THE LAKESIDE SCHOOL OF NEW THEOLOGY

Over a period of fifty years I occasionally heard casual reference to an auditorium and grounds surrounded by a high fence, and presumably located at or near Bemus Point. My questions were invariably answered by the tantalizing and vague information ....... "I guess there was something like Chautauqua started in Bemus Point, but it didn't last long .... and I can't tell when it was!"

Finally .. my curiosity became so bothersome .. I decided to find out what I could ... and at least settle the matter in my own mind. At first I believed I would find a newspaper article or a paper written by someone familiar with the subject ... but after two years search I have failed to find any such record.

From newspaper files and scrap-books, and conversations with dozens of people ... little by little I have gathered data ..... which pieced together makes this paper. I know full well this is not a literary masterpiece --- and I know there are omissions. I hope I have made no mis-statements. This paper is too long to be exciting ... perhaps even very interesting, but it is a record which three generations of our County historians failed to make.

This paper is a brief account of the development of a Jamestown Church ... and particularly the work of one of its Ministers.

The history of the Unitarian Church in Jamestown divides naturally into three Periods:

The First Period embraces the organization and activities of the first Liberal religious movement in the city, and known as the Universalist Society of Jamestown, 1858 - 1881.

The Second Period includes the birth and growth of a new and more Liberal religious idea; the pastorate of Rev. James G. Townsend, and the organization work of the Independent Congregational Society, 1885 - 1890.

The Third Period, is briefly, the uniting of the Universalist and Independent Congregational Societies, and the resulting Unitarian Society.

I shall write briefly of the First Period and the Universalist Society, and devote most of this paper to the telling the story of the Second Period: Dr. Townsend; His pastorate, and the Lakeside School of New Theology.

THE FIRST PERIOD

The Liberal Movement in religion in this vicinity had its beginning in the organization on March 8, 1858, of a group of men and women, and known as the Universalist Society in Jamestown. Their first meetings were held in Jamestown Academy Hall, at the corner
of Spring and Fourth Streets ... and later, in what was called Universalist Hall. In the membership of this Society we find the names of men and women who contributed largely to the development of Jamestown: Orsell Cook; Erastus Crosby; Tyler Field, Esq.; John A. Hall; W. W. Henderson; James L. Sprague; Wm. H. Tew; Abram Martin; Phineas Palmeter; Alonzo F. Kent, and Ellal F. Carpenter. There were several ministers who served this society ... Rev. I. George; Rev. S. L. Roripaugh; Rev. G. W. Kent, and others. After some 23 years, in January 1881, meetings of this Society were discontinued. However, I believe the membership remained intact.

JAMES GRAHAM TOWNSEND

Was born in Pittsburg, May 26, 1839. His father, an ardent politician, removed his family to Buffalo in 1847, because that was a Democratic city, politically. The father became very popular and expected to be Mayor of the city. In 1852, however, Buffalo was smitten by an epidemic of cholera ... and in three days father, sister, brother and uncle died ... and his mother left an invalid. That same year, 1852, when he was thirteen years old, James returned to Pittsburg to work in his uncle's foundry. Two years later he went to live with his grandfather in Trumbull Co., Ohio, and there worked on farms and attended a private school taught by Rev. E. M. Cravath, a graduate of Oberlin. Prof. Cravath persuaded James to go to Oberlin College, where he remained four years, studying during the summers and falls, and teaching school during the winters.

For a time he attended Allegheny College at Meadville, but did not graduate..... later the College gave him the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

In the summer of 1862, when he was 22 years old, he enlisted in Co. C., 105th Regt., Ohio Vol. Infantry. He was married to Miss Orpha J, Lafferty, the day following his enlistment .... and on the next day was with his company on the way to Kentucky to join General Buell's army. In service he was wounded ... his left upper-arm was crushed, and from that time he never lifted his left arm. Upon discharge from the army, rejoining his wife, he taught school for a time, and then became a Methodist Minister in the Erie Conference. For eighteen years he remained in the Methodist Church, having happy pastorates in Oil City; Meadville; Corry; Jamestown and Buffalo. He was pastor of the Methodist Church in Jamestown for three years -- as long as the law of the Church then allowed. Going to Buffalo, he became pastor of the Pearl Street Methodist Church, where, after a year of service, he withdrew and returned to Jamestown ..... to found the Independent Congregational (now the Unitarian) church. In the accepting of of this pastorate, he renounced his affiliation with the Methodist Denomination.

