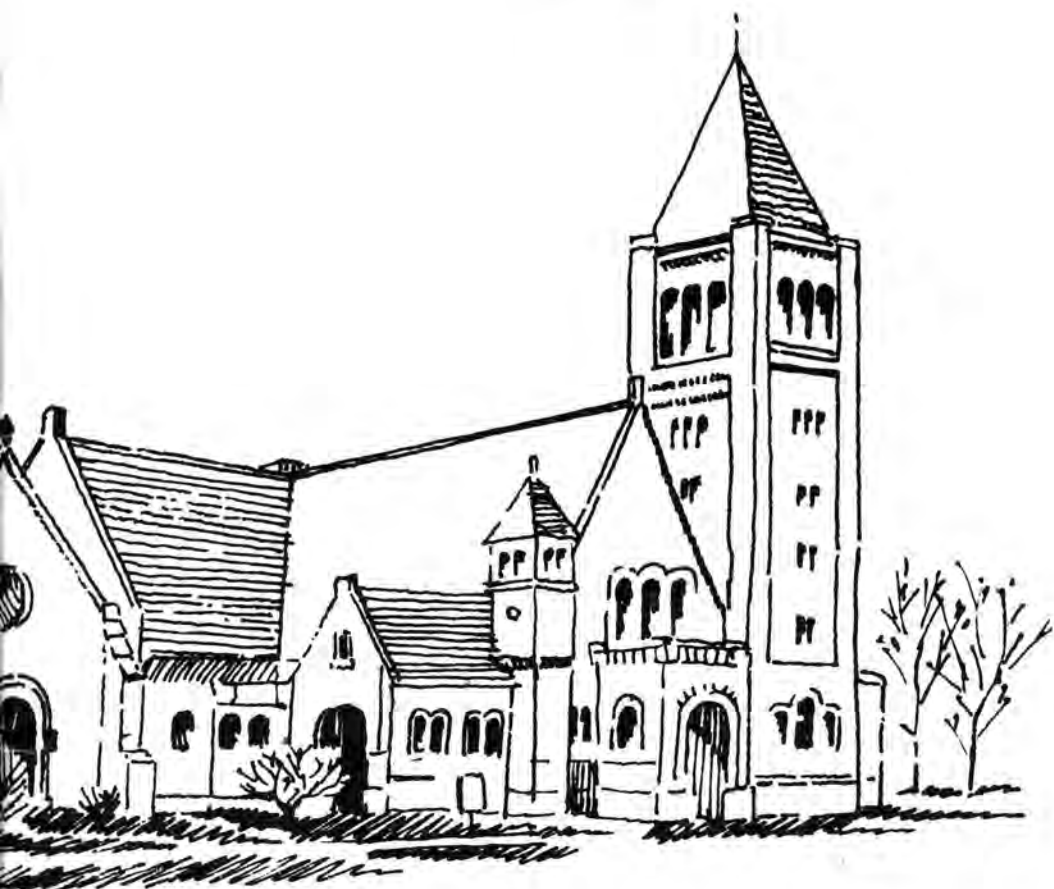


THIRD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rochester, New York

1827-1977



FOREWORD

How do you record one hundred fifty years of a church's history? How do you recite the story of dreams which came into being, flowered, withered, came to life again in new form, always changing and developing with the seasons of history? How do you get behind the monotony of thousands of committee meetings and one and a half centuries of church suppers? How do you avoid the religious cliché and pious platitude so that the past will have flesh and blood? How do you do it all in a pamphlet?

This pamphlet attempts to give a glimpse into some human beings and some events. Another author would have chosen others. This is not a history. It is an interpretation illustrated from history! The factual material, we trust, is true. The interpretations and comments are the responsibility of the author. He is deeply indebted to the late Waldo Wildes, an elder of the church, and a lover of its history, whose typescript manuscript provided much of the data. The reader is encouraged to read in Mr. Wildes' account which may be found in the Church library.

The content of this pamphlet was presented as a series of sermons during January, 1977 in celebration of the 150th Anniversary of Third Church. Some aspects of the personal and oral style have been retained. You will not find phrases like "God's grace," or "under God's guidance." That is because we deeply believe that it is God who has founded and sustained this congregation. In our Reformed theology all of what has happened is by the grace of God. The spirit of Third Church is, therefore, simply offered in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Conrad Harry Massa

Abel W. Riley }
 Isaac Warring }
 Modestus }
 Asa Carpenter }
 Resolved

At a meeting held by a number of the inhabitants of East Rochester on January 15th 1827 at the school-house in district No 4 in which village (notices having been previously given accessible to an act of the Legislature of the State of New York) for the purpose of forming a religious society to be known by the name of the Third Presbyterian Church or Society in Rochester it was unanimously

Resolved that

Abel W. Riley }
 Nijoh Blunthor }
 Modestus }
 Asa Carpenter }
 Secretary }
 Resolved that the meeting be adjourned until Monday 17th Inst 3 o'clock to meet again at the above mentioned place on Wednesday 17th Jan 1827 3 o'clock P.M. the moderators viz Abel W. Riley & Nijoh Blunthor together with the Rev Asa Carpenter resigned their office whereupon it was Resolved to retract two moderators & one Secretary by ballot. On counting the votes it was found that

held on the 23rd mentioned chosen barman & said Teacher the vote be instructed Mrs Shaw of a lot in streets as a site for 3rd Presbyterian minutes of eight meeting house for the materials of be built Obagah St. Paul Abel W. Riley Judson Booth Isaac Warring Peterka Johnson Eloha G. Daniel Fisher & John T. Colborn

The minutes of the meeting at which Third Presbyterian Church was organized on Jan. 15, 1827.



