



## A HISTORY OF ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH BRIGHTON, MI

A combination of two historical accounts, compiled by Marialice Baker and Cindy Snyder

The history of St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Brighton dates back to the early 1830's when the Rev. William A. Clark, D.D., Rector of All Saints' Church of New York City, journeyed to the "West" and visited this part of the territory of Michigan. Being pleased with what he found, he took up land in Brighton Township and moved his family here in 1837. Jacintha Anspach Clark, wife and mother of nine children, proved a true coworker in his duties, conforming cheerfully to circumstances.

The Rev. Clark was obviously a man of means, having great enthusiasm for this new state. He introduced the first sheep into the township, established a sawmill, purchased an operating flour mill, and opened a store for the benefit of his employees. He was able to secure a post office on his property.

The first church services were held in the orchard on wooden benches and were moved into his house on Grand River for winter services. These were the first regular Protestant religious services held in this area. The Rev. Clark set aside land to be used as a burying ground, reserving one acre as the site for a church. Dr. Clark died September 12, 1841, at the age of 55 and was buried in that cemetery. The stones of him and his wife, Jacintha, still stand on the east side of the cemetery.

William A. Clark, son of Dr. Clark, granted the burying ground through a warranty deed to a group of prominent citizens with the intention that it be the village cemetery. In March of 1880, the same William A. Clark and Mary E. Clark, his wife, deeded the land intended for a church building to the Church Association of Michigan for "one cent and other good and valuable considerations." A reversionary clause provided that the "property shall revert to the donors or their heirs if and when services of the Protestant Episcopal Church are not held in the building erected on that property."

In 1843, the Rev. A. S. Hollister was assigned to serve Hamburg, Green Oak and Brighton. Hamburg had erected a fine church (the one still in use), but the other congregations met in various halls. One such hall in Brighton was known as McHenth's Hall. That building stands on the east side of Grand River, midway between Main Street and North Street. It was a building of many uses, serving at various times as the Opera House, a roller rink and as a gymnasium for the high school students.

The Rev. Hollister ministered to St. Paul's through 1856. In a report written to the Spirit of Missions for January 1847, the Rev. Hollister complained that "our great difficulty arises from the poverty of our people, and the custom extensively prevalent in this county of the mass of people neglecting public worship, and spending the Lord's day in visiting and amusements." Of Brighton, he said, "Religion is greatly neglected here, and it is a sad discouragement at present to find no gentlemen of influence to interest themselves in promoting the Church. We have, however, very decent and attentive congregations in that village, and by the help of some members residing in Green Oak, we are enabled to have services decently performed."

According to the records, the Episcopal Mission in Brighton was established in 1878 with the Rev. R. H. Dennis as Missionary. As there was no church building, services were held in the old City Hall and the Presbyterian Church. Brighton Episcopalians finally started a church building. The action was greatly encouraged by the efforts of a member of one of the township's early families, Mrs. George English, formerly Sophia Fonda of Fonda Lake. She obtained \$1,000 from friends in New York. She secured a communion service, an organ, a Bible, and altar hangings which had been used in Trinity Church in New York City. Her sister gave the cross and the flower vases.

The will of Chloe Clark, daughter of Dr. William Clark, directed that her lands be sold and the proceeds be used in the building of a Protestant Episcopal Church in Brighton, the church to be recognized as a memorial for her father and her sister, Mary H. Clark. The original altar was a specific memorial to both Chloe and Mary Clark. This altar is now buried under the parking lot, as Canon Law states that altars have to be buried on church property.

Another fine gift was the rose window [circular window at the rear of the church] given by Bishop Harris.

Mr. Arnold, an architect from Lansing, was employed to draw plans for the building which he patterned after a little chapel in England. The building was erected by a local contractor, Mr. James Collett. At the request of Sophia Fonda English, the church was called St. Paul's. This was a period when the Diocese of Michigan was without a Bishop so a cornerstone was not laid until later.

