Historical Significance of Rev. James G. Townsend's Lakeside School of New Theology, *New Theology Herald*, and Liberal Religious Writings

Presentation by

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Chautauqua County Historical Society

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I am delighted to have an opportunity to speak to you tonight. I especially want to thank my former colleague from SUNY Fredonia, Jack Erickson, for not only inviting me to speak tonight, but for also locating in the attic of the McClurg Mansion original copies of *The New Theology Herald* published by Rev. James Graham Townsend in1886 and 1887 – further supporting the notion that all new houses should be required to have attics! I am also indebted to Clayburne B. Sampson for preserving stories told to him by people involved with the Lakeside School of New Theology. Clayburne Sampson presented his paper on the Lakeside School of New Theology at the Annual Meeting of this same Chautauqua County Historical Society on October 4, 1947 in Mayville –63 years ago!

In the summer of 1871 a prominent 32 year old Methodist minister, Rev. James G. Townsend, attended the first Erie Conference Camp Meeting of the Methodist-Episcopal Church at an idyllic setting on Chautauqua Lake called Fairpoint. Townsend was so taken with Fairpoint that he told his Methodist colleague, Bishop John Vincent, that Fairpoint would make an excellent location for the planned "Sunday School Institute." Bishop Vincent and Lewis Miller did visit Fairpoint during the 1873 Erie Conference Camp Meeting and decided that Fairpoint would indeed be the best location for their "Sunday School Institute." So arrangements were made to start the "Sunday School Institute" at Fairpoint in 1874 – which, of course, later evolved into the Chautauqua Assembly and then Chautauqua Institution.

From the beginning, Rev. Townsend was an avid participant in the Chautauqua Assembly. He was a frequent lecturer at the Assembly (his eloquent talk at the Assembly on the poet, John Milton has been preserved). Townsend was a member and local Jamestown organizer of the Chautauqua Assembly's inaugural class of the CLSC – Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle – the "Pioneer Class" that started in 1878 and graduated in 1882; and was frequently mentioned in the Chautauqua Daily from 1876 to 1881 including news of his trip to Europe in 1881 and his reporting that that the spire of the Strasbourg Cathedral was "that blossoming of architecture."

In 1886, just twelve years after the founding of the Chautauqua Assembly, Rev. Townsend founded a <u>rival</u> Chautauqua. He called his alternative Chautauqua, the Lakeside School of New Theology. The first summer session of the Lakeside School in 1886 was held on the shore of Chautauqua Lake in Lakewood. The second year in 1887, the Lakeside School of New

Theology moved to lakefront property in Bemus Point donated by Willard White, President and principle owner of the Chautauqua Lake Railroad.

How was it that in the twelve years from 1874 to1886 that the Rev. Townsend, a renown Methodist minister and Chautauqua Assembly enthusiast, ended up founding a rival Chautauqua – a more Liberal Chautauqua. Establishing a competitive Chautauqua across the Lake from the original Chautauqua caused a deep and permanent rift between Townsend and his long time friend and colleague, Bishop John Vincent. How was Townsend's "New Theology" as he espoused in the Lakeside School of New Theology different from the theology espoused by Bishop Vincent and the Chautauqua Assembly during the late 1880's? In the long view of things was there any historical significance to Townsend's creating the rival Lakeside School of New Theology? Did it and the companion New Theology Herald, a twice monthly journal also launched in 1886, have any bearing on the development of liberal theology and thought in the United States? Was Townsend's lifework historically significant? These are the questions that I would like to tackle tonight. At the end of this presentation I would welcome your thoughts, suggestions, and questions as I continue to pursue the historical record of Rev. James G. Townsend, D.D.

The story of James G. Townsend is best told in his own words – words that he delivered at the 30th anniversary of the Jamestown Unitarian Church in 1915. He states:

"I know what poverty and struggle are, for I have taken care of myself since I was 13. I was born in Pittsburgh, May 26, 1839, and my father who was an ardent politician, moved to Buffalo when I was seven years old, because that was a democratic city. He became very popular and expected to be elected Mayor of the city. In 1852, however, Buffalo was smitten by an epidemic of cholera and in three days my father, brother, sister and uncle were dead and my mother was an invalid."