Of this act, he later said: "I had no grievance with the M. E. Church, for she gave me her best churches, and my Doctor's degree came from old Allegheny College. I withdrew because I was no longer in harmony with her theology and philosophy of life. I came to Jamestown to preach what I called the "new theology."
"I hold that true theology, that is, a true explanation of the facts of life, underlies all true living. Right thinking in the long run leads to right living. And so theology, as interpreted by this school, has a vital and intimate relation to all departments of life and thought."

NOTE: In an article by Dr. Townsend, which appeared in the Buffalo Express of October 3, 1885, he stated his beliefs and why he left the Methodist church. (A copy of that article is on pages 124 - 125 of the First Record Book of the I. C. Church.) C. E. S.

The Second Period, 1885 - 1890.

As I stated before, this period covers the organization of the I.C. church society; the birth and growth of a more liberal religious belief ... and the pastorate of James Graham Townsend, D. D., in that Society:

As the story goes: Some four years after the cessation of the meetings of the old Universalist Society, and early in 1885, Alonzo M. Kent and Elial F. Carpenter ... members of the old Universalist group ... chanced to meet Dr. Townsend on the street, in Jamestown. (Let us remember that at that time Dr. Townsend was pastor of the Pearl Street Methodist church in Buffalo.) During their conversation Dr. Townsend was asked if he could be interested in forming a Liberal Church in Jamestown? (We KNOW he was very greatly interested ... for late in this year he CAME to Jamestown ... and in October, (1885) a meeting was held in Allen's Opera House (now Shea's, Jamestown.) and was well attended.

Dr. Townsend spoke briefly, stating that for a long time he had noticed the widening gulf between the churches and people ... and he had decided to form a 'people's church'. He said he used the name: Independent Congregational was used because the church was independent of all other church organizations and because the government was democratic. The meeting was then organized ... W. W. Henderson was chosen chairman, and Charles H. Brown, Secretary of the meeting.

The name: Independent Congregational Church, was adopted, and the following trustees were elected:

Mrs. Alonzo M. Kent.       Mrs. Martin L. Fenton.
Mrs. Orsino E. Jones.      Mrs. Mark Martin.
Edward L. Hall.            William T. Falconer.
Sidney B. Hoyt.            Elial F. Carpenter.
A. E. Pierce.              Carl W. Scofield.

F. B. Bush was elected Secretary, and Charles H. Tew, treasurer. The salary of Dr. Townsend was fixed at $2,000. and he was to provide his own parsonage. That night over 100 signatures to the paper ... declaring the intention of the signers to attend the church were received, making in all nearly two hundred and thirty.

Dr. Townsend held meetings morning and evening in Allen's Opera House for a little more than a year, at which large congregations were invariably present. A Sunday School was organized in connection with the church and the classes were held on the Opera House stage and in the boxes.
In the summer of 1886 the church building (erected in 1828) located at the junction of East Second and Chandler Streets, and formerly occupied by the Methodist organization, was purchased at a cost of $5,000. It was refitted and furnished at an additional expense of about $8,000. An addition to the church had to be built to hold the excellent pipe-organ ... a $4,000. gift from the women of the church. The organ was dedicated at a concert held Thursday evening, August 25, 1887.

At the first Sunday Service in the new church, held Nov. 21, 1886, Dr. Townsend preached both morning and evening, on 'Salvation,' and there were large audiences at both services. The press notice states that after the morning service there was a call for money, and that within half an hour $7,986.25 was subscribed. In the evening nearly $2,000 was given. Dr. Townsend remained pastor for nearly three years. ('four, including year in opera house.) On each Sunday during this time a sermon was taken in shorthand, and later was printed in a local paper. During this time excellent work was done and the church placed on a sound foundation.

