

READ BY

ELEAZER GREEN

at Jamestown N.Y.  
Prendergast Library  
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HISTORICAL SKETCH

JAMES PRENDERGAST FREE LIBRARY.

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It was fortunate for the City of Jamestown that James Prendergast, its founder, decided to locate at the Rapids on the outlet of Lake Chautauqua. From the time that decision was reached until the present date the little settlement first known as "The Rapids", later as "James's Town" which almost immediately ripened into "Jamestown", and is now the City, has profited beyond measure and will continue so to do for all time, by reason of the far-sightedness and the benefactions of such founder, his son Alexander Thompson Prendergast and his grandson, James Prendergast, the younger.

Although the founder long since passed away and all his descendants are dead, - the name of James Prendergast is cherished and will ever be cherished by all loyal residents of this City. The final and crowning benefactions of the Prendergast family to this City and its inhabitants are the St. Luke's Episcopal Church Building, given to that Society by Alexander Thompson Prendergast, and his wife, Mary Norton Prendergast, as a memorial to their daughter, Katherine, and the James Prendergast Free Library, regarding which I have been asked to write something for the Centennial History. The History of the founder of Jamestown and of his descendants has been quite fully recorded in the History of the Town of Ellicott and in those of the County of

Chautauqua but it has been deemed advisable that a historical sketch of the James Prendergast Free Library should become a part of Jamestown's Centennial Record.

James Prendergast, the founder of Jamestown, and his wife, Agnes N. Thompson Prendergast had only one child, a son, Alexander Thompson Prendergast. Alexander Thompson Prendergast and his wife, Mary Norton Prendergast had two children, James and Katherine; Katherine died when a child, leaving James the only surviving child of Alexander. James was born June 18th. 1848 and died December 21st. 1879; leaving no Will, but leaving memoranda which he had contemplated completing as a Will. James, the younger, was survived by his father and mother. Although James, the younger, was apparently in excellent health during my association with him, - he had a feeling, a premonition, perhaps, that he would not live to old age. As I was his law partner at the time of his death and had been such for nearly five years, - we talked much during our leisure hours regarding his ancestry, his life and his prospects and plans for the future. He told me that, as he had no descendants, and in all probability would not live to have any, that with the death of himself and his father, their branch of the Prendergast family would become extinct, but that such

branch would leave, in all probability, a substantial estate. That the other branches of the Prendergast family were well to do and he believed that it would be well for him to do something in a substantial way for the town founded by his grandfather, - and which bore that grandfather's and his own christened name. It was with that idea in mind that he considered the founding of a Library for Jamestown that would perpetuate the name of Prendergast and would be of substantial and lasting benefit to all who use it properly.

He had thought out and to some extent formulated a plan for the creation of an organization by the name, selected by him, of "The James Prendergast Library Association of Jamestown, New York", to which organization was to be conveyed the Prendergast Building at the corner of Main and Third Streets, erected by him in the years 1875-6, as an endowment or sustaining fund for the Library. The income from the Prendergast Building was to be accumulated until such income, with the interest thereon would be sufficient to purchase a site and construct a Library building and purchase a Library. The Library was to be known as "The James Prendergast Free Library". He had made written memoranda to that effect. I knew of this memoranda

and felt sure that it had never ripened into a Will. Soon after his death, I found it in his desk at the office and handed it to his father, Alexander T. Prendergast. This father religiously carried out its provisions by directing me to prepare, which I did, under his supervision, the act incorporating "The James Prendergast Library Association of Jamestown, New York", which Act appears as Chapter 3 of the Laws of 1880. Section 3 of the Act provides:

Section 3. Said Association is hereby empowered to receive from Alexander T. Prendergast, and Mary A. Prendergast, his wife, a conveyance in fee simple, of the building, lands and premises situate on the corner of Main and Third Streets, in Jamestown, Chautauqua County, New York, known as the "Prendergast Building", and to hold the same for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a public reference and circulating Library, according to the terms and provisions of this act. And said Association may also take and hold any additional or further donations, grants, devises, bequests, or general or specific endowments, which may be made in further aid or support of said library and the objects of said association by Alexander T. Prendergast or Mary A. Prendergast, or by any government or public institution.