A section of the first building was moved from its original site to Hartford Street and remained there for many years.

THIRD CHURCH - ITS BUILDINGS

A church building is somewhat like a human body; we do not always inherit the one we would prefer to have, but we somehow manage to live with the one we get. Through its history of 150 years, the congregations of Third Presbyterian Church in Rochester, N. Y. have housed their spiritual life and vitality in a series of buildings. One was provided hastily to meet an immediate need; others have been planned carefully and built to reflect a nobility of purpose, the dignity of worship of God and service to human beings. In its own way, however, each of the structures which has housed the people of God who called themselves Third Presbyterian Church has reflected something of the spirit of the people at that time.

By the 1826 census, Rochester had attained a population of 7,669. Although it had been a permanent settlement only since 1812, Rochester was already the third largest community in upstate New York. There were only three towns larger in all of New England. Nevertheless it was with a certain daring in January, 1827 that 22 persons risked going to the far outskirts of the village to found the first permanent religious society in Rochester, east of the Genesee River. The first service of worship was held on Sunday, Dec. 31, 1826 in the District No. 4 Schoolhouse at the corner of Mortimer and Clinton streets. That area was known as East Rochester in those days—not to be confused with the present village of East Rochester. The location has been described as being "in the woods."

The congregation continued to meet in this place for several Sundays and, on Jan. 15, 1827, chose the name "Third Presbyterian Church and Society of Rochester." Two days later Joel Parker, a licentiate of the Presbytery of Ontario, was called to be stated supply for six months at a compensation of \$130. Mr. Parker was later called as pastor for \$800 a year. A Commission of the Presbytery of Rochester met on Feb. 28, 1827 to organize the "Third Presbyterian Church in Rochester," according to the minutes of the Presbytery.



The first permanent building was built on the northeast corner of Main Street and Clinton Avenue in 1828.

Decisions on church buildings were made more swiftly in those days than they have been made in recent years. On Jan. 22, 1827 a Trustees Committee reported the purchase of a lot on the northeast corner of Clinton and E. Main streets for \$1,000. On Sunday, Jan. 28, the pastor spoke of the dire need of a building larger than the schoolhouse. On Monday, Jan. 29, a morning conference was held to discuss the hiring of a hall. Present was Josiah Bissell Jr., whose strong will and devoted spirit dominated the early years and life of Third Church. An historic conversation took place which has been described fully for us in an address later given to the Presbytery. It went this way:

Mr. Bissell said, "No, let us build a house for ourselves." Others said, "We cannot wait for that; we need a place at once." Said Mr. Bissell, "But we can build a house by next Sunday." "That is impossible," they replied. He said, "It is not impossible. If we could make a thousand dollars by building a storehouse for flour this week, we should do it; and it's a pity we cannot do as much for our Master as we should for ourselves." Further objection being made, he said, "Put me on the Building Committee and it shall be done—we will worship in the new church next Sunday."

They put him on the committee and that very hour he began to make his contracts. He engaged one master mechanic, with his men, to fell the trees (which were still standing in the woods) and to lay out and erect the frame; another set of men were to be ready to put on the siding and roof the moment the frame was up and still another to go right along at the same time with floors, windows and doors; and another to prepare benches and pulpit, and when he had engaged each man to do his work by a given day and hour, he offered in each case a considerable bonus, if the man would complete his job a few hours earlier than the time specified . . .

There was no apparent hurry or confusion about it, and yet the house was done on Saturday night—a building sixty feet long by thirty feet wide; they worshipped in it on Sunday, as he had promised; and by his wise thoughtfulness it was so put together in two separate frames, that it could easily be separated, as it was afterwards, and converted into two dwelling houses.

There must be a special place in the history of this Church—and in heaven—for any man who can get a church built in one week!

But that was only the beginning! The congregation worshipped in its new building for the first time on Sunday, Feb. 4, 1827. On Tuesday Feb. 6, a plan for a permanent building 58 feet by 75 feet, costing \$8,000, was adopted. The new building committee consisted of Josiah Bissell Jr., O. N. Bush and two men with the interesting names of Carpenter and Tinker!



Pew lease for 900 years.

Pews Sold to Finance Building

Feb. 20 was set for sale of pews to finance the new building. Pews were called "slips," prices ranged from \$25 to \$200 with a 7 per cent premium on each for the support of the minister. It was a common practice to deed over pews to creditors. That's how Enos Stone, a Vestryman at St. Paul's who had sold the church its building lot, ended up owning a Third Presbyterian Church pew. Possession of a pew was to be for 900 years. The new building was constructed of stone and was of Georgian design with a tapering wood steeple. Although membership had grown rapidly to 150, the new building would seat 700.

