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*A History of  
St. Paul's Parish*



1856 - - 1931



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# A HISTORY OF THE PARISH OF ST. PAUL'S

LANSING, MICHIGAN

By

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The sources from which this record has been compiled are of three kinds, Diocesan records, files of contemporary Lansing newspapers, and, most important of all, the memories of parishioners who witnessed the foundation and growth of the parish, and of those rectors, still living, who served as the parish priests.

The bringing together of these scattered threads of history has been a delightful task. The names associated with the parish, viewed in the light of their owners' other activities, have attested to the importance and influence of St. Paul's in Lansing, during all the years the little village of the early fifties has been growing into an industrial capital of nearly a hundred thousand population. And one cannot listen to the reminiscences of the older parishioners without profoundly feeling their deep love and interest in their church, a love and interest that has never failed in all these years, and which passed on, in unbroken measure to younger generations, is the best promise of our future growth and usefulness to the community we would serve.

The earliest parish record goes back to an uncertain date between 1850 and 1853, when the Rev. Mr. Brown guided the few families of Churchmen then resident in Lansing in the formation of an Episcopal society. In the year 1853, Mr. Brown celebrated the first Communion in the parish, in the parlors of the Benton House, then a leading hotel. Those present were Mr. and Mrs. Charles P. Fox, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Briggs, Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Thompson, and Mr. and Mrs. McClure. In June of that year a vestry was formed composed of Judge W. H. Chapman, Edward H. Whitney, Herman Haskall, E. R. Merrifield, John J. Paddock, J. P. Thompson, C. J. Fox, Geo. U. Peck, Dr. Meacham, Stanley Briggs and Dr. Price. Owing to the lack of written records, for that period, the absolute accuracy of this vestry list cannot be assured. It has been gathered from the memories of various people, and in the lapse of more than half a century it would not be strange if some error might have crept in.

During this period services were held, by permission granted by a special act of the legislature, in the State Library and the Senate Chamber, in the old Capitol. The services were conducted by various clergymen, sent by the bishop, and were usually weekly. After a time the society declined, but about 1854 it was revived by the Rev. E. S. Hollister, of Hamburg, and March 1, 1856, the Rev. John Bramwell came to serve it regularly.

At the Diocesan convention held June 3 and 4, 1856, St. Paul's was admitted as a parish with Mr. Bramwell as rector. He reported to the convention that there were at that time fifteen communicants, and expressed a most hopeful outlook for the future. The attendance showed the public to be interested, but the work of the church was greatly hampered by the lack of a suitable building, which prevented week-day services and Sunday School. Mr. Bramwell had also been charged with missionary duties in surrounding towns. He conducted services at Owosso, DeWitt, St. Johns, Delta, and other places, and found in all these places, as well as in Lansing, a great opportunity for the church, if only the field could be successfully occupied.

In 1857 the number of communicants had increased to 27. On Wednesday, April 29th, 1857, Bishop McCoskry made his first visitation to Lansing and confirmed four persons. The names of three have been preserved: the Misses Higbee, Lansing and Harriet Smead.

The missionary labors of Mr. Bramwell had told on his health and April 30, 1857, Bishop McCoskry states that he has reluctantly allowed him to resign, and sends him to points on Lake Superior, in the hope that the climate will prove beneficial. There Mr. Bramwell died from the effects of an accident in the spring of 1857. He was a remarkable man, an Englishman, a graduate of Oxford, a great linguist, speaking seven languages. He is remembered as always preaching extemporaneously. It was unfortunate for the young parish that he was so early taken away for, as the Bishop says in his report, he laid the foundations of the church broad and deep.

With the loss of a resident rector, the parish naturally declined. Missionary services were held occasionally at distant and irregular intervals, and the need of a church building was keenly felt. In July, 1858, the Rev. William Withington was appointed diocesan missionary for Ingham and Shiawassee Counties. He held services chiefly at Lansing, and with the resumption of regular services, the question of building a new church was agitated. In the early months of 1859, the first parish church was erected on the southwest corner of Washington Avenue and Ionia Street where the Gladmer theatre now stands. It was built at a cost of \$1,500 under the supervision of Dr. Price and Mr. James E. Hilliard. Free from debt, it was consecrated by Bishop McCoskry, May 29, 1859. The clergymen who aided in the services were the Revs. Grinnell, Banwell, and Withington.