During this busy year, of 1886, while the old Methodist church was being converted into the new home of the I. C. church, Dr. Townsend, not being satisfied with the really rapid growth of his church, sought to give wider scope to his theology, and proposed a Summer Lecture Course, something after the style of Chautauqua. An organization of several officers and directors was perfected... and in July, 1886, a very entertaining course of lectures was given in a tent at Lakewood, which was located where I believe one of the large hotels later stood. The Jamestown Sun, a weekly and Sunday paper published by Louis F. Camp and Guy H. Fuller, issued also a MORNING PAPER, during the two weeks of this lecture course... for the purpose of reporting the lectures and boosting the movement... which was called The Lakeside School of New Theology. Our good friend Charley Brown of Jamestown and Walter Crosby of Randolph covered these meetings at Lakewood, as reporters... They took the train from Jamestown to Lakewood, made copy and proof there, and returning to Jamestown on the train, delivered their "report" to the editor. (Mr. Brown tells me those speakers delighted in the use of "big" words.) Madame Belle Weaver Cole, of Jamestown and London... a wonderful singer, and her concert company composed the choir. Some of the brightest minds in the country were heard on the platform, and the meetings were altogether a grand success.

QUOTE... Jamestown Sun...July 10, 1887: "The purpose of the L.S. N.T. Organized by Dr. Townsend, with the cooperation of well known divines and professors in colleges and theological schools, was theological and educational, with a goodly amount of pure and elevating entertainment. It aimed to bring together the various phases of the progressive theology of the times, and by representative teachers to present the latest researches of Christian scholarship; The soundest teachings of science, unhampered by superstition; the broadest truths of modern thought. It held that the time-honored faiths of humanity were suffering from the imperfect forms in which they had been cast, and that the new revelations of science necessitate a restatement of many doctrines of Christian theology. They believed that in various religious denominations were to be found men who were earnestly laboring to make such a re statement. That IN churches and OUTSIDE of
churches, were people who, having abandoned the teachings of traditional theology, were casting about for a better and more adequate statement of religious truth. These teachers and these people, the L. S. N. T. helped to bring together for mutual helpfulness, for they believed that a comparison of views, an honest endeavor to arrive at higher truths, would result in a nobler and purer form of theology."

For a time a Liberal Christian paper called The New Theology Herald ... was published in Jamestown by Louis F. Camp and Guy H. Fuller.... publishers also of the Jamestown Sun. The publication of this paper must have started in 1886 and in an item, dated August 19, 1887, is the statement that The New Theology Herald had merged into UNITY.

An item dated January 12, 1887, states: "Men on New Theology Herald won Annual Printers rifle match." And also: "Full information may be obtained from Louis F. Camp, Secretary, Jamestown, N.Y."

1887 .. The Second Season of the Meetings of the L. S. N. T."

Early in 1887 .. Mr. Willard White of Boston; the originator of the Chautauqua Lake Railway, approached the directors of the L.S.N.T., with the proposition to present the Association the three and one-half acre Wilcox Grove, just north of the dock at Bemus Point ...... if they would make it the future home of the L.S.N.T.

This Grove extended from a point near the Universalist Church to within a few rods of the railroad, with the Lake Road on the West, and the Road to the Depot, on the East.

I quote:

"This is one of the prettiest spots on Chautauqua Lake and includes some fine Lake front. The property is valued at $4,000. It is but two or three minutes walk from the boat landing, and the Chautauqua Lake Railroad, which will be completed from Jamestown to Mayville by June 1st, will build a Depot within one minute’s walk of the grounds and the railroad will do everything in its power to accommodate the school."

On Tuesday morning, April 12, 1887, the purchasing committee of the L.S.N.T., met Mr. White at Attorney C. R. Lockwoods’ office in Jamestown, and accepted the magnificent gift. (Real estate transfer, May 1, 1887.)

The following is a copy of the article Published in the Jamestown Sun, Sunday, April 24, 1887: - (one week after acceptance of the property. C.B.S.)

THE HOME OF THE L. S. N. T.