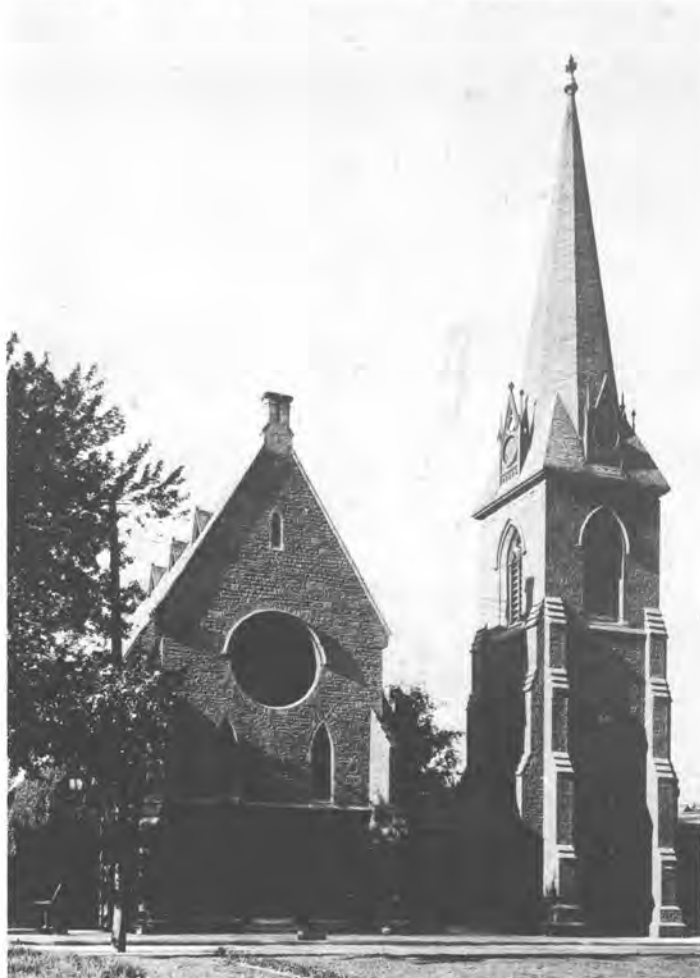
There were problems. The sale of pews did not go quite as well as expected and the building costs ran higher than expected. Among the extras were \$530 for the bell and \$240 for "one town clock." Apparently the church was very proud of that clock. The First Presbyterian Church also had one, but it had no hands and no works. Other debts became known as the cost of Mr. Bissell's enthusiasm surfaced.

The first step taken to reduce the debts was a reduction in the minister's salary. Even this did not stem the tide. The building, dedicated with great joy in Aug. 10, 1828, finally was sold in 1834 to the Second Baptist Church (now the Baptist Temple) for \$6,600 which did not quite cover all the debts. It was this building, however, which echoed to the preaching of the Rev. Charles G. Finney, the renowned evangelist.

The next months were dark ones for the congregation of Third Church. Attempts had been made to unite with First Presbyterian Free Church of Rochester, so-named because its pews were free. Third Church members even suggested a new name—"Clinton Avenue Church"—for the combined congregations. Free Church would have none of it, although the Third Church people were invited to come individually to the Free Church. When Third Church had to give up its building, a paper, the *Liberal Advocate* gloated, "The Third Presbyterian Church, which costs the 'lamented Bissell' so much cash and trouble has shared a similar fate—it is owned by the Baptists." The editors denounced both "notorious Finney" and what they described as the local "rage for building splendid churches."

From April to December in 1834, a faithful remnant of Third Church people held occasional services in other churches. A motion to disband was defeated and on Dec. 8, 1834 a new group of Trustees, including two from the previous group, was formed. The Church was organized anew. This is why the date 1834 appears on the present building's cornerstone. However, Third Church continued throughout this interim as an organized Church on the roll of the Presbytery, and therefore it rightly traces its continuous history to the earlier beginning.

Three more buildings were to follow. On July 3, 1836 a new building was dedicated on a site between Stone Street and South Avenue. This is described as a "tiny temple of stone, of the pure Grecian style." This building lasted 22 years until Aug. 17, 1858, when it was



The Temple Street building was first occupied in 1860. It was razed in the 1960s for downtown renewal.



A chapel was erected in 1883 on Meigs Street on the site of the present Parish House.

destroyed in a fire started by fireworks celebrating the laying of the Atlantic Cable. The fire began in the hay loft of a livery stable and consumed the entire block between Stone Street and South Avenue. Church historian Waldo Wildes wrote later: "At least we had the distinction of going up in the worst fire the city had known or would know for many a year." Third Church once again had to rise from the ashes—this time literally, not figuratively!

Church Built on Temple Street

The fourth church building was designed by the New York firm which built Trinity Church in New York City. It was located on Temple Street and was occupied on April 8, 1860. Its cost was about \$38,000. It had a striking stone spire said to be 132 feet high. One of the black walnut pews from this church has been preserved and is now on the platform in the renovated Parish House in the room designated Johnston Hall. This was the first Third Church building which did not have doors on the pews as well as being the first in which the congregation "faced the music"—choir that is. The new church's organ cost about \$1,600 and the funds were raised by the women of the Church. The organ was described as a "sweet-toned instrument of two banks of keys and twenty-six stops." There was a special collection for the new furnace, which cost \$108. This, incidentally, appears to be one of the more successful special collections at Third Church, possibly because the furnace money was raised on the first Sunday of December. This building was 13th century gothic style and stood almost unchanged until



Dr. George Patton

1936 when the steeple dormers were removed because of disintegration. It was razed in the early 1960s for the downtown renewal that included construction of Midtown Mall.

In the 1860s some attempt was made to give Third Church a name rather than a number. Two suggestions were Temple Street Church and Westminster Church. Second Presbyterian Church later became Brick Church and First Church is now part of the Downtown Church which also now includes Brick Church. By the sheer grit of hanging in there, Third Church now is the lowest numbered Presbyterian Church in Rochester.

