

HISTORY OF CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Rev. Maureen AtLee Hipple, Rector

(Written by Miss Frances Montanye
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The Rev. Maureen AtLee Hipple)

In 1833, the Rev. Samuel T. Lord of Athens began holding services in Towanda once every four weeks. For a number of years, services were held in the old Court House.

In 1840, the Rev. Robert C. Hays became missionary in charge of the parish. He reported to the Convention, "I entered upon the duties of this parish in February of this year. With the blessings of God upon my labors, I have succeeded in reorganizing the church, which was first organized in 1834.

On December 20, 1841, the Court of Common Pleas of Bradford County granted a charter to "Christ's Church", Towanda, in the name of seven active laymen-- William B. Foster, Jr., O.D. Bartlett, Abraham Goodwin, Dr. John N. Weston, C.L. Ward, M.C. Mercur, and David Wilmot.

In spite of severe financial depression, was begun on the erection of a church on land given by Hiram Mix, and completed in 1842. It was a wooden frame building, Gothic style, 36 x 50 feet, and stood just north of what is now our present church. The Rev. George Watson was named the first Rector, and an organ was purchased. Christ Church was consecrated June 14, 1842 by Bishop H. W. Onderdock and in 1844, was admitted into union with the Convention.

By 1847, the church had become self-supporting. The Rev. Robert J. Parvin, the third Rector, in 1849 reported to the Convention, "Our parish is in an improving condition. Through the exertions of the Ladies of the Sewing Circle of our congregation, we have just procured an excellent bell, the want of it has long been felt."

Movement for the building of a larger church was started in 1866. Land was donated by Ulysses Mercur and B.S. Russell, \$15,900 subscribed by the congregation, plans supplied by E. T. Potter, Esq., Architect of New York, and the foundations laid for the new church in the following year.

The laying of the cornerstone for the new church took place on September 19, 1868.

After the articles had been placed in the stone, the cover placed upon it, the Bishop, The Rt. Rev. W. B. Stevens, struck the stone three times with a mason's mallet, and said, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Amen. I lay the cornerstone of an edifice to be erected by the name of Christ Church, and to be devoted to the service of Almighty God, agreeable to the principles of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, in its doctrines, ministry, liturgy, rites and usages. Other foundations can no man lay than which is laid, even Jesus Christ; who is God over all, blessed for evermore, and in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Amen." A short discourse by the Bishop appropriate to the occasion followed. Due to financial difficulties of many members of the congregation, building operations were suspended, and the completed foundations stood choked with weeds for twenty years.

In 1887, under the Rev. W.E. Wright, the tenth Rector, plans were started for renewal of work on the new church. In April, 1888, work began on the erection of the walls upon the foundations completed twenty years before. The new church building was completed in 1889.

On the morrow of All Saints' Day, November 2, 1892, a large congregation assembled for the ceremonies attending the consecration of Christ Church. The original consecration certificate has been recently framed and now proudly hangs in our parish office.

Christ Church is a fine specimen of Gothic architecture and is a study in good proportions. It is built of native white conglomerate stone quarried on Stone Mountain, Bradford County. The outside dimensions are 127 x 50 feet. From the base to the top of the cross on the spire is 150 feet.

The nave of the church is trimmed in natural red oak finished on the grain. The pews are of this material and have a capacity of about 500 persons. The church is liberally supplied with handsome memorial windows. The rose window represents Christ the King on the Throne of Judgement, and the three lancets -- Moses with the tablets of the law, St. Michael expelling Lucifer, and Solomon carrying his Temple in his hands. This window was donated to the church in loving memory of Ulysses Mercur, a Chief Justice of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It was made in England by Cox and Sons, and was shipped to the church when it was built in 1889. It has now been restored and placed back in the original opening, as of November 1999. This memorial window is a truly magnificent sight and blessing for our congregation and the community.

The pipe organ was installed in the church in 1893. It is one of a limited number of Johnson & Son tracker organs existing in the country today, and is called a reverse tracker because the organist does not face the pipes as usual. At first the power for it to be played came from a boy working the bellows. He was paid 10 cents for a Sunday service. Later on, water was used to furnish the power. The water came from a creek just north of the church, which was named Mix Run. Eventually, an electric motor was put into use and is still used to provide the power.

Presently, Christ Church parish family is a loving and welcoming community. We are committed to God in prayer, studying of the Holy Scripture, the Holy Eucharist and sharing God's love with others. God's love, His Holy word and our Holy Communion with Him gives us His joy and compassion. This enables us to live and bring encouragement, support and love to each other, the community and all others we meet. We feel blessed that our forbearers have preserved and given us our beautiful church building, church parish family, and have passed down their faith in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to us!