He goes on to say that he then went to live with his grandfather in Ohio and worked on farms. He went to a private school taught by a graduate of Oberlin which he claims was a turning point in his life. His teacher persuaded him to go to Oberlin. He went to Oberlin without a cent, but remained there four years earning money as a local schoolteacher.

Townsend related that "In the summer of 1862 when I was 22 years old, I was working on a farm, near Sharon, Pennsylvania, when news came that Bragg and his army were in Kentucky. I shall never forget the thrill that entered my heart as I stood there in the field. The Union was in peril and the Union must be saved!"

He enlisted that same night, was married the next day, and the day after that he was on his way to Kentucky to join the Union army.

Two months from the day of his enlistment he was in the battle of Perryville. He states: "It was a drawn battle, but our wing, which was thrown far beyond the line, was surrounded and all cut to pieces. I was wounded and taken prisoner." He was later rescued by the Union Army and brought to a hospital. He says "my upper arm was all crushed, for eighteen months it had to be dressed every day. From that time to this I have never lifted my left hand."

When he was discharged from the Army, he attended Allegheny College but did not finish his degree (later in his career he was granted an honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree from Meadville Theological Seminary at Allegheny College). He then became the principal of the Union School at New Falls Pennsylvania and served two Methodist parishes before becoming in 1867 at the age of 28 the first principal of the co-educational Carrier Seminary – this Methodist Seminary later evolved into Clarion University which continues to exist as a thriving state university in Pennsylvania.

For a total of 18 years Townsend remained a Methodist minister having what he called "happy pastorates" in Oil City, Edinboro, Meadville, Corry, Jamestown, and Buffalo. In Jamestown, he was the pastor of the First Methodist Church from 1877 to 1880. Short tenure in these pastorates was largely due to church policy of moving ministers to new churches every three years compounded by his incurable epilepsy and later invalidism. Townsend's oratory skills were extraordinary. The Corry Telegraph of July 7, 1884, had this item about Townsends preaching in Corry "the Rev. J.G. Townsend continues to find full congregations, anxiously listening to the elegant phrases and beautifully worded truths." In 1887 the Unity Journal reported that Townsend had spoken at the anniversary celebration of the Meadville Theological School. The article said and I quote "The sermon, from the text *Man shall not live by bread alone*, emphasized the spiritual side of life, and presented religion as inherent in man and as natural as

smiles and tears. It was charming in its "sweet reasonableness" and its simplicity. Doctor Townsend speaks without notes, has a poetic rather than argumentative style, appeals to the deeper sentiments of the soul as one who believes in them, and thus awakens responses." (Unity, July 2, 1887).

Townsend's last Methodist Church was a large church in Buffalo. Townsend related that "after a year in the pastorate of the Pearl Street Methodist Church of Buffalo, I withdrew and returned to Jamestown to found the Independent Congregational (now the Unitarian) Church. "I had no grievance against the M.E. Church, for she gave me her best churches, and my doctor's degree came from the 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".

According to Clara Carpenter's history of the Unitarian Church for its 75th anniversary in 1960, the story went that "one day in 1885 Alonzo M. Kent and Elial F. Carpenter encountered Dr. James G. Townsend on the street and asked if would be interested in founding a liberal church. Both Kent and Carpenter were movers and shakers in Jamestown. Alonzo M. Kent founded many successful businesses including the First National Bank of Jamestown. You will be familiar with his home – now home to the Robert Jackson Center. Alonzo Kent entertained then President Ulysses S. Grant in his home in August 1875 when President Grant was on his way to speak at Chautauqua. Elial Foote Carpenter was also a very successful Jamestown businessman. Townsend accepted Alonzo Kent and Elial Carpenter's invitation to start a new church in Jamestown.