Things began to change around the Temple Street site of Third Church. A new building blocked any plans for extending Temple Street to Clinton Avenue. Then there was "the mushroom growth of odors from livery stable and clatter from blacksmith shop, and the rapid shift of the church population eastward." It was pointed out that, "Nearly all of our congregation at that time lived east of Chestnut Street, and many of them east of Alexander Street." When the Unitarian Society which had been burned out of one church and sold out of another

Early photograph of present church shows former Chapel, right rear, before construction of Parish House in 1911.



for a new post office, offered \$20,000 for the building, there was an agonizing decision to be made. Third Church was sold. With that decision, two Trustees left, feeling as did others, that a Meigs Street location was "dangerously far away." However, the records of the Unitarian historian do not reflect this agony. They read: "At that very moment of destiny, a Presbyterian society, with a beautiful church hidden in an out-of-the-way nook was seized with ambition to be out on the Avenue. 'Give us your twenty thousand dollars and take (our church)' they said."

Once again Third Church was homeless. Services were held in borrowed church facilities until a chapel was erected in 1883-84 at Meigs Street on the present



site of the Parish House. Within a few years plans were underway to build the present Church for some \$75,000. Once again, there were those who said it couldn't be done, and should not be done. The chairman at one meeting expressed the view that \$10,000 could not be raised for such a purpose. But a straw poll of those present brought pledges for more than \$20,000. So the present Church, in a style called Richardsonian Romanesque, was built and dedicated on May 14, 1893.

The Copeland Memorial Chimes consisting of 11 bells were installed in 1927 for the Centennial of the Church.

Dr. George Patton preached on the text from Genesis, "This is the house of God and this is the gate of heaven." A better choice, by the way, than the Rev. Comfort Williams had made when he preached on the preceding sentence of that text in dedicating the first religious meet-

ing house in Rochester nearly 80 years earlier. The Rev. Mr. Williams' text had been, "How dreadful is this place."

The present Church building was considerably altered in the building program of 1951. The center pulpit and choir in back of it gave way to a divided chancel. This was as much a characteristic of church building in the 1950s as the "Akron Plan" auditorium or nave was in the 1890's. The blend of the two plans into the present Church is something of an architectural triumph. The Chapel and Education Building also were completed as a part of the total rebuilding effort of the early 1950s. The total cost was approximately \$700,000.

The Parish House was built of St. Lawrence marble to match the Church and was finished in 1911. It was constructed on the site of the former Chapel, which had served as the congregation's place of worship from 1884 until the dedication of the present Church in 1893. The east end and part of the south wall of that Chapel were left intact and were incorporated into the Parish House. The beautiful gothic windows in the present Senior and Junior Choir rooms are a reminder that this is the oldest part of the present building complex.

The Parish House was built in 1911 to provide "more homelike quarters for the religious education groups and the social and weekday activities." Originally it had "gayly frescoed walls" and "delicate Japanese wall cloths for the parlors." Many changes in decor were made over the years. The use of the former Chapel site explains the various levels which one finds when going from the Church or Education Building into the Parish House. The Parish House was built and furnished for approximately \$60,000. The renovation in 1976 cost more than \$500,000 and resulted in a complete modernization of the building as well as significant additions. More than 2,000 square feet of usable space were created on the second floor. An elevator was provided for use by the handicapped.

Space in the basement and main floors was more efficiently developed. The arched entrance and extra lobby area at the Meigs Street door greatly enhanced the attractiveness and the accessibility of the main entrance to the Parish House.

The history of Third Church building programs reveals that not once was such a decision easily made. Not once



The present Chapel and Education Building during construction.

was there unanimity. Not once was there complete confidence that it could be done—or should be done. The Church came closer to such overwhelming feeling in the 1976 project than at any time in its history. This also was the first building program when all the cost was pledged in advance. With the Church, Chapel, Education Building and the newly renovated and functional Parish House, Third Presbyterian Church has a complex of buildings, debt-free, to serve the congregation and community for many years to come.

A Church is, of course, much more than its buildings. Still, if a body can be the mechanism of the spirit, a building can be a means for a congregation's life to express itself in worship, study, and service. For these ends this building has been created and dedicated that it may also be a house of God and a gate of heaven for many.

THIRD CHURCH – THE 19th CENTURY

If church buildings are like human bodies in that they house the living spirit, it is the people who provide the spirit. As lovely as any room is in itself, it is lovelier when filled with the animated conversation and laughter of people. That is the difference between a house and a home; it is the difference between the church dormant and the church vibrant.

Fortunately, the Church historian at the time of Third Church's 125th Anniversary researched and related some of those human interest anecdotes which make an era and a history come alive. This chapter deals with a few of the people of the 19th century whose lives have been woven into the fabric of Third Church. They are not all, by any means, the great and the noteworthy. That is because the great are not always interesting, and the interesting do not necessarily become great in the usual understanding of the term.

In the Church, more than almost any other group, an individual usually forgotten by history can have a marked influence at the time. We tell about some of them to whet your appetite enough so you may read further in the full history.

The name of Josiah Bissell Jr. was introduced in the story about the earliest Church buildings. Mr. Bissell was not interested primarily in buildings, however. He wanted people in them; he wanted people to be changed! One of the great forces to accomplish this was to be the Sunday School.

Mr. Bissell was described in 1829 as "that champion of sabbath-schools." He was the first superintendent of a Third Church Sabbath School and enforced a rigid discipline and training. He was the first president of the Genesee Sabbath School Union and helped to organize the Monroe County Bible Society. Under his leadership 1,200 Bibles were distributed during the summer of 1825. He believed in the memorization of Bible verses. His six-year-old daughter, Mary Ann Bissell, reportedly learned 502 verses in 12 days and Josiah Bissell III at the age of 5, managed to memorize 60 verses in 8 days.