During this year, the little parish, with 27 communicants, which had just built and paid for its new home, pledged five dollars for diocesan missions. The first funeral held in the new church was that of Mr. William Whiteley, June 2, 1859, and the first baptismal service was for Isabella Whiteley and Robert Merrifield. The little church, with all the activities that centered there,

is still held in affectionate remembrance by those who once worshipped in it. The pews formed a hollow square, in the center of which was the great heating stove. On cold winter days, we can well believe, that the glowing fire formed a center for friendly and social intercourse, after the services, and when the time came to leave this church home for a newer one, there were many homesick hearts. In those days the problem of lighting a public building was very difficult. Oil lamps were used and the oil was thick and poor. The lamps soon became gummed up and would not burn, the light occasionally going entirely out during service. Mr. Edward Flowers, a clerk in John Whiteley's store, used to bring the lamps to Mrs. Whiteley's residence. She would help him clean them, by boiling them with ashes and washing powders. This was a long and tedious operation and must be done often.

The history of the parish in that first decade would not be complete without some account of its social activities. Its membership included the leading families and in those days, when Lansing was connected with the outside world, only by a stage coach, church socials counted for much in the community life.

The first sewing society met with Mrs. Chas. P. Fox about the date of the first communion service. Mrs. J. P. Thompson, Mrs. McClure, Mrs. Stanley Briggs, Miss Laura Burr and Mrs. Price were the guests. The first Christmas tree in Lansing was at Judge Chapman's home on Michigan Avenue East, where the gas office now stands. After a church supper, served in the back parlor, the folding doors were thrown open upon a beautiful, lighted tree. Another elaborate Sunday School celebration, talked of for weeks, was held at the home of a Mr. Smith, then superintendent of the Sunday School. The children met at his home in the evening and marched in a body to the church. After the exercises they went back to his home and were served with a bountiful supper. The first Sunday School picnic was on the lawn of the old Capitol.

During those years, each church family was expected to open its home for a "ten cent social." Not only church people, but the citizens in general attended these. The legislators would come in a body and young housekeepers were hard put to it in order to find enough chairs and dishes. There was great rivalry between the hostesses over the refreshments, which were very elaborate. Some of the ladies were known to have served seven different kinds of cake, and as there were no caterers, not only cakes but ice creams must be prepared at home. There were few pianos, so that music was not relied upon for entertainment. Various games, charades and tableaux amused the guests.

With its establishment in a permanent home, the parish entered upon a period of growth and prosperity. On September 25, 1859, the Rev. W. W. Hickox took over the charge of the





REV. W. W. HICKOX

parish, releasing Father Withington to his missionary duties. Again regular services were held every Sunday, and the Rector reports to the diocesan convention that "the church numbers her communicants and friends from among the best of those who form the intelligence and enterprise of this small but growing city." On May 15, 1860, the Bishop confirmed twenty-two persons and found the parish in a very flourishing condition. Unfortunately for its continued welfare, Mr. Hickox left after a year's incumbency. Mr. Hickox had reported in the convention, "this station will need continued missionary aid," and the truth of this statement was shown by a rapid decline in its fortunes during the months when it was without a Rector. About November 1, 1860, the Rev. Edward Meyers came to the parish for a short time. His connection with St. Paul's is as picturesque an episode as one will find in the history of Lansing. Mr. Meyers

is described, by one who knew him, as a typical German, very learned, a linguist having command of half a dozen languages, and a very profound Bible student. Another acquaintance speaks of him as a wonderful preacher. Soon after the outbreak of the war, he was appointed chaplain to the First Regiment, Michigan Infantry, and accompanied them into the field. He left the parish with the consent of the Bishop who placed another priest in charge. After one or two years, Mr. Meyers returned from the war to claim his parish which he said he had never resigned. Dressed in military uniform, with sword clanking at his side, and accompanied by a son similarly attired, he marched upon the church one Sunday morning. The vestry met him at the door, forbade his entrance, and demanded his resignation. Overcome by superior numbers the disconcerted warrior priest retired from the unequal battle. Deeply grieved, he remained in Lansing for many years, never taking another parish.

Sometime in 1861, or 1862, the Rev. Heman Belding Burgess became Rector of the parish. He labored faithfully for four years, during which time there were about seventy communicants. During this period repeated mention is made in the Rector's reports to the diocese, of the strength and importance to the parish of the Sunday School.

In the spring of 1865, Mr. Burgess resigned and was succeeded by the Rev. Henry J. Brown, who remained only one year. In 1866, the Rev. Henry Banwell began his four years service as Rector. The Bishop testifies that Mr. Banwell had been enabled to greatly improve the parish, both "temporally and spiritually." During these years, the need of a larger church building began to be felt. The Rector placed in every home in the parish, home made mite boxes, which were conspicuously displayed to entice the small change, not only of members of the family but of callers as well. On the last Thursday of each month, a social was held and the mite boxes were opened. Often comparatively large sums were found in them and in this way money was raised to purchase a new church site.