An initial meeting was held in the Allen Opera House (now the Lucille Ball Little Theatre) in October, 1885. Townsend's electrifying presentation of his views on religion were so enthusiastically received that by the end of the meeting, 230 people had joined the new "Independent Congregational Church," the forerunner of the Unitarian Church. So exceptional were Townsend's sermons that the Jamestown Sun using stenographic reports published each week's sermon in their newspaper. In fact the first seventeen of Townsend's sermons were published by the Jamestown Sun in April 1886 – I have a copy of this publication with me tonight. In the Publishers' Preface to this publication, the Jamestown Sun's Camp and Fuller state "that Dr. Townsend is making a re-statement of Christian truth which will withstand the test of science, and of common sense…" "And it gives us great pleasure to scatter broadcast the pearls of truth which are being planted

by this courageous divine." The publishers go on to say that "The effect of The New Theology upon the City of Jamestown is marvelous and an interest has been created in spiritual affairs heretofore unknown. The publishers conclude that "we feel perfectly safe in making the statement that Townsend to-day has a larger audience than any Protestant minister in the State of New York outside of New York City. Certainly the Sun publishers were enthralled with Townsend, but it didn't hurt this paper to publish Townsend's sermons as they state "thousands of people are subscribers to THE JAMESTOWN SUN principally for the purpose of reading these sermons."

The meetings led by Townsend in Allen Opera House continued for more than a year and the congregation grew to more than 400 members. The church moved in 1886 from the Allen Opera House to the historic 500-seat First Methodist Church at East Second and Chandler Streets – ironic that Townsend had once served this church as its minister.

Townsend's intellectual revolt led him not only to found this new church in Jamestown, but to also launch what he called the "New Chautauqua" even though, as I have mentioned earlier, he had been a prominent and active participant in the original Chautauqua Assembly. Commencing in the summer of 1886 in tents in a grove on the lake shore at Lakewood, the New Chautauqua (formally called the Lakewood School of New Theology), consisted of two weeks of lecture and courses by master minds of the Bible, church history, ethnic religion, social science, labor problems, temperance and literature. Large, enthusiastic crowds attended Lakewood School's lectures and courses. After the tremendous success of this "New Chautauqua", in March of 1887 the Directors of the Lakewood School of New Theology (VOL I – NO 12 March 25, 1887, P. 1.) appointed a committee "to procure, by lease or purchase, suitable grounds, and erect thereon a hotel and amphitheater, adequate to the needs of the coming meeting. Steps were taken to organize a Board of Instruction, consisting of leading representatives of the Universalist, Unitarian, Independent and other Churches.

The aim of the Board will be to prepare a course of study which is to accomplish, in the field of progressive thought, a work similar to that which Chautauqua is doing in the field of conservative thought.

After this March 1887 meeting, the plan to procure new grounds and erect buildings for the New Chautauqua were implemented at a rapid pace. By

the end of April 1887 three and a half acres of lakefront land had been donated by (*New Theology Herald*, VOL. II. NO. 1, Jamestown, N.Y. , May 6, 1887, P.1.). Willard White, President and principal owner of the Chautauqua Lake railroad.

The land was a lakefront three and a half acre plot above the then Bemus Point Universalist church with Lakeside Drive running through it. Amazingly, before the August 1887 summer meetings, the newly named Lakeside School of New Theology had fenced in grounds and an amphitheater seating twenty-five hundred.

With this overview of Townsend, it is time to tackle the first of my questions of this presentation – "How was Townsend's "New Theology" as he espoused in his writings and the Lakeside School of New Theology different from the theology espoused by Bishop Vincent and the Chautauqua Assembly during the late 1880's?" Plus, was there any historical significance to Townsend's creating the rival Lakeside School of New Theology?

Dr. Townsend wrote that "After much and wide reading of the work of metaphysics and science, church history and the Bible, there came to me an intellectual revolt against the old church dogmas. I saw the alarming tendencies of the church. The gulf between the rich and the poor was widening; the flower of society was cultivated more than the flower of spirituality; the church politician was at the front, leaving the thinking people behind." Dr. Townsend wrote of the "cursing of the intellect" by the major denominations and their hostility toward the findings of science, He specifically cited the Methodist Church's dogma of everlasting punishment, the Methodist attitude toward laborers, the lack of warmth and sympathy for common people, a catering to wealth and pomp, the rigid attitude of the Methodist Church toward amusements--dancing, cards, drama."

