FIGHT the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession, that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ ... who only hath immortality, dwelling in the Light which no man can approach unto; which no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting.

CHARGE them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

KEEP that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so-called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen.

I TIMOTHY 6:12-21

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF RELIGIOUS PIONEERING

On the 20th of January, in the year 1812, a group of Brunswick residents gathered together and indicted the following compact:

"We, whose names are hereunder written, do profess to believe in the doctrine of universal salvation by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and feeling it our duty, as well as our privilege and highest happiness, to worship the one living and true God in Christ Jesus, do hereby agree and enter into solemn covenant, to assemble together as a religious Society on the Sabbath as often as we can conveniently, to worship the most high God; and that we will pay our proportion towards the expense of procuring a convenient place for convening together for public and social worship, and for the support of public teachers of piety, religion, and Christian morality in our Society."

Thirty-one men signed this agreement; and, in October of that year of 1812, the Society was legally incorporated as the FIRST UNIVERSAL CHRISTIAN SOCIETY in Brunswick. This document, signed by these members pledging themselves to the cause of propagating the doctrine of universal salvation, was for many years preserved by the former Mr. Harvey Stetson. For the last thirty or more years it has been kept in safe-keeping by his son, Mr. Frank Stetson. This historic document is now deposited among the archives of the Pejepscot Historical Society, as a public trust.

In many respects, this year of 1812 in which our church was founded was a momentous one. The United States and England were engaged in the War of 1812. "The appeal to arms," says one writer (*Hosea Ballou*, by Safford, p. 106), "brought stagnation of the common industries, and a great increase of partisan excite-

ment.” In many towns and cities there was intense opposition to the war policy. (*Ibid.*) It was in the year 1812 also that the great Hosea Ballou was in his prime. During these years he was electrifying our denomination with the vigor of his preaching, and clarifying many of the theological problems of Universalism through his sermons and writings. And the Universalists who banded themselves together in Brunswick, on that 20th day of January, in the year 1812, must have been acquainted with these writings, and must have been strengthened by them in their loyalty to the cause of propagating the doctrine of universal salvation.

In looking about for a minister to call as their first pastor, the Brunswick Universalists turned their eyes toward the Rev. Thomas Barnes. Mr. Barnes had been ordained in 1802 over the united societies of Norway, New Gloucester, Falmouth, and Gray. Arrangements were made with him to come to Brunswick once a month. The meetings were held in Washington Hall (Washington had been dead only thirteen years). Mr. Barnes came here on Saturdays, on horseback, and returned on Mondays. “After the cotton-mill was built,” says Wheeler in his *History*, “in 1812-1813, he received a good part of his pay in cotton yarns.” (p. 392.) A parson can always use a supply of good yarns, and Mr. Barnes “swapped yarns” with the people of Brunswick for about a year and a half. He was called “the Father of Universalism in Maine.” This church is therefore distinguished in that it had as its first pastor, the Father of Universalism in this state.

Mr. Barnes was succeeded by the Rev. Jacob Wood, of Saco. Mr. Wood preached only occasionally, however, and it is not known for how long a time he remained in Brunswick. “Probably other itinerants,” says the Brunswick historian, “visited the place from time to time.” (pp. 392, 393.) In the year 1826, the Rev. Sylvanus Cobb occupied the pulpit in the Washington Hall meeting-place for several Sundays. Mr. Cobb was one of the outstanding men of our denomination, and his coming caused certain Universalists of Top-

sham to be interested in assisting in the maintenance of the church. A new Society was thereupon formed, and, on the 27th of January, 1827, the FIRST UNIVERSAL CHRISTIAN SOCIETY OF BRUNSWICK was succeeded by one calling itself THE UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY OF BRUNSWICK AND TOPSHAM. For the period of one year, the Society heard Mr. Cobb once in every three or four weeks, meeting, as before, in Washington Hall. In February, 1828, Mr. Cobb left, and took over a church in Malden, Massachusetts.

A few months later, in the month of April, 1828, the Rev. Seth Stetson came into Maine on a missionary tour. He visited the church in Brunswick, and preached before the people for the first time on a Thursday evening, on April 17, 1828. Evidently he was well liked, for he noted in his diary that he “preached in a large hall to a good number of men.” (Wheeler, p. 393.) The following day he went over into Topsham and was the guest of Major William Frost. That evening he preached in the Topsham Court House. “From Topsham he went to Bowdoinham and other places in the vicinity.” (p. 393.) THE UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY OF BRUNSWICK AND TOPSHAM soon extended a call to Mr. Stetson—“Father” Stetson, as he came later to be called—to take up his abode in Brunswick, and to serve the towns of Brunswick, Bowdoinham, and Bath, alternately. On the 22nd of June, 1828, he preached his first sermon as resident pastor here.

In this year of 1829, the parish built a meeting-house on Federal Street and the corner of Franklin Street. During the winter, Mr. Stetson preached in this new edifice. At first he was given a stated sum for his services (\$8.00 a Sabbath); but soon the matter of the minister's remuneration was left to be determined by the mood of his congregation each Sunday. The amounts contributed under such an arrangement were naturally insufficient for defraying the living expenses of his family, and, on May 10th, 1829, he returned to missionary work.

For the next six years, the Universalists were without Universalist preaching. It was not until 1835 that they were again able to support a resident minister. In the meantime, the Unitarian movement was born in Brunswick. On the 3rd day of January, 1830, a group of residents organized THE SECOND CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY OF BRUNSWICK. The group had no legal existence; but it was composed at its founding of twenty-three members, all of whom were avowed Unitarians, and among whom were several very distinguished men—Major William Frost, Governor Dunlap, and the poet-professor, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

When this body circulated a subscription paper to arrange for the raising of funds for the support of a pastor, fifty-five names were secured. A number of Universalists had signed pledges, being willing to do their share in furthering this work of religious pioneering in Brunswick. The Universalists, as a body, moreover, gave the Unitarian society the use of their meeting-house on Federal and Franklin Streets.