One of the real champions, however, though was a Priscilla Wilson, who, at 12 years, achieved 4,002 verses in 11 days. (There is a later notation after her name, "dead." The two events do not seem to be related.)

Josiah Bissell's method for the recruitment of Sabbath School teachers was, to say the least, rather forceful. Mary Allen King told of her experience in her autobiography:

The first Sabbath after removing to Rochester, I went . . . into the school. In passing up the aisle, I stopped a moment against a class of fifteen young ladies, taught by Rev. Mr. Pierpont, then an elder in the church. Mr. Bissell, who was at my side, without having asked me to take a class, said, "Mr. P., you may give Miss Allen your class and look up another." He immediately arose, and I, turning to Mr. Bissell, said, "I have worked very hard lately, and I thought I would rest a while." He replied, "There remaineth a rest for the people of God, but not in this world."

Much confused, I turned to apologize, but he was half way across the room. I had nothing to do but to take my place before the class and go to work as well as I could. For seven years I was able to be present, when in town, every Sabbath but three

. . .

There are many other tales about Mr. Bissell whose great enthusiasm for the faith indirectly brought about his early death. He greatly admired the evangelist Charles G. Finney and once accompanied Mr. Finney on a difficult three-day journey by stage to Auburn. Exhausted by the pace of life he had set for himself with various business ventures and involvement in Church activities, Josiah Bissell took ill. He died at Seneca Falls on April 5, 1831. He was only 41.

Albert Gallatin Hall became the fifth installed pastor of Third Church in November, 1840. Four others had preceded him in the first 13 years of the Church's existence, but Dr. Hall was to change all that. His pastorate extended for 31 years until his death in 1871. It was the longest in the Church's history and will undoubtedly remain such into the 21st century.

Third Church was firmly established under Albert Hall, but its direction was also changed. No more anti-slavery preaching. No more politics from the pulpit.



Albert Gallatin Hall

Charles Finney was reluctantly invited to preach at Third Church but only on condition that he refrain from what was called, in a letter to him, his "peculiar views". Dr. Hall's famous "Sermon on the Seventh Commandment" (the one on adultery) printed in 1841, indicates what were the problems of society and the sins of individuals as he saw them. He denounced what some saw as the "gross indecency" of the day by naming these five specifics:

- (1) Any style of dress which does not contribute toward the "prevention of impurity."
- (2) "Friendly and familiar intercourse with the violators of this precept."
- (3) Mixed dancing.
- (4) The Theater.
- (5) A portion of the fashionable literature of the day.

It happened, about 1865, that Mrs. William S. Little, who had recently come to Rochester as a bride of 21, entertained the Mite Society of Third Church in her East Avenue home. The women met to sew in the afternoon and the young men came to supper. As she had been accustomed to do in her prior home, Mrs. Little sat down at the piano and played a quadrille for the young people to square dance. Word reached Dr. Hall, who made a friendly call. He explained to his bewildered parishioner "that it was quite unseemly to introduce such a feature into any activities or organizations identified with the church, that, as she was so young, and hadn't realized this, he would overlook it this time, but that it must *not* happen again."

It did not. Historian Wildes notes—with some subtle glee—that at the 100th Anniversary in 1927 there was a dance in the Third Church Parish House—and even the ministers participated!

Old School Versus New School

Albert Hall represented the Old School Presbyterian which had broken with the New School in 1837. Third Church had withdrawn from the Presbytery to be a part of another until the reunion of Presbyterianism in 1870. This conservative-liberal division found Third Church's leadership in the conservative camp for these years. As with all such division each group identified what it felt were the major sins and needs of society. Dr. Hall was reported to have enjoyed a glass of ale now and then, so one never reads denunciations of alcohol as earlier and later Third Church preachers were to do. He also was accustomed to chew tobacco and was noted to have the usual marks—"the distended cheek and the yellow lips." It was not just his theological conservatism, therefore, which made him dislike Charles Finney who denounced both tobacco and drink—and slavery.

Another type of person in the history of Third Church was the sexton—who was also, at times, the chorister or choirmaster. The first sexton was Harvey George, who received 50 cents per week and also was required by the village to sweep the street every Saturday morning except in the winter. During the winter he was paid one dollar and had to keep the stove fired up. The congregation soon felt, however, that the job of sexton could be combined with other activities. In 1843, Jonathan Copeland was appointed sexton and also collector for the trustees at \$100 a year. It had been proposed to pay him 5 percent on collections only. Earlier, in 1837, C. O. Messinger was paid \$200 as chorister and sexton. Mr. Messinger produced the first concert of Sacred Music at Third Church, with a choir of the Church, on March 31, 1837. The opening piece was Haydn's "The Heavens Are Telling" with piano, violin and violincellos. Tickets were \$1 and admitted "a gentleman and two ladies." By 1851, Charles Messinger had become a "teacher of music" and was lost as sexton.

In May, 1854 a new sexton and chorister, James S. Cooper, was "to establish a congregational singing school . . . with a view to introducing congregational singing as far as practicable." Mr. Cooper does not appear to have been overly successful. The choir is later described as "in very low state; and yet a dozen or more new members could easily be recruited if only the choir-master would leave." When Mr. Cooper finally did leave in 1857, the offices of choirmaster and sexton became distinct responsibilities.

