

— HISTORY —

Willimantic Baptist Church a beehive of activity

Part four of seven

In October 1892, on the occasion of the First Baptist Church of Willimantic's 75th anniversary, it was chosen to host the state Baptist convention known as the Baptist Anniversaries. The first official occasion was the 10th annual meeting of the Baptist Ministers of the State. The Willimantic Baptist Church was crowded on the second day of the three-day event for the first annual meeting of the Baptist Young People's Union of Connecticut.

The theme was education, and the main speaker of the evening was the eighth president of Brown University, Elisha Benjamin Andrews, who served in that post from 1889 until 1898.

Andrews opened his speech in the packed church by saying that this was an educational era, but he decried the fact that the Baptists had a poor record in education, and that although Brown University was primarily a Baptist organization, the Baptist Church did not support it.

He was frustrated that the best Baptist students were leaving their churches to go Yale,

Harvard, Columbia and Cornell, "probably never to come back to their churches again because the Baptists have no facilities for education with the exception of the Chicago University, which was mostly given by Rockefeller and outside denominations."

He stressed that the Baptists should develop a liberal arts curriculum, and that he, as president of Brown University, would encourage its growth there, and fight for the growth of Baptist education particularly in the liberal arts.

The 69th annual meeting of the Connecticut Baptist Convention followed after a 15-minute intermission. The meeting adjourned 30 minutes later after the election of officers and the ninth annual meeting of the Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society of Connecticut commenced. The national organiza-



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tion was founded in 1877, and sent missionaries to educate and support ex-slaves in the South after reconstruction ended. It also sent missionaries into industrial towns to work with immigrant workers.

For example, in 1893, the Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society of Maryland appointed one Marie Buhlmaier to work with German immigrants in the port of Baltimore. Two of the most famous members of the Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society were Joanna P. Moore (1832-1916), a white missionary from Pennsylvania who dedicated her life to improving the condition of African-Americans in the South, and Sophia Packard (1824-91) of Massachusetts, who presided over the organizing meeting of the Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society in 1877, of which she was chosen treasurer that year and corresponding secretary the next. She is better known as a founder of Spelman College.

Following the meeting of the Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society, the Home Mission Society received the reports of missionaries in the field in Connecticut. The Rev. A. Rohnstrom read the report of the Swedish missions, and the Rev. A. F. Pistor of New Britain reported on the German missions.

The Rev. J.F. Burditt of Udayagini Telegu Baptist

Missions in India, caught everyone's interest through "a vivid picture of the barbarous habits and customs of the people."

The Rev. Dr. Hazlewood of Boston made the most controversial address of the convention in which he criticized the "idolrous worship of Roman Catholics." To prove his point he provided miniature statues of the Virgin Mary, a Rosary, and a French-Canadian Bible with three nails driven through it. He further stated that Catholics were harder to convert than Buddhists. This drew an immediate response in a letter to the *Willimantic Chronicle* the following day.

An individual who signed himself "Idolater," but who was believed to be the pastor of St. Joseph's Church, the Rev. Florimond de Bruycker, denounced Hazelwood as a "quack, an impostor" who promoted "bigotry, prejudice and sectarian hatred." He suggested that any Baptist who needed an explanation of Catholic devotion to the Blessed Virgin should ask any member of St. Joseph's congregation, "and receive not a passionate, unintelligible denunciation of Baptist worship, but a more lucid explanation of Catholic Doctrine than the learned Doctor shed upon his hearers at the Baptist convention on Tuesday."

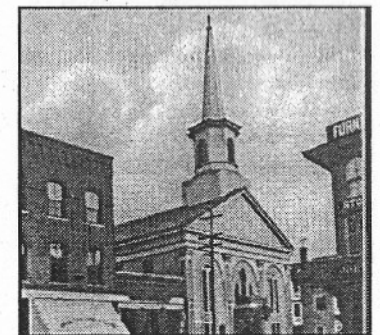
The writer ended his critique by inviting Hazelwood to St. Joseph's

School, and reminding him that the Catholic Church had survived much worse than the barbs delivered at the Connecticut Baptist convention.

The debate continued when the pastor of the Willimantic Baptist church, John Bunyan Lemon, replied to "Idolater," and reminded him of the days of Martin Luther, and to the millions of Baptists who had bled and died, and that he believed that the Catholic Church would rejoice in the downfall of the American Republic.

Lemon also stated that 25,000 Baptists from across Connecticut invited Hazelwood to Willimantic. "Idolater" replied that he was speaking for 200,000 Catholics across Connecticut.

Continued next week



A 1912 postcard view of the Baptist Church taken from Lincoln Square.



Ships and their clear personalities

By ROSEMARY MCKITTRICK

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