On January 31st. of that year, immediately after the passage of that Act, the first meeting of the Board of Trustees was held. The board as created by the Act, consisted of William C. J. Hall, Robert

Newland, Solomon Jones, Lucius B. Warner, William Henry Proudfit, Frank Edward Gifford and Eleazer Green. At that first meeting Mr. Hall was chosen President; Mr. Newland, Treasurer; and Eleazer Green, Secretary. Mr. Hall continued as President and Mr. Newland as Treasurer during their lives. The writer of this article, Eleazer Green, still holds the position of Secretary. Of the original Board of seven members, four have died, viz: William C. J. Hall, Robert Newland, Solomon Jones and Lucius B. Warner. Mr. Hall died October 30th. 1887 and Mr. Robert N. Marvin was chosen to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Mr. Hall. Mr. Newland died October 3rd, 1891 and Mr. Daniel H. Post was chosen to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Mr. Newland. Mr. Jones died November 29th. 1901 and Rev. Elliot C. Hall was chosen to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Mr. Jones. Mr. Post who was chosen to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Mr. Newland died June 2nd. 1904 and Mr. Sheldon B. Broadhead was chosen to fill the vacancy caused by Mr. Post's death. Mr. Warner died February 14th. 1905, and Mr. Clayton E. Bailey was chosen to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Mr. Warner. Mr. Marvin died February 6th. 1909 and Mr. Ralph C. Sheldon was chosen to fill the vacancy caused by the

death of Mr. Marvin. Rev. Elliot C. Hall died April 27th. 1917 and his son, Elliot Snell Hall, was chosen to fill the vacancy caused by his father's death; Mr. Bailey died August 8th. 1918 and Mr. Charles C. Wilson was chosen to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Mr. Bailey. Mr. Broadhead died August 29th. 1925 and his son-in-law, George L. Maltby, was chosen to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Mr. Broadhead; so that, the Board is at present composed of William Henry Proudfit, Frank Edward Gifford and Eleazer Green, of the original Board, Ralph C. Sheldon, Charles C. Wilson, E. Snell Hall and George L. Maltby. The following have served as President, viz: Mr. William C.J. Hall, Mr. Jones, Mr. Warner, Mr. Marvin, Rev. E.C. Hall and Mr. Proudfit, who is still acting.

The Board of Trustees early adopted a corporate seal and chose for its device and motto that of the coat of arms of the Prendergast family. An impression of the seal is shown herewith:

The accompanying portraits are of the elder James Prendergast, of Alexander, and of James, the younger, as well as a picture of the Library building.

It may be well to mention that when the younger James was getting data of the Prendergast family for Young's History of Chautauqua County, - he was unable to find any picture of the elder James, or that one had ever been made. He did discover, however, that there was still living a man who was a warm personal friend of the elder James and who painted portraits. This man was induced to paint a picture from memory. James, the younger, furnished the painter a ruffled shirt and some other wearing apparel worn by the elder James, as aids. A picture was produced and that picture is the one upon which all subsequent pictures of the elder James, have been based. Older residents who knew the elder James personally considered the picture an excellent likeness.

Immediately after the organization of the Board of Trustees in 1880, Alexander T. Prendergast and his wife conveyed to the Association the Prendergast Building. Thereafter the present site of the James Prendergast Free Library, consisting of an entire city square, 240 feet by 256 feet in size, bound-

ed by Fifth and Sixth and Cherry and Washington Streets, was also conveyed by Alexander T. Prendergast and his wife to the Association, as a site for the Library Building. This site had at an early date been set aside by the first James Prendergast and conveyed to the First Congregational Church as a burying ground and later by such Church to the Village of Jamestown, but the burials therein had ceased long before the death of James, the younger. To remove any possible question regarding the title to such site, legislation was procured permitting the removal of any remains still therein, and Deeds were obtained from the Village of Jamestown (Jamestown had not then been incorporated as a City) and from the First Congregational Church of Jamestown, conveying to the Association whatever right, title or interest they, the Church and the Village, might have in the site.