A Visit to the Grounds,
Liberality of the Bamus Point People

On Wednesday Morning (April 20, 1887) a number of the officers and directors of the Lakeside School of New Theology were conveyed to
Bemus Point by the steamer CORNELL through the courtesy of Willard White, of the Chautauqua Lake Railroad, to view their new grounds donated by Mr. White to the School, and on arriving where Jack Pickard met them at the dock and conveyed them to his hotel, where he had one of his famous dinners prepared for them, and afterwards offered to whip any man who should dare to put up a money consideration for the same. This is Jack's way of doing business. When he invites guests to his house he wants it distinctly understood that he will take care of them.

After a most delicious dinner the party repaired to the Grove which is to be the future home of the L.S.N.T. It is a beautiful spot, containing between three and four acres, slopes gently toward the Lake and has a large frontage on the beautiful body of water. The amphitheatre will be located a little west of the center of the plot and will be enclosed by a high fence, though the major portion of the grounds will be free to all. The directors were more than delighted with the plot and its surroundings, and greatly cheered by the kindly and liberal spirit manifested by the citizens of Bemus Point, who have contributed about $1,200. toward the enterprise, as follows: A. J. Pickard, $200; Jotham Bemus, $150; J. J. Lenhart, $100; Charles W. & Emmet H. Bemus, $100; Smith H. Brownell, $100; James N. Seymour, $50; Samuel Weaver, $50; William L. Barnes, $50; John R. Russell, $50; Mrs. A. S. White, $25; C. Ross Horton, $25; Austin Wilbur, $25; Andrew Brown, $25; Fred K. Phillips, $15; Odin B. Arnold, $25; W. Frank Arnold, $25; Hobart H. Brockway, $25; Abner Furlow, $10; George W. Scofield, $10; George O. Strong, $10; Oscar Hale, $10; Benj. Casselman, $10; Earl Brownell, $10; Brownell Weaver, $5. and N. A. Stone, $2.

Un-quote.

Item: June 24, 1887. The L.S.N.T. was reorganized, and Hon. Alfred Short, of North East, Pa., elected President.

I have found no record of the "improvements" made on these grounds at Bemus. I however have been told of those activities: Men and teams removed dead trees and stumps and did considerable smoothing of the surface. Seats were built around trees and several walks were made. Residents say the fence was high and of boards .... but some of the printed articles mention a wire fence.

Item: "Single admission tickets to the grounds cost ten cents, and are good for all day, if the holder remains inside the gate. Day Tickets, permitting passage thru the gates as often as desired during the day, 25, cents. Season Tickets.. for 17 days... $1.50 Thus it will be seen that considering the richness of the program, the cost of the attendance is very low. The season is from August 5 to 21."

PROGRAM OF THE LAKESIDE SCHOOL, NEW THEOLOGY

In Session at Bemus Point,
Chautauqua Lake, August 5 - 21, 1887

( The Jamestown Sun, June 5, 1887. )

Friday - August 5 - Opening by Rev. James G. Townsend, D. D.
Rev. F. J. Chase, Subject: The Coming Man.


Monday - Prof. George L. Cary, of Meadville Theological School,
Subject: "How to Study the Scriptures."
Dr. Henry R. Rogers, of Dunkirk, N.Y., Subject:
"The Sun in Its New Role."

Tuesday - Conversation Meeting, led by Rev. J. G. Townsend.
Subject: "What is the New Theology?"
Solon Lauer, Subject: "The Crisis."
Rev. E. P. Adams of Dunkirk. Subject:
Rev. M. L. Williston, of Davenport, Iowa. Subject:

Wednesday - Pres. O. D. Cone, D.D., of Buchtel College,
Subject: "Messianic Prophecies."
Arthur Stearns Esq., of Cleveland. Subject:
"Co-education of the Sexes."
Grand Concert - By Mrs. J. W. Bentley Concert Co. of Albany.

Thursday - Conversation meeting, led by Pres. O. Cone, D. D.,
Subject: "Education."
Rev. L.W. Mason, of Union City, Pa. Subject:
"Discernment of Spiritual Truth."
Rev. E. L. Rexford, of Detroit. Subject: Clement of
Alexandria, or the Earliest type of
Christian Theology.
Rev. M. L. Williston, of Davenport, Iowa. Subject: "Switzerland
& Egypt. Illus. Stereoptican Views."