In 1857, a chorister named Abbot was hired for \$100 per year. It is very likely it was he who was the subject of an account which appeared much later in the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*:

There came to town a remarkable organist . . . His name was Abbot. He was heard of in Corning, at a time when Central Church was in need of an organist, and was sent for. His fame spread like wild-fire. Crowds flocked to hear him. People would turn in their seats to look while he played interludes; and at the close of service many resumed their seats, while, inspired by their interest, he played on and on. Abbot's music was mostly improvised, and of an extraordinary brilliant character. Local musicians became jealous of his rocket-like fame and, finding that drink was his weak point, led him into it. They had soon gotten rid of him. For there came a Sunday when, in hushed voices, the people were saying to each other, "Abbot is dead!"

What a romantic and tragic personality is described in that brief account. Some people enter our lives that way—like skyrockets—illuminating our days for a brief while and then passing into unknown oblivion. They too, have their place in history.

This is an odd listing of people with whom to commemorate a history of a Church: a founder, little children who memorized prodigious numbers of Bible verses, a woman trapped into teaching Sunday School, a minister deeply concerned about dancing but who would not permit an anti-slavery speaker in his Church, sextons, choirmasters. But this is what a Church is in its day-by-day and year-by-year life. The kingdom of God is not always thunder on Mount Sinai; it is also struggles to meet bills, pastors with great strengths and terrible weaknesses, men and women who sing in choirs, or sew during wars or hold meetings on problems of society.

For 150 years the people who have somehow chosen to share their lives with Third Presbyterian Church in Rochester have found in this congregation a focus for their efforts. Not all needs have been met in earlier generations nor in this one. Yet one need seems to have been met through all the triumphs and tragedies of our history. That is the need every woman and every man has to know and to believe that she or he are children of God and those for whom Christ gave himself. Through everything else, Third Church has provided that conviction and the inspiration of that truth.

Nowhere does this conviction shine brighter than in a statement by Dr. Hall shortly before his death. In 1869 he served on the Committee of Conference on Reunion of the Old and New Schools of Presbyterianism. It was he who offered a resolution, at a key meeting in Pittsburgh, which made the reunion possible. In response to an interviewer who later asked him the meaning of the difference between Old and New School, Dr. Hall said this:

I cannot tell you the theological difference. They now seem to me wholly unimportant. During the years I worked with the reunion commissions my mind and my soul underwent great changes. I seemed to be another man, a humbler, a far happier, and I trust, a much better man. I confess with shame and with great joy, too, that I had been wrong in feeling that the New School men were irrational, unspiritual and morally inferior to us. I now see that my unjust judgments were caused by *odium theologicum* and held me a spiritual slave to ideas and attitudes shamefully unworthy of a follower and servant of Jesus Christ. Both Schools were right and both were wrong: right in heart loyalty to our Lord, wrong in practical disloyalty to Him, to His Kingdom and to His followers. We were ignorant, conceited, biased, proud, arrogant, unlovely. We reckoned other things . . . higher than His Kingdom. That wrong poisoned our souls . . .

. . . I have tried to exalt Christ, but I have done it in my petty, half-blind, proud, ignorant, terrible erring ways. God forgive me for Christ's sake! I grieve over all the sermons I have preached and things I have said and written against others whom Christ loves. Never again, never again!

When the two General Assemblies, marching from the churches they had met in, came together and marched on, each man of one school with a man of the other school, my arm was linked with that of old Dr. Blank, all the years my New School rival in the Blank Church here. The tears ran down our faces, and we wanted to throw our arms around each other. I felt nearer to Christ than I had ever felt before, and I feel that way still.

Dr. Hall died on Sunday morning, Sept. 10, 1871, a little more than a year after Reunion. He had begun to point a new direction which flowered in the 20th century into the spirit which became the modern Third Church.

East Avenue at Meigs Street during the 1950s before disease destroyed the huge Elm trees that lined the street.



THIRD CHURCH – ITS SPIRIT

The modern spirit of Third Church was introduced by its first 20th century pastor, Dr. Paul Moore Strayer. A great congregation is far more than the talents and interests of its pastor, but the pastor, in our Presbyterian system, is in a unique position to indicate direction, to provide example and enthusiasm, and to inspire hope. Dr. Strayer did all of those things—and he did them in the best tradition of Charles G. Finney who, in the earliest years of Third Church, had challenged the congregation with a faith that made a difference in society.

The question of the involvement of the church, the pulpit, and the pastor in issues of social conflict is never

finally resolved. Each generation finds its own way through those issues. For Dr. Strayer, there seemed to be one guiding principle—sympathy for the underdog—which grew out of his strong sense that every human being had worth in the sight of God. If this sometimes betrayed him into a too idealistic venture into realms where angels might fear to step and caused him to reform people whether they wanted reforming or not, his sympathies were unselfish and his aim was love of the best in people.

It was Dr. Strayer's dedication to the needs of people in the congregation and community which prompted the building of the Parish House. This was to be shared with the neighborhood community. That is why it was initially equipped with a kitchen, a pool and billiard room, and a bowling alley. He worked to have public schools opened in the evenings for adult civic clubs. In 1908, when it was clear that working people of the time would not come to an East Avenue church, Dr. Strayer founded the People's Sunday Evening, a great influence in labor circles. He was a fraternal delegate of the Ministerial Union to the Central Trades and Labor Council. He sat with the council, marched in Labor Day parades and wrote "Brother Strayer's Corner" in the *Labor Journal*. His People's Sunday Evening met weekly in a downtown theater. Designed especially for non-churchgoers, it attracted from 1,000 to 2,500 each week its first winter. Third Church paid nearly half the cost of this meeting.