Beyond Townsend's rejections of the Methodist Church's "old dogmas" Townsend rejected Vincent's conservative views on appropriate Christian social behavior. As I have stated, Townsend rejected the Methodist church's rigid attitude toward dancing, cards, and drama or theater. Vincent, in particular, was vehemently opposed to these amusements and wrote a book on this subject entitled **"Better Not: A** *discussion of certain social customs"* which was published by Funk & Wagnalls in New York and London in 1892. In this book Vincent condemned wine-drinking,

card-playing, theatre-going, and dancing. The one similarity between Townsend and Vincent was their opposition to the drinking of alcohol and their strong support for the Temperance movement, but their agreement ended on that "social custom."

Vincent in "Better Not" claimed that he was not against recreation per se and thought kindly toward outdoor physical exercise such as " croquet" and " lawn tennis." However, wine drinking, going to the theater, and playing cards seriously run afoul of certain Christian principles. Vincent states that the "card-table has no good and much evil". In its most innocent forms it is only the picket-line of a great and an evil army. (p.42).

VINCENT THEN ASKS "SHALL Christians patronize the theatre? The answer, always promptly given, is in two words: " Better Not." (p. 62).

With regards to dancing Vincent equates dancing with sexual immorality. Vincent quotes several anti-dance supporters in "Better Not." One source states that dance "in its very nature is unclean and cannot be washed." (P. 71)

Clearly, Townsend's new theology is a clear break from Vincent's adherence to Victorian conservative social customs, Christian uprightness, and orthodox Christian theology.

The theological differences between Townsends "New Theology" and Bishop Vincent's Methodism were also significant – despite the fact that Vincent was a pioneer for progressive Protestantism in his time – Townsend's views were viewed as heretical by some mainline Protestants in his time. In a tongue and cheek article on August 14, 1887 the Jamestown Sun published the headline: "The New Theology: Ably Expounded by So-called Heretics at Bemus Point." The article goes on to say that "some of the most prominent heretics of the country have been lecturing and preaching" on the Lakeside School of New Theology platform. The Jamestown Sun concludes with this statement:

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 love of humanity at heart. Their heresy seems to be simply a revolt against doctrines which most sensible people of today deny.

Townsend's differences with Methodism were publicized nationally. What was labeled "Townsend's Creed" drew national attention. Townsend proclaimed that he had "discarded" entirely the idea of eternal punishment, and with that other parasites of religion". His rejection of "Eternal Punishment" made news in the New York Times. Townsend as opposed to Vincent did not believe in the infallibility of the Bible. Townsend said that "while the New Theology recognizes the New Testament as its spiritual basis, its mental basis is knowledge. The New Theology rests upon the facts of experience." Furthermore, Townsend opposed Vincent's Trinitarian views. To Townsend, Christ was human but lived an exemplar life – he said that Christ was the human door to the heart of God – but not the only door to God.

What then drove Townsend to create a New Chautauqua, when Bishop Vincent's old Chautauqua Assembly was avowedly religiously progressive? Townsend presented these reasons for developing a rival Chautauqua:

"You may ask, 'what was the need of a new organization? Could not Chautauqua do the needed work? I reply, no, it could not, great and useful as it is. The men who speak on Theology at that place are expected to give the explanation common in the churches. Invisible padlocks are placed upon their lips. When they speak of God, the Bible, Atonement, we know just what they will say. We want no padlocks on our lips. We want men who can and will give their freshest, truest thought."

Townsend gives an example of Chautauqua Assembly's distrust of modern science, particularly evolution, in his sermon "EVOLUTION AND NEW THEOLOGY: EVOLUTION AND MAN" published in the January 28, 1887 issue of *the New Theology Herald*.

He starts his sermon with the following story about the original Chautauqua and I quote:

"Last summer, at Chautauqua, Doctor Tallmadge spoke upon the theme, the "Absurdities of Evolution." The audience, I am told, roared with laughter, and vigorously applauded the clerical punster.

Instead of treating science lightly, Townsend goes on to say "Evolution teaches us, also, that we ought to welcome science as an ally. Scientific men are not foes to, but friends of, Christianity. Let us welcome every fact that science brings from solar or social system; from the dust under our feet, or the star-dust over our heads; and place it, a glittering gem, in the crown of Religion. Let us pray that the time may soon come when this long, long quarrel between church and science shall forever cease, and both be free to recreate the world and the soul."