Friday - Conversation Meeting. Led by Dr. J. G. Townsend:
Subject: The Dynamic of the New Theology.
Rev. Thomas Hill, D. D., Ex-President of Harvard University,
Subject: The Crucifixion Historically
Considered.

Grand Concert. By Mrs. J. W. Bentley Concert Company.
Saturday - Rev. Thomas Hill, D. D., LL D. Subject: "Toads."
Rev. E. L. Rexford, D. D. Subject: "Augustine."
Prof. J. B. Roberts of Phila., Subject: "Elocution."

Sacred Concert. Mrs. J. W. Bentley Concert Company.

Monday - Rev. Thomas Hill, D. D., LL D. Subject:
"Children to be Taught from Nature."
Solon Lauer, Subject: "Scientific Theology."

Tuesday: Theo. W. Haven, Ph D., of Battle Creek, Mich.: Sermon.
Prof. Sam'l G. Love, Supt of City Schools, Jamestown, N.Y.,
Subject: "The Philosophy of Education."
Merchant of Venice. Given by Prof. J. B. Roberts of Phila.,
Supported by his English Literature Class, of Buffalo,
and histronic talent, of Jamestown.

Grand Concert: The Mrs. J. W. Bentley Concert Company.
F. N. Thorpe, Ph D., Subject: "The Wage Earners."

Thursday: Rev. J. G. Townsend, D.D., Subject: "Utopia" to be
followed by conversation.
F. N. Thorpe, Ph D., Subject: "The Industrial Relations of
the State.
John R. Clark, of Detroit. Subject: "Gough, in Humor and Eloquence."

FRIDAY: F.N. Thorpe, Ph.D., Cooperation in the United States.
John R. Clark. Subject: "To and Fro, in London."
RICHELIEU. Given by Prof. J. B. Roberts, supported by his
English Literature Class, of Buffalo; and Histrionic Talent
of Jamestown.

SATURDAY: Rev. A. N. Somers. Subject: "Does the World Owe Men a
Living? -- or, "A Study of Crime and Pauperism."
Rev. A. A. Miner, D. D., of Boston. Subject:
"The Human Elements in the Bible."

Rev. A. A. Miner, D. D., Subject:
John R. Clark. Subject: "The Chivalry of Reform Movements."

End....

I quote: (From: Jamestown Sun, August 7, 1887.)

The Second Annual Season of the L.S.N.T. was opened Friday,
August 5, at 2:00 P. M., by Rev. James G. Townsend, founder of the
School. In a short address he set forth the origin; methods and
objects of the School. He declared the need of a broad and progress­
ive theology, and said the L.S.N.T had been founded to bring together
earnest men who could there present their freshest and noblest tho.
The grounds are in excellent condition, the spacious ampi­
theatre is cool
and comfortable and the attendance constantly in­
creasing. The outlook is for a large attendance.

Un..quote.

This article was printed in the Jamestown Sun, August 14, 1887....
at about the middle of the season's meetings:

The New Theology; Ably Expounded by the So-called Heretics
at Bemus Point:

"The L.S.N.T. is under full headway. Some of the
most prominent heretics in the country have been lecturing and preach­
ing on the Platform. Last Sunday the people were addressed by Dr.
H. W. Thomas, of Chicago, who gave them a real spiritual and intell­
lectual feast. Dr. Thomas has been growing more and more Liberal
since he was forced out of the Methodist church and the mantle of
his religion now is broad enough to cover anyone who desires and
strives to lead a good life, without regard to creed.

Dr. J.G. Townsend, the founder of the School, is
a central figure of attraction. His warm, genial nature, his eloquent
and spiritual sermons and lectures, make him loved and admired by
all who know him. Dr. Townsend has been a target for criticism from
the Methodist church since he left it, but he takes it all in good
part, and keeps right on preaching what he believes to be true.
It would seem as there must be something wrong with a church which
has no room for men like Thomas and Townsend. If we can judge these
men by their work since coming out of the church, they are good men,
with the good of humanity at heart. Their heresy seems to be simply
a revolt against doctrines which most sensible people of today DENY.

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Here is another article...from a scrap-book I own. It is pen-dated: July/1887.