In 1870, or early in 1871, Mr. Banwell was succeeded by the Rev. J. F. Walker, who remained with the parish about one year. He was the last rector in the first church. Mr. Walker went west, after leaving Lansing, and died within a short time.

The old church building was sold and removed to the Grand Street premises of the Bement Company, now the State Journal property, where it long was in service as a warehouse. It has since been destroyed. The lot was sold for the sum of \$6,000. The congregation, without either a rector or a home, held very few services until January 1, 1873, when the Rev. Joseph E. Wood entered upon his incumbency. Immediately a room on the second floor of the Ingersoll Building on the East side of Washington Avenue near Michigan Avenue, was secured for services. Here the furniture of the old church was placed and regular services were resumed.

The present site of the church had been purchased at a cost of \$2,200. Plans were prepared by G. W. Lloyd, of Detroit, for a "chapel" building to be completed by autumn. It seems plain from the rector's report, that this building was to be a chapel which would serve as a church home until a larger and more expensive edifice, suitable to the capital of the state, could be built. A rectory was also contemplated, as the lots were large enough for three buildings. Unfortunately for these plans, a most unhappy division arose in the parish over the site of the new church. This so weakened the parish that it was eleven years before the rectory could be built and forty years before the chapel could be replaced by the church.

October 20, 1873, the first services were held in the new church. It was a stormy day, but the attendance was good, and the collection amounted to over \$700. The Rector preached the sermon, and the musical program was in charge of Miss Truax, organist, Mrs. Arveng, of Brooklyn, N. Y., and Messrs. Whitney and Mead. The building had been completed at a cost of about \$8,000.

In January, 1875, the Rev. Mr. Wood resigned and in April a second loss fell upon the parish. Mr. Smith Hunter was treasurer and kept the church records in his office in the Cowles block. On April 15, that block was destroyed by fire and every written record of the parish prior to that time was burned.

In August, 1875, the Rev. Mr. Banwell was again called to the parish, and was temporarily in charge for a few months. In the spring of 1876, the Rev. John W. Clark, of New York, became Rector. Mr. Clark remained in Lansing until December, 1879.

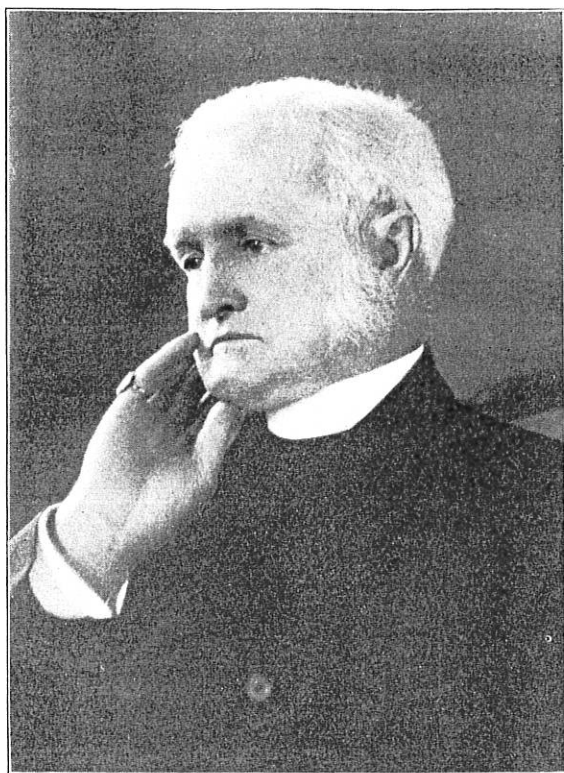




REV. EBENEZER THOMPSON

The increase in communicants and offerings, and the reduction in the debt, show that the parish flourished during this time. Mr. Clark is described as a fine, classical scholar, and an earnest, conscientious, Christian minister. He died in Cleveland, in 1885.

From January, 1880, until August of the same year, the church was closed, or open only to services by lay readers. August 12, 1880, the Rev. Ebenezer Thompson held his first service. During the six years of Mr. Thompson's stay in Lansing, two important events are recorded in the parish. April 22, 1882, the mortgage on the church was paid, and the consecration service was held May 8, under Bishop Harris. The morning service was conducted by the Rev. Willis Hall, of Ann Arbor, assisted by the Rev. Rufus Clark, the Rev. Mr. Pitkin of Detroit, the Rev. S. S. Chapin of Henrietta, and the Rev. Mr. Matran of Owosso. In the evening, Bishop Harris preached a memorable sermon on "The Character of Christ," and confirmed nine candidates.