In June, 1830, the Rev. Andrew Bigelow preached the first Unitarian sermon held under Unitarian auspices in Brunswick; and for six years, Brunswick Universalists listened to Unitarian philosophy from the lips of a rapid succession of clergymen.

The meetings of the Unitarians are said to have been well-attended during this period, but it is said that, while the meeting-house was well filled, it was “seldom or never crowded.” (p. 394.) “Professor Longfellow conducted a Bible class for several years,” Wheeler says in his *History*, and adds that the class was “largely attended,” and was “spoken of by members of the class as having been exceedingly interesting and instructive.” (p. 394.) To his activities as a teacher, the great poet often added also the playing of his flute as a contribution to the ministry of music.

Inasmuch as a number of the congregation of Universalists and Unitarians were from Topsham, it was agreed, after some time,

that they should alternate the place of holding worship, and that the people of Topsham should maintain the preaching in Topsham and the people of Brunswick, that done here. The Unitarian group in Topsham was an outgrowth of the orthodox Congregationalist body there, which had called itself the FIRST PARISH OF TOPSHAM. One of their preachers had been named Urquhart, and it may be interesting to note in passing that it was said that “his mode of preaching was marked for its humor and quaintness, and he would arouse his drowsy listeners on a summer afternoon by some stirring anecdote or exclamation. On one occasion he stopped suddenly in his sermon and then exclaimed, ‘I’m your shepurd o’er all o’ ye, and Wully Wilson is me graut bull-dog.’ The deacon [mentioned], either not relishing this publicity, or to signalize that he was *not* asleep, sturdily called out yet louder still, ‘I’m not your bull-dog! What did you say that for?’” (Wheeler, *History*, p. 409, quoted from Dr. James McKeen’s notes.)

In 1835, at the end of the six years of Unitarian preaching, the Universalists reorganized their ranks. The Unitarians carried on, using the Topsham church, while the Universalists used their church in Brunswick. The Universalists again called “Father” Stetson to be their pastor. He came, and began his pastorate on the 28th of June, in that year of 1835; but he gave up his charge on the 28th of February of the following year, after having been with the church for a period of only eight months. He continued to reside in Brunswick, however.

Beginning in June of that year, the Rev. Stephen A. Sneathen preached occasionally during the summer months. He and the Rev. G. W. Quinby occupied the pulpit of the Universalist meeting-house on Federal Street at various times, until, on the 25th of January, 1837, Mr. Sneathen was ordained and became their minister. He is said to have been the first duly installed minister of the church; but his ministry, like that of most of his predecessors, was of brief duration, and ended in the spring of 1838.

The Rev. Sidney Turner was the next pastor of the church, from June, 1838, to September 1st, 1840. "He was a young Congregational minister," says Father Stetson in his diary, "who turned Universalist; but after a year or two, he turned back again." And then he adds, as though this were the last straw, that, later, "He married a minister's widow in Bingham." (Quoted from the *Diary*, in *Wheeler's History*, p. 295.)

The now familiar Father Stetson was again engaged by the church, and in October, 1840, began his fourth and last engagement with the church. He preached every other Sunday until April, 1842.

Father Stetson was succeeded by the Rev. Giles Bailey, who undoubtedly was one of the outstanding ministers in the history of this parish. He remained with the church from April, 1842, until September of the year 1848, when he resigned to become Superintendent of the Maine Universalist Convention. He is to be thanked for having placed in the hands of the editor of the *Wheeler History* many valuable facts concerning the history of the parish up to that time. The parish was in what was probably its most flourishing period during his six-year pastorate. It was during his pastorate, also, that the new church, on the corner of Mason and Maine Streets, was erected.

The building of this church was made materially possible through the kindness of John L. Swift, a Universalist and a man of much influence in the town. He was a Representative in the state Legislature, a County Commissioner, and for 26 years a director of the First National Bank of Brunswick. He was the father of Mrs. William Frost, oldest living member of the church; the grandfather of John William Frost, in youth an active member of the Brunswick church and today not forgetful of it; and the great-grandfather of William Frost, a student at Bowdoin College. Nor is the record of faithfulness yet complete; for the great-greatgrandfather of the Bowdoin attendant, Major Lemuel Swift (father of John L. Swift),

was in his time one of the founders and a staunch supporter of the church in Brunswick. A number of churches in those days were built, if not literally upon a rock, at least upon the upper part of a building already built or in process of erection. Such an arrangement was economical for the parish. John L. Swift offered this privilege to his Brunswick fellow-Universalists, when he was building a block of stores on the corner of Mason and Maine Streets. "On the 15th of April, 1846, a lease was drawn up and signed, on the one part by Mr. John L. Swift, and, on the other, by several members of the Universalist society. This lease, on the payment of a nominal sum of \$5.00 to bind it, gave permission to the society to construct a church over a first story; [this first story] to consist of stores ... to be used for purposes not incompatible with church uses." (*Brunswick Telegraph*, October 10, 1884.) A provision was inserted in this lease, that if, as a result of a fire or other disaster, the building should remain uncovered, the lease would lapse. The lease was drawn up for 50 years from the date of its signing.

This new church was dedicated in December, 1846. It contained a steeple noted for its stately beauty, visible for miles around and a landmark in the community. Within the steeple hung a bell. Col. Andrew Dennison, a deacon during Mr. Bailey's pastorate, was largely instrumental in raising subscriptions for the purchase of this bell, and personally responsible for the securing of a good one. The first bell received from the manufacturer seemed slightly off tone, and Col. Dennison had it returned and a second one, perfectly toned, was secured. The bell weighed 1,794 pounds, and cost \$481.80. Col. Dennison conducted the choir at that time, and it is said that if, as happened on occasion, he came to the church without his tuning fork, he would go to the bell-rope, pull the bell, and from the note given by the bell would get the pitch he needed. The town appropriated money to pay a man to ring this bell three times daily—at seven in the morning, at noon, and at

nine at night. In time, a clock was also placed on this steeple, the money being appropriated by the town for this purpose.