Townsend's declining physical health abruptly forced him to resign from the Jamestown Independent Congregational Church and end all of his Herculean efforts on behalf of the Lakeside School of Theology in early 1888. The causes of his ill health were speculative (some reports suggest he had a nervous breakdown; some said that it was connected to his being shot in the Civil War and that the lead bullet had not been removed; and finally ten years later he was permanently immobilized with incurable epilepsy that made him an invalid later in his life). Lakeside property donor William White left an unpaid $1,500 mortgage on property and the Lakeside property went into foreclosure; the lot was surveyed for building lots in 1892 and the amphitheater with seating twenty-five hundred was torn down in 1893 – the lumber was used to build new cottages in Bemus Point. What would have become of the Lakeside School of New Theology if Townsend had remained physically healthy, we will never know.

We do know that Townsend's Lakewood and then Lakeside School of New Theology at Bemus Point was directly inspired by the original Chautauqua. Townsend was careful not to criticize the extremely successful educational innovations of the original Chautauqua, but only to say that there should be a virtual replica of Chautauqua for religious liberals. This position is best described by Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones, the leader of the Western Unitarian Association and editor of the UNITY journal. Jenkins states that (UNITY, September10, 1887, p. 17) "Chautauqua has done wonderful things, and greater things it will do. But it possesses certain limitations which necessarily limit its usefulness in some directions. Chiefly its strong theological bias, its orthodox predilections, will always make its study of certain topics halting and unsatisfactory. While this group urged a change to Chautauqua, it was the Lakeside School of New Theology that had an early demise – mainly due to Townsend's physical decline – and the original Chautauqua adapted. As we know, Chautauqua did amend its early

orthodoxy opened its gates to a much wider constituency of religious persuasions. The liberal Unitarians opened a denominational house at Chautauqua in 1904 and currently have weekly worship services in the Hall of Philosophy with an average attendance of 165 persons.

I would like now to address the question of the historical significance of Townsend's contributions. Did Townsend's "New Theology" that reached its pinnacle in terms of national exposure through his Lakeside School, his *New Theology Herald*, and his journal articles have any lasting impacts on the development of religious thought in the United States?

First, I would say that Townsend's impact can be measured by the very large national exposure to his ideas. With coverage of his views in prominent newspapers throughout the country he reached a large audience. His personal contact with many of the greatest religious thinkers of his time as well as the scores of articles in the leading liberal religious journals of the time ensured that his "New Theology" impacted the thinking of many prominent religious thinkers. He wrote many articles for *the Christian Register*, the *Monist*, *The Open Court* and *UNITY*.

As indicated earlier Townsend's reasons for leaving the Methodist Church and the development of what was to be known as the "Creed of the New Theology" were covered by the nation's leading newspapers of that time. Sometimes that wide audience was negative. One reader of "The Boston Traveller" newspaper, Mary Baker Eddy, clipped out the article on Townsend's Creed" and sent it to her "Science Journal" with the following published comments in April 1888 (Science JOURNAL VOL VI APRIL 1888 No 1: CREED OF THE NEW THEOLOGY).

Mary Baker Eddy writes and I quote "It appears that Rev JG Townsend of Jamestown NY recently expounded the New Theology and gave the Creed of his church. While this Creed lacks the steadfastness and power that understanding imparts its <u>intent</u> is good and it has as you can see borrowed largely ideas without credit from my work Science and Health." (A side note here, Mary Baker Eddy herself was later sued for plagiarizing material in her 1875 *Science and Health* book from P. P. Quimby). Apparently Mary Baker Eddy felt Townsend had acquired considerably more publicity than she wished.

Townsend personally met with or communicated in writing with many of the greatest religious thinkers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For example, Dr. Townsend interacted with Bishop John Vincent, Henry Ward Beecher and Robert Ingersoll.

Dr. Townsend met with Colonel Henry Ward Beecher (brother of abolitionist and Uncle Tom's Cabin author, Harriet Beecher Stow) in Brooklyn, New York just before his Beecher's death in 1887. Beecher, a Civil War veteran, was a prominent, Congregationalist clergyman, social reformer, abolitionist and great orator --considered to be the greatest preacher of his time. At this meeting Beecher spoke kindly of Townsend's work and the Lakeside School of New Theology. After the news of Beecher's death Townsend's New Theology Herald memorialized Beecher with these statements (New Theology Herald, March 11, 1887, p. 1): "His influence upon theological thought of our age cannot be measured. During a long and active service in the Plymouth pulpit, he stood firmly for progress. That he has made mistakes is only evidence that he was human. ….. if he seemed to fluctuate in his beliefs, it was because those beliefs were changing, as the beliefs of every thinking man must change, from youth to riper age…….the true reformer recognizes that higher truth comes only by evolution of lower truth" (New Theology Herald, March 11, 1887, p.1).