The cornerstone was laid on a beautiful day in May of 1880. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of that event, Mrs. Jessie (Jacintha) Clark Mitchell, granddaughter of Dr. William A. Clark, recalled, "I skipped school to attend the ceremony, and I remember

just how Bishop Harris tapped the cornerstone as it was set in place. The Rev. Rufus W. Clark of Detroit was present and also Mr. Trowbridge, the executive secretary of the Diocese. "The first service in St. Paul's, June 12, 1881, was conducted by the Rev. John A. Clark of New York, a son of the Rev. William A. Clark. The church was consecrated by Bishop Harris in August 1881. The Rev. A. W. Ryan was the first priest in charge.

On Sunday, September 26, 1916, the first funeral for Benjamin Clark was held at St. Paul's Church, conducted by the Rev. H. A. Stone. Benjamin, 79-years-old, was a son of William A. Clark. He was very active in the church and sponsored many baptized members of St. Paul's.

On March 6, 1927, after being closed two years, St. Paul's resumed its place in the community. Archdeacon Ramsay held the first service. On March 13 the church school had its first session, not having met since 1918. On October 9 Bishop Page confirmed six parishioners. He commended Mr. Daniel Huff, a layreader in charge of the mission, for his excellence.

St. Paul's has been through many troubled periods, having been closed for a ten year period in the thirties. During those years the church records were held for safe keeping in the home of the layreader, Dr. F. M. Blatchford. When that home was completely destroyed by fire in 1932, records dating from 1886 to 1932 were lost. We are indebted to Evangeline (Eva) Bell for patiently seeking out many bits of information covering parts of that period.

In 1942 Lloyd Bell was instrumental in getting St. Paul's reopened by petitioning the diocese. One hindrance to church growth was lack of space for a Sunday School. Many odd places were pressed into use the basement of Ralph Filkin's Restaurant (known as the Cheese Cave), the old fire hall, and the city council chambers.

During the World War II years, scrap drives collected all kinds of metals to be used in the war effort. The bell from Union School on Rickett School was rescued by some quick thinking churchmen and now hangs in St. Paul's belfry. Ina Shannon was pleased that the bell which summoned her to school now summoned her for church.

The Rev. John Ross Wellwood was ordained to the priesthood at St. Paul's on January 25, 1949, by Bishop Emrich. He served until 1953. In this same year the City of Brighton was given control of the cemetery. Over time, parts of the original one acre (1854) had been deeded to the City to provide for St. Paul's Street and the expansion of City Hall. After "boundary matter" issues with the city from 1979-1982 were settled, St. Paul's had a little over one-half acre of land.

In 1951, a parish hall was erected on ground directly east of the church. This building provided almost as many problems as it solved. The Bishop's Committee, at one time, considered closing it because of lack of funds to maintain it, and the mortgage on it was not paid until 1968.

On March 9, 1958, the vicar, the Rev. William B. Klatt, held the first regular meeting and election of officers of St. Paul's Chapter of St. Andrews. The Brotherhood had eight members with Birney Smith serving as director and Emeryson Phillips serving as assistant director.

In 1961, under the Rev. Robert Eidson, the church continued to grow and the Brotherhood bought a coffee maker for use at their meetings.

In 1963, a most important step was taken by St. Paul's. In September of that year, the Vicar, Fr. Eidson, issued a call for a special meeting of the parish for the purpose of approving a proposed Constitution and By-Laws, and electing a Vestry so that we might petition the next Diocesan Convention for admission to parish status after having been a mission [aided congregation without full-time clergy paid by the congregation] for more than eighty years. The forty-eight communicants present unanimously approved all plans as presented, and our petition was duly granted by the Diocesan Convention. And so St. Paul's Day, January 25, 1964, our vicar became our first rector, and we assumed the responsibility of full support for our church. The Rev. Robert Eidson resigned in the spring of 1967 and was succeeded in September by the Rev. Ralph McGimpsey.