After some time, the Rev. W. C. George was called, but he remained only a year, and the parish was again without a minister. Owing to the death or removal of some of the strongest supporters, both the Universalist church of Brunswick and the Unitarian church of Topsham were now in a feeble condition. It was decided, therefore, to unite the two societies, and to call the new organization THE MASON STREET RELIGIOUS SOCIETY. On the first Sunday of November, 1850, this agreement went into effect. The Rev. Amos D. Wheeler, D.D., a Unitarian, was the first pastor of this organization. Dr. Wheeler seems to deserve posterity's laurels for duration of ministry, for he served the united societies for fifteen years, from 1850 until 1865; at which time he left the church to act in a missionary capacity in the state of Maine for the American Unitarian Association.

Dr. Wheeler was succeeded by the Rev. William Ellery Copeland, at whose ordination the charge to the minister was delivered by no less celebrated a personage than the Rev. Edward Everett Hale. Mr. Copeland resigned his charge in 1869.

In 1870, the Rev. William R. French, D.D., a Universalist, was called. Dr. French was all that could be desired as a pastor, but the difficulties inherent in the situation were deep-rooted. The Unitarians were willing to support a united church as long as Unitarian ministers were called, but when a Universalist, however distinguished, was called, they gradually lost interest and withdrew their active support. The legal interests of the Unitarians were finally liquidated by the Universalists, and the Unitarians, withdrawing from the society, legally organized themselves into THE BRUNSWICK UNITARIAN SOCIETY. In 1875 they purchased a site of land on the corner of Pearl (now Jordan Avenue) and Federal Streets, with the \$1,500 which had been raised in subscriptions. The building subse-

quently erected there is today known as Wheeler Hall, and serves as a public school building. A poignant epitaph of this final separation was written by an officer of the American Unitarian Association on May 16, 1894, from the Boston headquarters, when he wrote to the last Unitarian pastor of this church. "Your painful letter received. That the result of 50 or 60 years' work at Topsham and Brunswick of thoroughly competent people should be the death of the church is something greatly to be lamented...." Lamentable as was the withdrawal of support from the Unitarians, the Universalists did not give up the struggle.

For four years, following the resignation of Dr. French when insufficient means were available with which to support a resident pastor, there were no regular services in the Mason Street church. In 1879, however, the Rev. I. J. Mead, State Superintendent at that time, visited the parish, gave the people fresh encouragement, and secured financial aid from the Convention to help them in supporting a resident pastor. On September 28th of that year, the Rev. J. H. Little was invited to occupy the pulpit, and was at once asked to become the pastor of the church. Mr. Little served the Brunswick parish for four years. During his pastorate a Sunday School was established, the parish list was doubled, the church organization made firm, and the State Convention financial assistance made unnecessary after the first year. In 1880, moreover, the parish entertained the Maine Universalist State Convention. After four fruitful years with the Brunswick parish, however, Mr. Little received an urgent request from the Trustees of the State Convention to become State Superintendent, to fill the vacancy being left by Mr. Mead, who had bought the *Gospel Banner* and was to devote his whole time to it. On November 1st, 1883, Mr. Little took over his new responsibilities. He was succeeded in Brunswick by the Rev. Lucian Seneca Crosley.

On Saturday evening, October 4th, 1884, a citizen named Charles Hacker was standing in Barron's grocery store across the street

from the Mason Street church. It was a little after half past seven. As Mr. Hacker looked out the store window, he observed a small flame starting up just beneath the bell deck in the gable end of the church building. He and three others at once ran for the church, going through the front door, which was seldom locked, one of them ringing the bell in the church to give the fire alarm. "Mr. Hacker groped his way up two flights of stairs, up also three or four steps to a platform or floor over the ceiling of the vestry. There he found a fire burning in the end of an old stuffed cushion, several being stored away. Seizing a board he attempted to beat it out, and did to a considerable extent, only to find it taking another course and leaping up to the rafters. Finding it beyond his control, he ran downstairs, gave another alarm, and he and another party carried up a pail of water, but when the fire was reached, it was beyond their control, and the two men retreated...." (*Brunswick Telegraph*, October 10, 1884.) In the meantime, the editor of the *Telegraph* wrote, he himself, up on the hill, heard the bell of the Universalist church ring out a brief alarm, then stop. The bell on the hill then took up the alarm. "We went to our front door, and seeing no sign of light, we concluded the alarm was false. About 8 o'clock we were called out, and were astounded to observe a very bright light northwest of us. As we crossed Maine Street in a heavy shower in front of the Congregational church, we witnessed what we regard as the finest (if that word is applicable to a fire consuming property) sight we ever saw, reminding us of old-time fireworks on the 4th of July. The spire of the Mason Street church was all ablaze apparently from the bell deck to the vane, the flames flashing and flickering at intervals so that every timber and cross-tie stood out in bold outlines for seconds at a time, the framing and finishing work having been already burned. We entered the store of Mr. G. F. Tenney, to find four persons there, who gravely affirmed that if there were any fire, it was in Topsham. We replied that they had better step out and decide for themselves. They did so, and saw the spire as it fell over...." (*Ibid.*)

“The two alarms,” the *Telegraph* article continues, “brought out the two Brunswick engines and the Topsham engine, which speedily had streams thrown upon the burning spire, but with the slightest possible effect in arresting the flames, for when the water reached the timbers, it was delivered in mere masses of spray; but the men were kept at work at the brakes in the hope to do some good.” After some time, from various connections, “seven strong streams were poured upon the burning mass, all to little purpose so far as the spire was concerned, for it burned and finally went over, a portion of the timbers falling upon the roof and crashing through it, and some into the street. The clock and bell went by the board, the bell, as we are informed, being cracked in two or three places.... A more persistent fire we never knew, for it was raining heavily while it was going on....” (*Ibid.*)

Many who watched the firemen, on the Sunday morning following the conflagration, endeavoring to pull over the burned timbers of the spire, must have been satisfied that the spire was originally framed to stand. (*Ibid.*) It was said that the sight of the beautiful old landmark as it stood a few days after the fire was a sorry sight indeed. “Everybody of course misses the old town clock; and the ‘sound of the church-going bell,’ familiar to people of regular nine o’clock habits, will be heard no more. Lots of people Monday looked up for the time, who, perhaps, except for the *fatality* which makes one seek what is lost, would never have cast a glance in that direction.” (*Ibid.*)

With the burning of the church, the society lost practically the whole of their investment in the building. They had no insurance, and no indemnity was to be had from this source. But the people lacked nothing in consecration, and meetings were held at once to decide what should be done. After careful consideration of the many problems involved, the society decided that the most far-sighted policy would be to buy their own lot, if possible, and build a modern church building upon it. John L. Swift gave this desire

concreteness when he suggested that the parish accept the gift of \$1,000, which might also serve, for technical purposes, as a consideration on their surrender of the option to build again over the block of stores, and in addition contributed his share of the subscriptions that were taken up for the building of the new church. The society selected the site of land on which the present church building now is located, purchasing it for \$1,500. A portion of the site then purchased was sold shortly thereafter, adding to the funds that were being raised for the erection of the new church.