Dr. Strayer did not do all of this, of course, without causing a few ripples—perhaps waves—in the congregation and community. An outstanding Presbyterian elder and businessman who was an official of the Contractors' Association, and negotiating a strike, denounced Dr. Strayer's role as being less than honest and straightforward. When Dr. Strayer's sermon pointing out similarities between Protestants and Catholics and indicating how certain misunderstandings could be overcome was printed in the *Post-Express*, it angered St. Bernard's Seminary professor, Father Frederick Zwierlein, whose scathing denunciation of Strayer's interpretation also was printed. Thus ended an early attempt at ecumenicity!

Dr. Strayer was an ardent prohibitionist and got the Mayor to close all saloons when the World War I armistice was announced. He "accompanied the police, and helped clear out the drinking and drunken men, compelling the proprietors to lock their doors." (Actually



Dr. Paul Moore Strayer

it was a false report of the armistice, but when the real one came, all Monroe County saloons were closed right away.) To encourage the enforcement of the prohibition laws, Dr. Strayer would hang around the courtrooms. An assistant district attorney once made an impassioned speech to a grand jury that Dr. Strayer was trying to influence the jury by his presence. Dr. Strayer later accused the District Attorney of lax enforcement of the law and sensational headlines blasted Strayer.

For all of his sometimes arch-crusader image, Paul Moore Strayer left an indelible feeling in Third Church that religion was not merely a private matter but compelled the believer to work for public morality and justice as well. He wanted very much to have Third Church change its name to All Souls' Church to reflect this philosophy. His efforts toward this in 1905 and again in 1914 did not generate any enthusiasm. Dr. Strayer said that Third Church was "coming to stand for liberal Presbyterianism in this city." His closing message to the congregation, which reluctantly received his resignation and declared him Pastor Emeritus in 1925, was: "My heart is with the church and I bespeak for it your continued loyalty and devotion. The best is yet to be. Believe in it. Prepare for it." He had been stricken with the sleeping sickness in 1923 and died on Apr. 3, 1929. He was 54.

A Quiet Time in Church Life

In 1916 the last pew rentals at Third Church ended. The first annual canvass was held in 1911 and gradually replaced the older system. About 1926 the weekly prayer meeting died out. Church historian Wildes writes, "The small attendance, consisting of those who were, it seemed, the most saintly, and thus required its offices least, hardly justified the effort."

Andrew Gillies, a Scot, succeeded Dr. Strayer as pastor and remained until 1937. It seems to have been a quiet time in the life of the Church. Dr. Gillies continued something of Dr. Strayer's crusading style in that he frequently denounced some injustice of big business toward its employees. An anecdote of this era reveals that, although Dr. Gillies could denounce big business on Sunday from the pulpit, he could equally enjoy close friendships at meals with some of Third Church's leading representatives of commercial enterprise, much to the chagrin of his young associate who saw a certain incongruity in all of this!



Andrew Gillies

Third Church congregations were active in social service projects during both World Wars. It was a Third Church elder, Edward J. Seeber, who in 1917 invented a bandage-folding machine that made it possible to fold almost four times as many bandages as could be done by hand in the same time. Both Dr. Strayer and Dr. Paul Covey Johnston, who served Third Church from 1938 through 1944, had pacifist leanings. Although some were undoubtedly upset by this, neither man appears to have been strident in affirming his convictions and both played major roles in the social service aspects of the war effort and later rehabilitation. Perhaps one ought to be suspicious, anyway, of a minister of Christ who finds it easy to bless the killing and maiming of people no matter how just the national cause.

The Church's written history ends with the pastorate of Dr. Johnston. He was requested to run for the denomination's highest administrative office, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, but refused in order to continue serving Third Church instead. Dr. Johnston was an innovator. During his pastorate the Church's weekly newsletter, Third Church Messenger, was begun (on Apr. 8, 1938). The present Hymnals were dedicated in November, 1938. The budget, which had been more than \$50,000 in 1928, had fallen to about \$35,000 by 1938. When Dr. Johnston left in the Fall of 1944 it had increased to \$56,000. In 1940, multiple services were introduced with the first at 9:30 a.m. It was followed by a "Family Service" with children present part of the time. In 1942 the Church returned to a so-called "Unified Service" at 10:30 a.m. The recent past has seen a similar development.

Extensive plans were drawn up for a remodeling of the Church and organ and a new Chapel and expansion of education facilities. This was estimated to cost between \$200,000 and \$250,000. A crowded Third Church corporation meeting on Mar. 11, 1942 voted the proposal down. Ten years later, during Dr. William H. Hudnut's pastorate, a similar proposal finally became a reality—at a cost of \$700,000.

It becomes difficult for me at this point to continue an account of the years during which Third Church has been served by my immediate predecessor, Dr. Hudnut, and by myself. To do so inevitably involves me in judgments which discretion suggests I should not make. However, the present congregation of Third Church has already learned that the discretion of its pastor has limits and

that he is not overly inhibited! Besides, the most interesting comments are usually those in which the writer puts himself "on the line."

William H. Hudnut Jr. served Third Church from 1946 to 1964. This was a unique period in American Protestantism—a non-typical period according to Church historians and sociologists. The post World War II years brought an economic boom, and explosion in the birthrate, and a flood of people into churches. The building of new churches, nationally, reached its all-time peak in the late 1950s. By the conclusion of Dr. Hudnut's pastorate, Third Church had reached its largest congregational size of over 2,400 people.

For a Church to be able to capitalize on this period, however, the right leader had to be in the right place. William H. Hudnut was right for Third Church. He brought energy, enthusiasm, feeling and an ability to direct the congregation into areas of growth. The spirit of Third Church which Paul Moore Strayer had introduced was encouraged and expanded—a spirit of reaching out and helping others.