At the annual parish meeting of 1969, the Vestry was authorized to prepare plans for a much needed refurbishing of the church building. There was no intent to change the Victorian atmosphere of the church only to make the building more comfortable, more usable, and even more beautiful. In order to conserve funds, wherever possible volunteer labor was used. Many hours of work by parishioners and by the rector went into this refurbishing. It was during this renovation that the altar was moved away from the back wall and the priest faced the congregation during Communion.

The Rev. Larry Carver followed Fr. McGimpsey and served St. Paul's for a short period from 1974-76. The Rev. Frederick (Rick) Houghton served from 1977-1981. During this time the sacristy was refurbished and the upper level of the parish hall was divided into separate rooms.

In 1980, St. Paul's made arrangements with Congregation Zoel, a Jewish congregation, to share the use of our church and parish hall. A Centennial Service was held on May 18 of that year in commemoration of the laying of the cornerstone. In November, through ordination in St. Paul's Cathedral (Detroit), Dorothy Calmes became the first deacon of St. Paul's Church.

A 100th Anniversary Service was held on September 13, 1981.

In 1982 the Rev. Charles (Chuck) Sturm and parishioners established a lounge with a library. Many books were given by Richard Calmes in memory of his father.

Late in 1983, St. Paul's was officially proclaimed a historical site and a Historical Marker

was erected. A Dedication Ceremony was held on Sunday, May 20, 1984.

In June 1986, we started the painstaking job of refinishing of the front doors, which are the original ones cut from trees on the property and finished with nails made at the worksite.

In January 1988, the congregation decided that St. Paul's needed expansion and renovation. The spring of 1990 was set as the target date, as that would be 110 years since the laying of the cornerstone of the present nave and sanctuary. In June the architectural plans were presented the congregation and fundraising began. A new brick sign and landscaping was undertaken that summer. In November the building plans were submitted to the City of Brighton. The spring of 1989 found us short of meeting our target date, so the two years were spent raising funds and refurbishing the parish hall.

Our Groundbreaking Ceremony took place on Sunday, June 16, 1991. In attendance were the Very Rev. Barbara Cavin, Dean; the Rev. Charles E. Sturm, Rector; the Rev. Dorothy Calmes, Deacon Assistant; Cindy Snyder, Senior Warden; David Brown and Keenan Cluskey, Co-Chairpersons of the Building Committee; and members of the congregation. By December the foundation was completed, the roof trusses and decking were installed, and more than half of the roof was shingled. Masonry work was progressing as the weather permitted. Carpenters and electricians were working, and church members were relocating parish offices and making decisions for the selection of "non-attached" interior furnishings. During January, February and March "painting bees" and "work bees" were taking place.

A service of Confirmation, new building dedication and cornerstone laying was held on Sunday, March 22, 1992 at 3:00 p.m. with Bishop Wood officiating. Six inches of unexpected, overnight snow kept the attendance to 120 people.

Work sessions continued throughout May, June and July to do finishing work. In September the first phase of the landscape plan was finished. Finishing touches to church and yard continued into October. The quilted hanging was completed and hung making a beautiful backdrop for the Baptismal Font. On October 10, 1992 an Open House was held to share our new building with the community. That same month, Fr. Sturm retired.

In November, a Search Committee was formed to find a permanent rector. Fr. Eugene (Gene) Montague served as Interim Rector for 1993.

In January 1994, we welcomed the Rev. Walter Sherman as our Rector. During the year new hymnals and prayer books were purchased to facilitate our new seating capacity and the sacristy was again refurbished. The front steps of the sanctuary and repair of the rest of the cement work took place in October/November. At this same time the rectory was renovated and sold. Purchased in the early 1950's and paid off in 1974, it had been maintained through the Tender Loving Care of our parishioners. The proceeds from its sale were placed in a fund, with the interest being used to pay the

rector's housing allowance. In late 1994 our music program was expanded with the creation of a Children's Choir and a larger Adult Choir of mixed voices. In June of 1995 a new electronic digital organ and keyboard were purchased.