During this period, Mr. Little, although State Superintendent, was residing in Brunswick, and assisted in raising the funds needed with which to build and go forward. Mr. Crosley continued as the pastor. Meetings were held in the old Odd Fellows Hall, through the kindness of Harvey Stetson. On September 9th, 1886, the new church on the corner of Pleasant and Middle Streets was dedicated. Mr. Crosley preached the dedicatory sermon. A material memento of his pastorate is to be found in the pulpit Bible, of which he made a gift to the church, the last pulpit Bible having been burned in the fire. Mr. Crosley is to be remembered as having been the first pastor in the present church edifice. But the memory of this pastor should be particularly dear for his work in raising the greater part of the money for the building of the new edifice. Of the \$4,500 needed, Mr. Crosley and his committee raised \$3,000. Mr. Little raised the remaining \$1,500, not in Brunswick, but throughout the Universalist parishes in the state, and among friends in Massachusetts. The thought that other parishes have contributed to the building of this edifice should make us realize that we of the Universalist churches of Maine are indeed knit by a close bond of fellowship.

Following the fire which destroyed the greater part of the Mason Street church, Mrs. Mathilda Swift, a Dennison, sent the metal that had been dug out of the ruins of the building to a foundry. When the bell was recast, it was found that it had "shrunk" 200

pounds in the process. But Col. Dennison, who was still interested in such matters, had insisted that no new metal should be added, lest the purity of its tone should be lessened. When the bell was installed in the belfry of the present church, business men on lower Maine Street were heard to say, when they heard it, "Why, there's the old Universalist bell a-ringing"; but they had not even known, perhaps, that it had been re-cast and re-hung.

No finer tribute could be given to any man than that given by all who have known the consecrated labors of the Harvey Stetson of this period to this church. Mr. Little, in his address to the people on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the society, said this about him:

"There was one man who is deserving of brief mention here.... This was Harvey Stetson, the one man who, through sunshine and storm; through fortune and misfortune as these attended our cause, stood firmly by and in several instances when, figuratively speaking, everything would have been given up by the others who were discouraged, said NO!—and continued to watch and work for opportunity to renew the life of the church and go on with the work; and to his consecration we are largely indebted for the possibility of celebrating this 100th anniversary of Universalism in Brunswick. His devotion to his church was such that he never forgot anything which was for the interest of the church. He would build the fires and ring the bell and act as usher, and do anything else which he thought needed to be done. His home was the minister's home at any time. His wife used to say, when sometimes he would forget an errand for the house, 'Harvey, if I had said that that was for the church, you would not have forgotten it.' If every Universalist Church could have one or more men as loyal and devoted as Harvey Stetson, there would be no question about the future of those churches." (*Brunswick Record*, November 1, 1912.)

In recalling special causes for indebtedness, it should be noted that the first sum of money pledged for the erection of the new church was given by the children of the Sunday School. The School had held an impromptu entertainment in the gallery of the Mason Street church just before the fire. After the fire, the \$20 which the children had raised by their entertainment was pledged to the new home to be erected.

When Mr. Crosley left Brunswick, he was succeeded by the Rev. C. Waite, who remained with the church for several years. He was followed by the Rev. H. S. Whitman, who in turn was followed by the Rev. Leroy S. Coons, D.D., who came to Brunswick first as a student at Bowdoin. After a ten-year pastorate at Pittsfield, Dr. Coons had wished to undertake further studies, and was persuaded by President Hyde to do this at Bowdoin rather than at Harvard. After Dr. Whitman's resignation, Dr. Coons was asked to become the pastor of the Brunswick church. From October, 1906, to October, 1908, Dr. Coons served in Brunswick, leaving to take up work in the church in Augusta. Dr. Coons is at present Superintendent of the Massachusetts State Convention. Following Dr. Coons came the Rev. F. T. Nelson, who was succeeded in turn by the Rev. Oluf Tandberg, on April 7, 1912. In this year of 1912, a great fire destroyed old St. John's church; St. Paul's church was damaged. The *Titanic* sank. Dr. Tandberg came to Brunswick with the distinction of being the only clergyman in the country who had set up in type and printed the Revised Version of the Bible. During his pastorate, the Centennial of the founding of the church was observed, the services being held on Wednesday, October 30th, 1912. Many of the people of the parish will recall memories of their participation in this Centennial. In 1914, Dr. Tandberg left to take up work in a larger field, and was succeeded by the Rev. Otto S. Raspe. Mr. Raspe was at first pastor of the Freeport parish, but soon was serving both the Freeport and Brunswick parishes. His pastorate in these two parishes was from February 1, 1915, to Feb-

ruary 6, 1921. Mr. Raspe is remembered for his constructive work in Brunswick. He is at present pastor of the First Universalist Society of Cambridge, Massachusetts. The next pastor was the Rev. Harry Shook. During Mr. Shook's pastorate, the Associates, the men's club of the church, reached its highest point of able membership, and he is dearly remembered by many here today. Mr. Shook is at present living in Concord, New Hampshire. He served as pastor from October 1st, 1921, to December 31st of 1923. Mr. Shook was followed by the Rev. James F. Albion, S.T.D., who came to Brunswick after an outstanding pastorate at the Portland Congress Square Universalist church. Following Dr. Albion, came the Rev. Harold I. Merrill, now pastor in Hardwick, Massachusetts. My own pastorate began on October 1st, 1933, shortly after the church had gone through another crisis and had been preserved as a heritage for posterity largely through the faith of a latter-day Harvey Stetson, who, when merging with another church was proposed, also knew how to say NO! To Osborne R. Pennell the church is as much indebted today as ever it was to Harvey Stetson.