Members of the Church were encouraged into a variety of projects of service. The Chapel and Education Building were constructed and the Church remodeled. A loyal and involved congregation spread its influence throughout the city so that, by the early 1960s there was a

William H. Hudnut Jr.,
left, and David W.
Moody, associate pastor,
the Church's ministers in
1950.





A Sunday service in the Church in the late 1940s.

member of Third Church on the governing board of almost every service agency in the city which was not solely Roman Catholic or Jewish in its makeup. In direct service operations, Third Church members worked in neighborhood houses, drove the handicapped, and engaged in interreligious activities. It was a fruitful and expansive era.

Community Problems Involve Congregation

It was in 1964 that Dr. Hudnut resigned from Third Church to become the chairman of the Fifty Million Fund of the United Presbyterian Church. In that same year, Rochester experienced a race riot in its black ghettos. The churches of Rochester invited the organization of the black community by an outside group. When the present pastor was called in the middle of 1966 Third Church members had already chosen sides on the question of this organization of the black community.

The Session had taken a stand in support of such organization and had voted funds for it. However, many in the congregation protested. The stewardship canvass in the Fall of 1966 showed a \$25,000 decrease in pledges from the prior year. The Annual Meeting in January, 1967 drew more than 300 people—an all-time record! More than 30 of these signed their names to the minutes in protest of the Session's action.

The new pastor found these pressures aggravated by routine internal needs. An ancient Addressograph machine was kept operable by folded cardboard shims to keep worn metal parts together. The entire Church staff was paid at rates considerably below the prevailing community salaries for similar work and experience levels, and more than half of a Fifty Million Fund pledge of \$325,000 remained to be paid from the diminished receipts.

The new pastor had been deeply involved in social issues in his previous two pastorates and was thrust immediately into demands to be a partisan advocate of one side or the other. He had no choice but to uphold the decision made by the Session. His basic sympathies were with the aims of the black community for self-determination; but his own spirit recoiled from the personal abuse and vituperation which characterized some of the leadership on both sides in the struggle. It was almost impossible not to be misunderstood. Unnumbered hours were expended by a handful of clergy, including the Third Church pastor, in efforts of true reconciliation: that is, a reconciliation which would advance the just claims of an oppressed and alienated people, but within the structures of an ordered and healthy society. Rochester Jobs, Inc. was one of the results of this effort.

While many Third Church members had a variety of levels of involvement in the events of 1966-1969, two Third Church elders played especially significant leadership roles in Church and community. They were John B. McCrory and David M. Allyn. While both were advocates and reconcilers, they helped to bring a balance and perspective to many. Still, one other man deserves to be remembered for his courage, his commitment, his sacrifice, and his honor. That man is Elder John G. Mulder. His pastor knows perhaps more about his suffering than most others do, but even his pastor does not know the fullness of that agony. Mr. Mulder

became the symbol of all compassionate white people to the black community. As with others through history whose instincts and insights have been in advance of their day, Mr. Mulder was rejected by many of his own people. His personal professional loss can only be guessed. His great courage was shown in two acts especially. When the agreement he had signed with the black community on behalf of his employer, Eastman Kodak Co., was rejected by the company, Mr. Mulder went personally to carry the message to the group of black leaders celebrating what they thought was a Christmas blessing. His second act of courage was to stay at his job and in his community until retirement, a symbol of conscience.

This event, known as the Kodak-FIGHT controversy, left a deep impression on the community and church life in it. Years of healing have had to take place. A new generation has realized the benefit of a more mature Rochester. Third Church had its great social concern challenged at a new level which demanded change, not charity, and needed to reflect more deeply on the root causes of social need. Solutions are no longer as simple as a Christmas basket, although the touch of a caring hand has once again become very important.

The most recent years have seen the spirit of experimentation in many aspects of the life of the Church. The compensation of Church School teachers in a cooperative program with parents has become a model for other churches. The Services of Worship have incorporated a variety of form and content. A new Board of Deacons is working to encourage friendship and genuine Christian care throughout the congregation. The place of women and young people in policy-making levels has been greatly enhanced. The recent renovation of the Parish House should make any major building work unnecessary for many years. The amount of support pledged for the 150th year of our history is the largest to date and the Outreach portion is just over \$100,000.

The spirit of Third Church is a spirit which honors the past but does not glorify it beyond reality. The spirit of Third Church is a spirit which serves the present but will not remain wedded to it. The spirit of Third Church is a spirit which looks to the future because its hope is always in the God who is out ahead calling—calling—calling. May our response continue to be like Samuel's of old: "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."

Third Church Pastors

Joel Parker	-	-	-	-	-	1827-1830
Luke Lyons	-	-	-	-	-	1831-1832
William Carpenter Wisner	-	-	-	-	-	1832-1833
William Mack	-	-	-	-	-	1835-1839
Albert Gallatin Hall	-	-	-	-	-	1840-1871
George Patton	-	-	-	-	-	1871-1893
Richard Davenport Harlan	-	-	-	-	-	1894-1901
Paul Moore Strayer	-	-	-	-	-	1903-1925
Andrew Gillies	-	-	-	-	-	1926-1937
Paul Covey Johnston	-	-	-	-	-	1938-1944
William H. Hudnut Jr.	-	-	-	-	-	1946-1964
Conrad Harry Massa	-	-	-	-	-	1966-1978



Ministers in 1977: from left, William W. Young, Mary Carol Schaedel, Conrad Harry Massa and John E. Barclay.