While Townsend was a full supporter of Beecher despite Beecher's alleged adultery, Chautauqua's Bishop Vincent took a different view. Bishop Vincent had also been a great fan of Henry Ward Beecher. So much so that Bishop Vincent thought at the outset of Chautauqua 1874 that bringing the renowned preacher Henry Ward Beecher to speak at Chautauqua in 1875 would gain Chautauqua some great national publicity and help in its growth. However, at that same time Beecher became notorious for his alleged adulterous affair with a married woman which became known as the Beecher-Tildon affair. So in the place of Beecher, Bishop Vincent decided to recruit President Grant to speak at Chautauqua in 1875. As we know, President Grant's appearance at Chautauqua gave Vincent the huge national press coverage that Vincent so desired and launched Chautauqua into national prominence.

Another person in this prominent thinkers network was Robert Ingersoll. Robert Ingersoll was a Civil War Veteran, American political leader, abolitionist and great orator and was noted for his broad range of culture and his defense of agnosticism. Rev. Townsend was not an agnostic, but valued

Ingersoll's work. The New Theology Herald published long selections from Ingersoll's published articles. It was important to religious discourse that national publications such as Townsend's would give space to a wide variety of thought.

So, Townsend was a dynamic thinker; he associated with other great thinkers; and shared his thinking broadly by writing scores of articles that appeared in a long list of liberal religious and philosophical journals. At his funeral in 1917 Frank H. Mott, a politically active Jamestown lawyer – his cousin Robert Jackson apprenticed under him, said the following (The Christian Register, July 12, 1917, p. 669): "In his later years he (Townsend) had come more and more to realize, as do all truly intellectual men, that there is something more required than the accumulation of knowledge, the refinement of the intellect, and the deductions of science to explain the origin, the duty, and the destiny of man. This very quality – whether we call it faith or intuition or inspiration – can never reach its highest development except in the free and open mind. In the deductions of pure intellect, Dr. Townsend represented the highest standards of our Western civilization and was, though perhaps unconsciously, a great factor in the evolution of human thought."

My third point as to the historical significance of Townsend's "New Theology" is that Townsend played a significant, although not dominant, role in the development of American Unitarian thought. His twice monthly "New Theology Herald" was a ground breaking publication in liberal religion. The Herald was circulated in 25 states and Canada. In the 1880's Unitarianism separated itself further from orthodox Christianity and Townsend's signature is evident in this change.

The demise of classical Unitarianism around the world can be traced to the efforts of ministers associated with the Western Unitarian Conference in the 1880's. The WUC was an association of Unitarian churches in the Ohio River and Mississippi River valleys. The more radical WCU was led by its Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones. He believed Unitarianism would grow by opening up Unitarianism to other (non-Christian, even non-Theist) views and that Unitarianism should be an ethical movement, rather than a religious one. Unitarianism is really an aversion to creeds; its openness is the foundation upon which it should rest. Therefore, any and all who wish to be Unitarian, whether they believe in God or NOT, should be welcomed. If some wish to form churches that are not Christian or even Theist, in nature, those

churches should be permitted into the Western Unitarian Conference. Rev. Townsend had deep connections with Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones – the Western Unitarian radical.

Townsend invited Rev. Jones to speak at the Lakeside School of Theology. Furthermore, Townsend's own publication, the New Theology Herald, was merged into the UNITY Journal in 1887 and Townsend was appointed to the editorial board and was a frequent contributor to the UNITY journal. The Unity was representative of the more radical Unitarian opinions. This group of activists was determined to change Unitarianism from a liberal Christian religion to a liberal open religion.