Beginning with the first of January, 1880, the rents from the Prendergast Building were accumulated by the Association until, with the site donated by Mr. and Mrs. Prendergast and other substantial donations made by them, a sufficient fund was accumulated for the removal from the site of the few bodies remaining therein, and the erection thereon of the Library Building. The building, a fireproof one, was

completed and dedicated December 1st. 1891.

Samuel G. Love was chosen by the Board as the First Librarian,- upon him devolved the task of purchasing books and establishing the library upon a working basis. Mr. Love was assisted in placing the library upon such basis by Mrs. Harriet B. Love and Miss Luella Dowler, now Mrs. Luella D. Freeman. Mrs. Love continued with the Library until failing health compelled her resignation. Mrs. Freeman is still efficiently serving the Library as Assistant Librarian. Mr. Love performed his work well and the Library was formally opened at the time of the dedication, as a Reference and Circulating Library. Mr. Love continued as Librarian and successfully conducted the Library until his death, which occurred November 12th. 1893. After the death of Mr. Love, Mary Emogene Hazeltine was selected as Librarian and she intelligently and with signal success acted in that capacity until a wider and more remunerative field opened for her in Wisconsin, when her resignation as Librarian was presented to and reluctantly accepted by the Board on January 25th. 1906. During Miss Hazeltine's administration the Library prospered and its influence for good was greatly increased.

Miss Lucia Tiffany Henderson was then

chosen by the Board as Librarian and has continued in such capacity to the present time,- well and satisfactorily conducting the Library. Its prosperity has continued under her administration. Miss Hazeltine is a lineal descendant of Abner Hazeltine,- Miss Henderson of Silas Tiffany,- these men were prominent pioneers of Jamestown.

Before the formal opening of the Library the private Library of the Prendergast family had been donated to the Association and placed in the Library building and with the books purchased by the Association formed a Library, at the opening, of 7555 volumes. Since such opening the Library has continued to be a constant source of education and wholesome entertainment to the people of the City. The rentals from the Prendergast Building have paid not only the salaries of the Librarian and Assistants, the upkeep of the Library building, and the Prendergast Building, but has furnished an additional supply of funds for the purchase from time to time, of new books so that the Library now (June 1st. 1927) consists of 30,000 volumes.

In addition to books, the Library contains an Art Gallery consisting of a choice, though not numerous collection, of oil paintings. Mr. and Mrs. Alexander T. Prendergast gave to the Library Association,

the valuable portraits of the Prendergast family, now in the Art Gallery, and also many thousand dollars for the purchase of additional paintings which sum was expended by the Board of Trustees under the guidance of skilled assistants in the purchase of additional paintings,- so that the Art Gallery today contains a choice and valuable collection,- some of the paintings therein being worth several thousands of dollars each. The portrait of James Prendergast, the younger, is considered a masterpiece by those competent to judge and to the Library, is of priceless value.

Mr. and Mrs. Alexander T. Prendergast used great care and exercised excellent judgment in the selection of the original Board of Trustees and by the act of Incorporation gave to the Board self-perpetuating powers. The Board has endeavored to maintain that high character by the selection of men of the highest standing and fitness in the filling of vacancies occurring upon the Board.

James Prendergast, the younger, died when young in years but he lived long enough to become prominent in the business, social and educational life of Jamestown. He was a man of strict integrity and of high culture being a Yale man and a graduate of Columbia University Law School. He was strikingly

handsome,- of more than medium height, well proportioned, graceful and dignified and always well-dressed. Though reserved, his culture, mental and physical vigor were so apparent that he would command admiration and respect in any gathering. And through it all there was revealed the kindly heart. He possessed both an intellect and a soul.

Although the James Prendergast Free Library is the creation of one scarcely more than a boy in years, it is a creation worthy the wisest and most mature and it will endure for all time,- will increase in value and influence as the years go by, and those who use it intelligently and appreciatively will revere the name of its founder.

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