To the thoughtfulness of four others, who, through bequests to the church in recent years, have made possible the continuance of the work during the critical years through which we have just passed, the parish is also particularly indebted: Mrs. Emma Swift Booker, Mrs. Adelaide Dennison, the Hon. Harry F. Thompson, and Isaiah R. Morrell. Without their material aid through these years, the difficulties of administration which have been encountered might never have been surmounted. Through all these 125 years of religious pioneering, there has always been a hard up-hill fight to wage. The two oldest living members of the Universalist church in Brunswick can attest to that—Mrs. William E. Frost, whose membership dates from the building of this present church edifice; and Mr. Fred I. Richardson, the oldest living constituent of the parish. These can both say with truth, toward the end of their long ministries as members of this movement—as did the apostle Paul: “I

have fought a good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith." As the years go on, each of us must be able to say just that: "*I have fought a good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith.*" The exercise of the same faithfulness that has endured for these 125 years cannot but assure the continued service to God and man of the First Universalist church in Brunswick. God bless it. ‡

The following review of Rev. Sheldon's book, *125 Years of Religious Pioneering*, appeared in the *Christian Leader*, February 27, 1937.

RELIGIOUS PIONEERING IN MAINE

A LAWYER with offices in the heart of Wall Street, New York City, where bulls and bears with snapping jaws and gory horns rage up and down, obviously finds relief in turning the pages of "One Hundred and Twenty-five Years of Religious Pioneering," for he writes us that in his judgment it is worthy of mention in the *Leader*.

The lawyer is right. It is an attractive booklet* containing an interesting story and it has four illustrations [Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 in this edition - ed.] which help make the message vivid. It is the story of the attempt to establish and maintain Universalist preaching in the town of Brunswick, Maine, and the story begins eight years before Maine became a separate state.

Mr. Christian tells the story simply and well. Thomas Barnes, Sylvanus Cobb, Seth Stetson, G. W. Quinby and Giles Bailey are among the preachers who served the parish in early times. Harvey Stetson and Osborne R. Pennell are among the great laymen and laywomen.

The pictures make us wonder again why our great grandfathers were so much more advanced in church architecture than our fathers, why the men of the forties built so that the entire community regarded their work with affection, and the men of the eighties built so much less worthily. A well-proportioned barn is a much finer sight than most Universalist churches.

The story of the fire which destroyed the old Mason Street Church in 1884 is graphic. The story of the sacrifice involved in rebuilding

is worth reading. Lack of money explains much about our architecture, but it does not explain all.

Apparently experiments in church union, some of which go back for eighty years, have not succeeded in Brunswick. The average Maine Universalist is a little too individualistic to combine with anybody. But that is true of people in many other states. Obviously these Brunswick Universalists now have a minister who believes in them, and believes in their distinct mission in the Community. He writes *con amore* of the people of Brunswick, who have carried on in the Universalist tradition for 125 years.

**One Hundred and Twenty-five Years of Religious Pioneering: Being a History of the Universalist Parish at Brunswick, Maine.
By the Rev. Sheldon Christian. Published by the Parish.*

HISTORY OF UNIVERSALIST CHURCH HERE

TRACED THROUGH SEVERAL EDIFICES
MOVEMENT BEGAN IN BRUNSWICK IN 1812
CHURCH HOPES FOR FULL-TIME OCCUPANCY OF
FEDERAL STREET PROPERTY SOON
BRUNSWICK RECORD JANUARY 3, 1952

It is a Sunday morning in the year 1812, and we find ourselves entering a certain building on Maine Street. There is a sign over the building which reads, "Washington Hall." Washington has been dead only a dozen years. Today, this building is known as the Brackett Block.

With others whom we know, we enter the front doorway and ascend the stairs to the second floor. Other people are already seated, but there are few down in the front of the hall, talking with a man whom, from his somewhat clerical appearance, we gather must be the preacher. He is, in fact, the Rev. Thomas Barnes. He comes here to Brunswick only once a month, on a Saturday, and he must leave on Monday for places on his extended circuit.

"Father" Barnes, as we affectionately call him, is a distinguished-looking man, with a full beard, and features that reveal consideration, intellectual insight and strength of character. And now those who have been conversing with Father Barnes seat themselves, and the preacher mounts the steps to the platform, and standing behind the rostrum, waits a moment for our complete attention.

"I was glad," he begins, "I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord. Peace be within thy gates, and prosperity within thy palaces, O Jerusalem...'"

The service continues. Father Barnes preaches to us about the Gospel promise of Universal Salvation. In other churches they are preaching that only a few were ever elected to be saved; that one is damned; and that the great majority of the damned will suffer eternal torment in an endless hell. The people whom we see about us listening gratefully as Father Barnes expounds the large Promise of Scripture, and all strong-willed people; people who have learned to do their own thinking, and are not afraid to be among a minority. They are men and women and young people who sense that somehow their being is part of a religious movement which is bigger than it looks, and that what they do will somehow have a potent effect on popular religious thought in the years to come, when their own names will no longer be remembered...

And here we leave them, the Universalists worshipping in Washington Hall soon after the formation of their society on January 20, 1812, and we slip down the stairs to Maine Street, and enter into the stream of time...

Eighteen years pass. Again it is a Sunday morning, in June, in the year 1830. We find ourselves among those walking down Federal Street towards a small church building on the corner of Pearl Street, now Jordan Avenue. This building was hopefully erected not long ago by the Universalist Society, but the people found themselves financially unable to maintain a pastor themselves. But the Unitarians have just organized a society, and so the fellowship have agreed to worship together in the first church building of their own which the Universalists erected—the Unitarians, however, calling the preachers.