Townsend threw his theological hat in with the more liberal Western Unitarians as is apparent in this statement of purpose of the UNITY journal. The New Theology Herald which the Chautauqua County Historical Society has preserved became the UNITY journal. The mission of which I now quote:

"Unity believes that religion should be friendly to science and that it is indebted to its triumphs. It seeks to make religion a part of and essential to all human helpings. It would make Rationalism reverent and Reverence rational. It is in search of the unities of universal religion that reaches from the Catholic Church to the Ethical Culture Society that includes the perennial elements in Christendom, Judaism and all other forms and names that have purified, sweetened and ennobled life" (Unity, **Volume 2, Issues 2-14, June 1889).**

After a prolonged theological battle, the more radical Western Unitarian Association won out in 1894 over the more conservative the American Unitarian Association in the East to adopt an open Unitarianism accepting people with fundamentally different viewpoints….accepting believers and non-believer alike.

Townsend's theology was complimentary to the more radical views of the Western Unitarian Association – and his views along with others did become the accepted view of the national Unitarian denomination. Indeed, Townsend's New Theology was non-creedal and humanistic. Townsend proclaimed that: "We believe in a gospel of good houses, good food, and good clothes, and we will endeavor as far as we can, to help our brothers and sisters to these opportunities. We recognize that the large part of the world's evils comes through ignorance. If men and women were better trained and

taught, from their earliest years, morality would increase, for knowledge, wide and full, means in the long run, salvation."

My fourth and final thought about Townsend's historical significance is the substantial record of the sermon, articles and writings of Rev. Townsend that are available for all to enjoy and be enlightened by. These writings are not only significant because they detail Townsend's contributions to religious and philosophical thought, but also because his beautiful and poetic writing style described as "sweet reasonableness" is a gem in itself. Townsend talked about his steadfast commitment to scholarly dialogue in a Unity journal article in September 1887. Townsend states (UNITY, September 17, 1887, p. 30) and I quote: "The New Theology is a cluster growing upon an old root. Many a pearl gathered in the mystic past has found a place in the casket of its truth. Men of profound thought in all times and climes have made their contributions -- Kant, Tennyson, Whittier, Longfellow, Emerson, William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, Ballou, and Henry Ward Beecher..... And if I, by the patient thought of the next ten or twenty years, may be allowed to contribute a bud or even a leaf to the beautiful wreath of this fairest truth, I will say with the old Roman, "Sat est vixisse" -- To have lived. (UNITY, September 17, 1887). Although beset by serious illness, Townsend **did** live another twenty years and was able to contribute his best thinking through scores of articles in a myriad of national journals. So thanks to the stewardship of history keepers such as the Chautauqua County Historical Society, we have been able to preserve 44 years of Townsend's sermons and writings from an 1873 sermon at the Erie Conference Camp at Fairpoint to his final article published posthumously in the *Monist* journal in 1918. Thank you for your attention and your work on behalf of our region's history!

A NEW RELIGIOUS SPECULATION.

DR. VINCENT'S ASSEMBLY TO HAVE A RIVAL ON CHAUTAUQUA LAKE.

JAMESTOWN, May 10.—The Lakewood School of the New Theology is the latest feature of Chautauqua Lake as a Summer resort. A few months ago the Rev. J. G. Townsend, D. D., left the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church in Buffalo and came to Jamestown, where he has since preached in the Opera House every Sunday to crowded houses. His belief is much like that of the Universalists, but he calls it the New Theology. His plan in starting a new assembly on the lake is to give a wider spread to his creed. The association which has just been formed will lease land at Lakewood, five miles from Jamestown, on the lake, inclose it by a high board fence, and hold meetings there during August, charging an admittance fee to the grounds. C. E. Tucker, of Bradford, is President, and the Rev. Dr. Townsend, of Jamestown, and Dr. Livermore, of Meadville, are the Superintendents of instruction. Dr. Townsend says he has been assured of substantial aid from Prof. Swing, Dr. Thomas, and Dr. Sunderland, of Chicago; ex-President Hill, of Harvard College, and Dr. Peabody, of Boston. While he states positively that the new assembly will not be a rival of the orthodox Chautauqua, the movement by the new theologians is regarded as in the nature of competition. The old Chautauqua has never had its gates open on Sunday in the 13 years of its existence, but the L. S. N. T. proposes to admit the crowds Sunday and give them an opportunity to listen to the Word as preached by some of the most eminent ministers in the Union. The New-York, Pennsylvania and Ohio Railway promises to advertise the new place of assembly, and Dr. Townsend is very confident of the success of his school from the start.