Through the years many committed church members by means of special gifts and memorials and by the sacrificial giving of money and labor renewed the physical structure and the spiritual structure of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. The feeling of family and community has been important to members of St. Paul's, thus giving it an atmosphere of inclusivity.

Through all the years of this church's existence, the women's groups have given devoted service. The first meeting of St. Paul's Guild was August 25, 1883. In 1891 they organized formally as St. Paul's Guild and remained active even in the periods when the church was closed. Their moneymaking activities in early days included making sunbonnets and aprons, sewing carpet rags, making comforters and serving meals at the fairgrounds. For the year 1894 their profit was \$94.16!

The records of bills which they paid make fascinating reading: Edison bill: 45 cents; four cords of wood: \$6.00; fire insurance \$8.50; papering two rooms of rectory: paper \$3.12 and labor \$2.00. Often the Guild paid the diocesan assessment as well as many repair bills. They added to the social life of the town with oyster suppers, socials at the G.A.R. Hall, and entertainment at the Opera House. In 1927 the ladies of the Guild had various projects to furnish the church: vestments, altar pieces, repairs to the church building, and even the minister's salary. Quilting parties and bake sales gradually built up the financial status of the church so it could be resumed.

In 1963, Mary Owen and Eva Bell started sending birthday cards to parishioners. The cards were handmade. For a while, because of high postage, the practice was discontinued. It was started up again, with ECW members taking turns sending the cards each month.

Can a building have three cornerstones? Well, St. Paul's does! You may ask how that could be and where they are. Let's see...The first one was laid in 1880 when St. Paul's was built the church proper, that is. You'll find that one on the front east corner of the church. For 70 years this building stood alone as a place of worship but with nowhere to meet for church school or other meetings.

After being closed during the Depression, St. Paul's reopened its doors after World War II to a small but committed congregation. In 1952, the group was able to raise enough money to build a separate cinder block building next to the church. Most of the construction was done by parishioners themselves. This space was originally built and dedicated to the idea of a community building for all to use (we even sold bricks to community folks and businesses) as well as expanding opportunities for St. Paul's parishioners.

Our longtime members will tell you that the upstairs room had a beautiful oak floor and was used for dances in the community. The upper level was one big room divided by various partitions as need be. The ECW held their annual bazaars and contributed to ongoing improvements around the church for many years. Although the lower level had a kitchen, restrooms and meeting space, it remained fairly "rustic" until just a few years ago.

In the late 80's, a new group of enthusiastic parishioners remodeled the kitchen, added drywall, insulation, new heating and windows and carpet. You'll find that cornerstone on the east corner of the lower level, by the parking lot. It was originally near the entrance of the upper level, but it was moved to its new location when the two buildings were connected.

Two buildings? That's right. What looks like one building today was two separate and very different buildings.

The church being very much of the Victorian Era, patterned after a small chapel in England; and the parish hall being vintage 50's cement block, flat roof, utilitarian and downright unattractive! Although both buildings had served their purposes very well over the years, it was time for a face lift. And that's where we get the third cornerstone.

In 1990, the parish voted to invest \$325,000 (and a lot of sweat equity!) into St. Paul's. What did we get? The two buildings were joined into one (no more running back and forth between buildings in the depth of winter), the parish hall was face bricked, and a pitched roof was added to blend better with the church. Additional restrooms were added, as well as another meeting room under the addition (dedicated to Al Noirot), shower facilities, new offices for the rector and secretary, more seating in the church, a fire alarm system, partitions upstairs for Sunday School rooms, extensive landscaping, and an elevator to make the building completely handicap-accessible.

So, take some time to look around the outside of the church grounds to see if you can find these cornerstones. There are a lot of stories in this parish and many, many faithful people who have contributed to the buildings and grounds over our 115 year history.