We are a little early this morning, and we arrive at the church before the service has begun. The Sunday School is still assembled, and we see, down at the front of the auditorium, a group of adults who are gathered around a scholarly-looking young man with side whiskers. It is the Bible Class and the young man is Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, professor of Romance Languages at

Bowdoin College and librarian of the College Library. A man comes forward to greet us, and he is Rev. Andrew Bigelow, Unitarian.

The Sunday School classes assemble quietly and are dismissed, and we see the young professor goes up into the choir loft of the church, takes out a silver flute from a carrying cases, and softly trills a few notes as he exercises his fingers. He will play a solo for us later. Soon we see the preacher rise before the people, and invoke the Divine Presence. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for such doth the Father seek to be His worshippers. God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Seventeen more years pass, and it is again June. On this Sunday in the year 1847, we go down Maine Street toward the Androscoggin, for the Universalists are worshipping by themselves again. For that matter, the building on the corner of Federal and Jordan Avenue has been sold to the Baptists, and has been moved out of town, to Maquoit, where it is now known as the Forest Church. Along broad Maine Street, carriages are being drawn by spruce horses, taking their owners to the various churches of the town.

We soon come in sight of our own destination. We have noted its fine white steeple all the way down, and indeed that steeple is a landmark in the town. By the town clock, which is hung in the belfry of this same steeple, we see that we are in good season. We had better be for it is Children's Sunday, and the parents of the children in the Sunday School will be there to hear the children speak their pieces.

We pass under the arcade fronting of the various stores which are on the first floor of the church building; turn down Mason Street, and begin to go up the long flight of stone steps, this time only a short flight, into the body of the building. At right and left of this entry other flights of stairs go up to the gallery. Rubbing elbows

with others who are entering the auditorium we come into the large square room in which we gather for worship. We look behind us as we enter and notice the big queer-looking stoves, one on either side of the rear entrance of the auditorium, setting back in the shallow alcoves. In the winter we stand around them till we get our feet warmed, but there is no need of that today.

The whole auditorium is plain and painted white. Along the east and west sides of the church, long windows with plain glass admit the light, and this morning they are flung wide open, and all along the sides of the church, bird cages are hung, because it is Children's Day, and the air is full of their natural music. There are many people already seated in their pews. The pews are white, too, with black walnut tops. In many of them are little haircloth-covered "crickets" on which the people may rest their feet for greater comfort; but the pews themselves are none too comfortable as we ourselves know as we take our place in one of them. The shallow channel of the church has been cleared, the pulpit placed on the floor to one side of the front of the church and the pulpit chairs near them also. The platform is decorated with many flowers, and there can be no doubt that this is the Children's Day.

The organist, in the gallery, begins to play the prelude. It is an old organ, but the music is good. When the prelude is ended, we see a man down at the front of the church rise to his feet to speak. It is the Rev. Giles Bailey, an energetic man who commands immediate attention by the strength of his personality. Even the children cease from whispering as he spoke.... The Children's Sunday service is under way....

It is the night of October 4, 1884. It is raining. If we were listening, we may have wondered why the bell in the Universalist steeple on Mason Street was rung for a few moments, then stopped short as suddenly as it had begun. There was no real reason why it should have been rung at all, unless it was to give an alarm. Then why had it stopped? Now we hear the bell in the tower of the Congrega-

tional Church on the hill begin to ring also, and we go to the door to see if we can see anything; but not seeing anything, we go back inside the house, but we keep having a feeling that something is wrong, and we decide to go “downstreet” and find out.

Suddenly, as we head down Maine Street, we see it; through the shimmer of the descending rain, we see the beautiful spire of the Mason Street Church entirely in flames, even timber and cross-tie standing out like a Fourth of July illumination.

We step into a store and cry out excitedly to the men inside that there is a big fire downstreet. One of them, lolling against a cracker barrel, waves a hand and says there isn't—“It's over in Topsham.”

“Step outside, then, and see for yourself,” we exclaim impatiently.

He steps out, just in time to see the great spire, its skeleton glowing in outline, topple slowly over into the street. When we get to the fire, we find the Topsham fire company there, as well as the local companies; and the men are manning the brakes furiously. They tell us that they had been unable to save the spire, because the water turned to spray before it reached it and therefore was ineffective. But the rain helps some, and finally the blaze in the rest of the building is fought to a smolder.

We go home at last in the rain with heavy hearts; there is no insurance on that part of the building which is the property of the church. The results of 72 years of parish husbandry have been wiped out in a night.

Again it is Sunday morning. It is the ninth of September in the year 1886. This time our destination is a new building which we have just erected on the corner of Pleasant and Middle Streets. Today it is to be rededicated. As we enter it, there are many of our friends already here, and there is a general feeling in the air that a good work has been done and that the parish has again been placed in a

position to assemble in its own house of worship for many years to come. As we look about us, there are many mementos of the Mason Street Church which will carry on its remembrance for us, and for those who will follow us in the work of our church.

The old pipe organ in the Mason Street Church was pretty thoroughly ruined by the fire, but the “Old Lady” Stone salvaged some of the wood from it and had “Old Man” Larrabee use it to build the communion table which we see down there in front of the church. The pulpit in the Mason Street Church was also salvaged from the wreck, and is good for at least a few more hundred years. Up in the belfry, we can hear the bell ringing for tardy attendants. That bell will serve as a reminder, too, of the Mason Street Church, for the parishioners of future generations; Mrs. Mathilda Swift sent the metal from the old bell to a foundry, and had it recast, and there it is, pounding away up in the belfry of our new church. And the people who are gathered with us in this new church, on this Sunday morning of September 9, 1886, to dedicate this new church home, have the satisfaction of knowing that the building is clear of debt.

John L. Swift, who owns the block of stores over which the Mason Street Church Building was erected, gave the society \$1,000 for the release of their option to rebuild over his stores and with this and other monies subscribed at the time, we bought a double lot here on this corner, then we sold half the lot, which gave us more toward the erection of the projected new building. The State Convention gave a large part of the amount needed; and the rest was raised in the parish by subscription and among friends of the parish in Maine and Massachusetts.