"The grounds of the L.S.N.T. are being put in apple pie order for the coming meeting. They are surrounded by a neat wire fence, there are two gates, one on the side toward the Depot of the C.L. Railway, which is only about ten rods away, and the other on the lake front, about two minutes walk from the boatlanding.

The amphitheater is nearly completed and will be ready for use by Friday. It is a fine, large structure, well built and conveniently arranged. It covers a space of 90 x 100 feet, with a roof projecting five feet all around. The platform is at the end toward the Lake, and is of generous size, 17 x 34 feet, with a space 17 x 33 feet at each end partitioned off for offices, dressing rooms, etc. In the rear of the stage is a veranda and a private entrance for speakers and singers.

The place is pervaded by a delightful atmosphere of rest, here, one forgets the cares of business and the petty trials of daily life, it is a fitting place for the utterance of the nobler and newer truth which the movement represents.

I have told you of the meetings of the L.S.N.T at Lakewood, in July, 1886 . and of the Meetings at Bemus Point, in August, 1887. I am quite sure meetings were undertaken again at Bemus Point, in 1888 .... in order to keep up the Association, perhaps, but I believe they failed to meet with any degree of success.

Due largely, perhaps to Dr. Townsend's having what may be called a "nervous-breakdown," and resigning early in 1888.

I wish I might go on, and tell you of many years of successful meetings of the L.S.N.T at Bemus Point .... But such a happy ending is not possible, for in 1889 misfortune came upon the association.

When Willard White presented the beautiful Grove at Bemus Point to the Lakeside School of New Theology, he had not paid Mrs. Clara Wilcox of whom he purchased it - the full amount of the purchase price, but gave a mortgage of $1,500. for the balance. That mortgage was not paid at maturity. Consequences were ... it was sold by foreclosure on March 28, 1889 by Mrs. Wilcox's attorneys, Bootey, Fowler and Weeks. Hon. Alfred Short, of North East, Pa., the President of the L.S.N.T., bid in the property for the association, this securing an indisputable title to the property, which with the improvements upon it was considered to be worth at least $4,500.

ITEM: dated July, 1890. (the next year).

"Last year Mr. Short bid in the Grounds at the foreclosure, and still holds them in trust for the association ... but it is doubtful if the directors will redeem them."

Which statement was all too true.... And so, thus ends the story of the L.S.N.T. so far as I know it.

............... 

Now .... A few words more about Dr. Townsend:

Early in 1888 the health of Dr. Townsend succumbed to the great strain put upon him by the L.S.N.T. as well as his Church work, and he was thus forced to resign the pastorate of the church in Jamestown.
The Church then secured the services of Rev. Henry Frank. Rev. Frank caused quite a scandal in Jamestown when he left the pulpit of the Regular Congregational Church in Jamestown, to serve this society ... and was thus promptly excommunicated by his former colleagues ...... Which Rev. Frank took as a compliment to his ability in spreading Liberal thought.

I believe Dr. Townsend's health improved until (I Believe) in May, 1889 he removed to Pittsburg, where he founded the First Unitarian Church, now one of the largest Churches in the Smoky City.

On April 26, 1891 the Jamestown church called Dr. Townsend, and he returned to the pulpit of that church on June 7th, of that year. Six months later, on January 10, 1892, he resigned, and a farewell Social was tendered Dr. and Mrs. Townsend, March 25, 1892. I believe this was the end of his Regular service as Minister.

Dr. Townsend was plagued from this time on, with epilepsy, but in spite of this, he kept up a large correspondence with friends on the religious, social and intellectual problems of the age. He also wrote many articles for the Christian Register, of Boston; the Monist; The Open Court; and Unity, of Chicago. He performed many marriages and attended more than a thousand burials, while in Jamestown. He was a Member of the first C.L.S.C. Class to be graduated, and was a member and for many years Chaplain of James M. Brown Post, G.A.R. Dr. Townsend died at his home, 31 Euclid Ave., Jamestown, June 26, 1917, just one month after his 78th birthday. Reverend James Graham Townsend ... his wife Orpha, and his daughter Madeline ... are at rest in Lake View Cemetery.

I Thank You!

C. B. Sampson,
Clayburne B. Sampson,
October 1, 1947.