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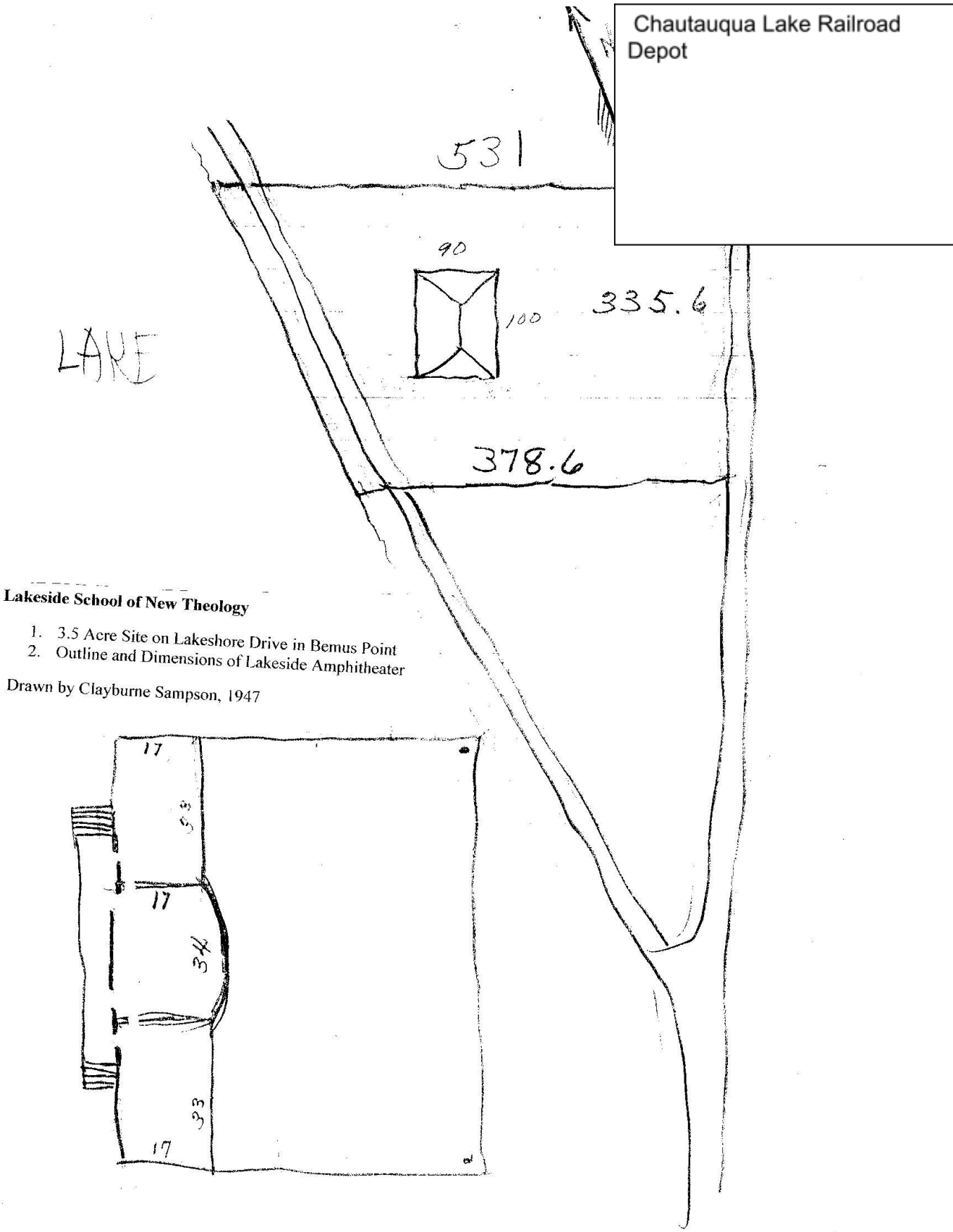

Lakeside School of New Theology

1. 3.5 Acre Site on Lakeshore Drive in Bemus Point
2. Outline and Dimensions of Lakeside Amphitheater

Drawn by Clayburne Sampson, 1947