As the service begins, the Rev. Lucan Seneca Crosley, who was pastor of the church at the time of the fire at Mason Street, and who had been working hard with the church committee to get the money for the new building and see it through, proudly rises and gives the invocation. And as the service progresses, we hear

words of encouragement from the Rev. J. H. Little, who preceded Mr. Crosley as our pastor at Mason Street, but who was called to the state superintendent while still our pastor. During the work of getting funds for erecting this new building, Mr. Little has been a great help to us. Then we hear a sermon by Mr. Crosley's brother, the Rev. Marion Crosley.

And when the service of dedication is over, on the ninth day of September in the year 1886, we all go forth from this little church with the feeling that although it is not all that we should like in the way of a building, at least it is ours; and as such we shall love it.

And we come back to where we started from, in these glimpses of the hours of worship which our society has inhabited during the first 130 years. The future remains to be enacted, and no one can prophesy what that future will be. We find ourselves in a situation in the present which is certainly unusual. A building, whose construction has been halted when half completed, seems to have little meaning. Yet, there was meaning in the plans from which the building has been started, and when the structure is finished, every detail will be seen to have its place. We find ourselves in the situation of the man upon whose project building has been halted.

Two years ago the sense of inadequacy of our Pleasant Street building was brought home to us forcefully because of the growth of the activities of the parish. New organizations, new needs, and new times required more facilities to work with than we have been favored with in this Pleasant Street edifice. But efforts to secure funds for adaptation on this buildings elicited little interest. Then we found that certain business interests were looking eagerly toward the possibility of purchasing this property, and were willing to pay a good price for it. But the amount which any such group would be able to pay would not go far in the construction of a new and better building.

At that time, Wheeler Hall, formerly the Unitarian Church, and for many years used as a school building, had just been abandoned. The possibility of purchasing it from the town was investigated, and at a subsequent meeting of the town, formal authorization was given for the act. The money needed for its purchase was given expressly for this purpose by friends of the church, and the purchase price was paid in full.

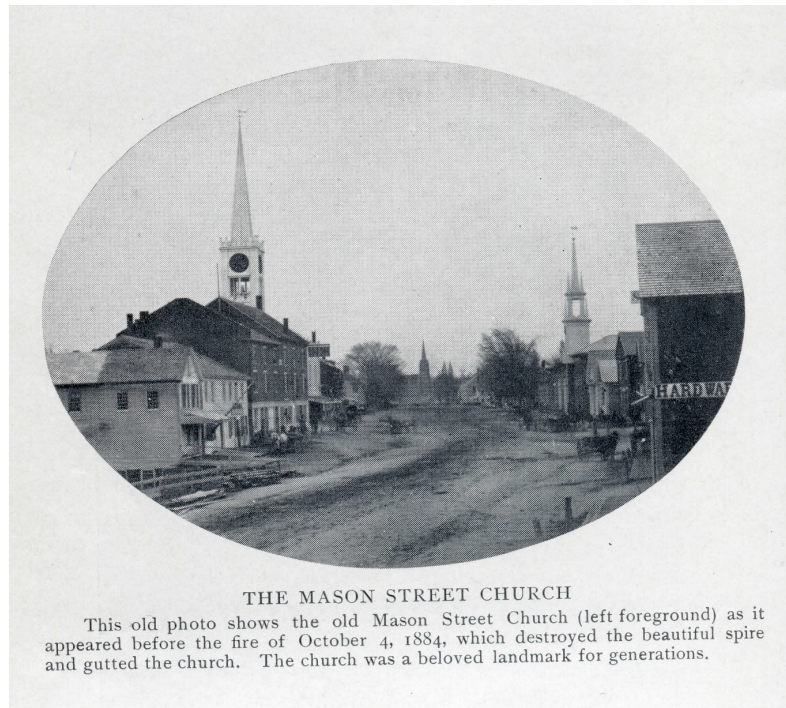
But already the Battle of the Atlantic was in progress, and financially, those interests which had gone to considerable trouble and expense to themselves in preparing to purchase the Pleasant Street property, decided that the times were now not opportune for the venture and withdrew. Though naturally this was a great disappointment to us, a study of the balance sheet shows that as a result of these two years of extensive work on

the problem of acquiring better quarters for the church, the church now holds title to a building which in all fundamental respects is far superior to the one which we dedicated in 1886, and it may be that, though the kindness of persons interested in the parish, funds may someday be made available for repairing and slightly modifying the Federal Street building with the view to its full-time occupation by the parish.

The parish today consists of the fellowship of members with a board of management, Mrs. Emma Haley, chairman, which conducts the affairs of the parish between meetings of the parish itself. A number of groups are active within the parish: The Macrina Society, Mrs. Gertrude Staples, president, an organization for women; The Mission Circle, Miss Helen L. Varney, president; The Associates, Russell Hosmer, president, an organization for men; The Youth Fellowship, Dorothy Perkins, president; the Sunday School; the Choir, Mrs. Helen Brackett, director; Boy Scout Troop 33, scoutmaster Lauriston Trott, Harry Snow, assistant scoutmaster; Cub Pack No. 33, Lauriston Trott, cubmaster.



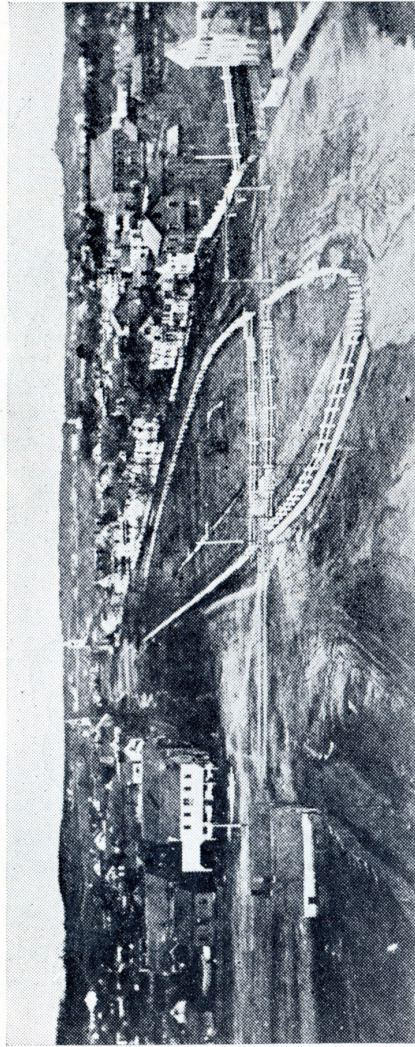
Figure 1: The Reverend Sheldon Christian



THE MASON STREET CHURCH

This old photo shows the old Mason Street Church (left foreground) as it appeared before the fire of October 4, 1884, which destroyed the beautiful spire and gutted the church. The church was a beloved landmark for generations.

Figure 3: The Universalist Church at the corner of Mason and Maine Streets



THE MALL, ABOUT 1860

An old view of the town, made about 1860, from the steeple of the First Parish Church. Note the Mall, fenced in, the unpaved streets, and, in the distance on lower Maine Street, the spires of two churches. The spire at the right is that of the old Mason Street Universalist Church. (Courtesy of The Brunswick Record.)

Figure 4: The Mall, about 1860. Picture taken from the steeple of First Parish Church.

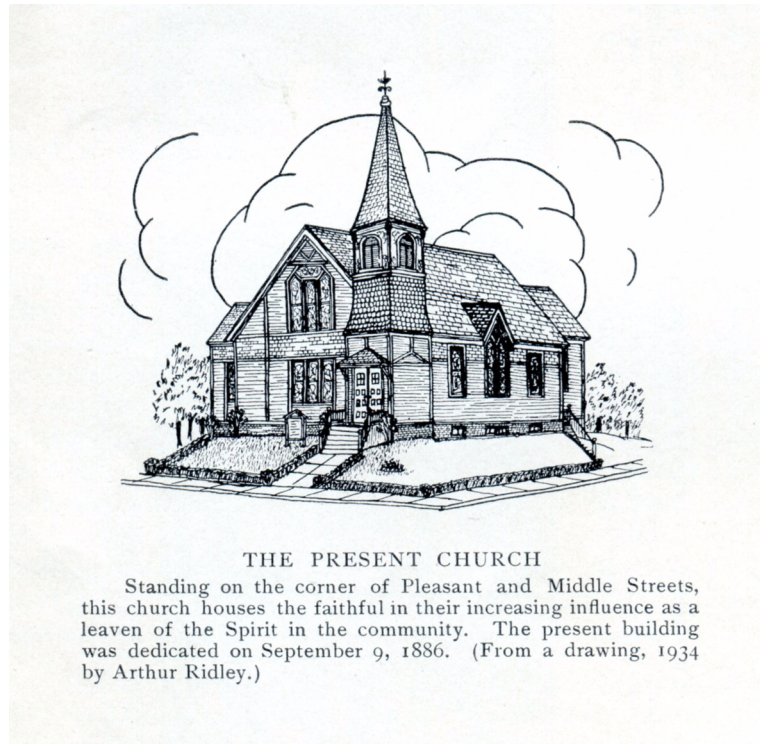


Figure 5: The “Present Church” [This building burned June 6, 2011.]



Figure 6: Mason Street Church



Figure 7: The Unitarian Church at the corner of Jordan Avenue and Federal Street

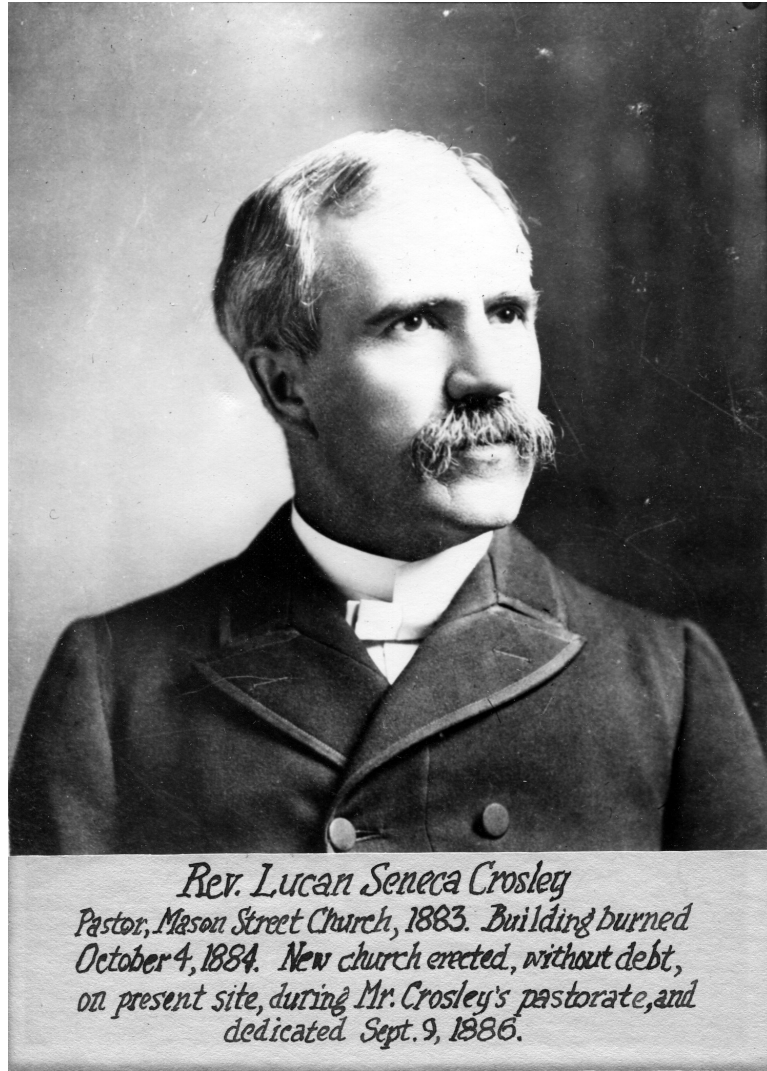


Figure 8: The Reverend Lucan Seneca Crosley