REV. J. M. MCGRATH

In 1884, the Rectory was built at a cost of \$1,500. It is reported that the Rector worked with his own hands on this building. Mr. Thompson left Lansing at the close of the year 1886.

The Rectorship was filled in a few months by the Rev. J. M. McGrath, who preached his first sermon June 25, 1887. At that time he was described as "an indefatigable student, a cultured and genial gentleman, a strict disciplinarian, and economist." During his administration, the first vested choir was organized, and Mrs. Hudson's Sunday School class gave the brass pulpit as a memorial to Bishop Harris. When Mr. McGrath left near the close of 1890, the parish was entirely free from indebtedness. He speaks of the people of the church as being responsive to his every suggestion.



REV. W. H. OSBORNE

The Rev. W. H. Osborne was Rector from 1891 to 1898. During his incumbency the parish prospered and grew. The old organ was sold and replaced by the present one. Near the close of this period another division in the parish alienated several prominent members and left wounds, slow to heal. Mr. Osborne went from Lansing to Battle Creek.

went from Lansing to Battle Creek. He then became Rector of St. John's Church, Johnson City, Tennessee, and later of St. Andrew's, Clifton Forge, Virginia, and St. Thomas, Berkley, Norfolk, Virginia. In 1922 Mr. Osborne retired from the ministry and now lives in Glendale, California.

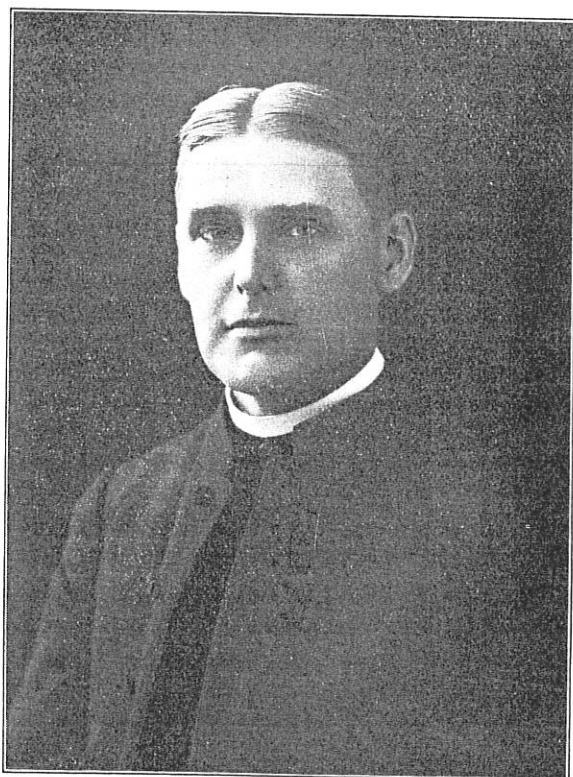




REV. J. A. SCHAAD

Mr. Osborne was succeeded by the Rev. E. W. Hunt, who remained but one year. The Rev. J. A. Schaad was in charge from 1898 to the close of 1905. The affection and esteem always expressed by his former parishioners, when Mr. Schaad's name is mentioned, is evidence of his high character and useful work.

Mr. Schaad left St. Paul's to serve successively as Archdeacon of Western Missouri; rector of Grace Church, Kansas City; rector of Church of St. John the Evangelist, St. Paul; Missioner; rector of Trinity, Bay City; rector of St. Paul's, Augusta, Georgia, and Dean of St. John's Cathedral in the diocese of Quincy.



REV. GEORGE A. ROBSON

The Rev. George A. Robson, spared to the parish which had received him with such high hopes, only six months, from October, 1906, to March, 1907, left an impression which can never be erased.



REV. WILLIAM C. HICKS

The Rev. William C. Hicks was Rector from September 8, 1907, to September 18, 1910. He will probably be best remembered in future years as a brilliant pulpit orator of rare gifts.

Mr. Hicks became Dean of All Saints Cathedral, Spokane, in 1910. After twelve years service there, he lectured on Americanism for two years, was rector of Grace Church, Cleveland, four years, and in 1928, became rector of St. Andrew's Memorial Church in Yonkers, N. Y.

During these years the rapidly growing parish felt more and more cramped in the church building which had so well served the needs of the much smaller city of the early seventies. A well organized movement was set on foot to replace it by a structure of nobler architecture, worthy to house a branch of our great communion.



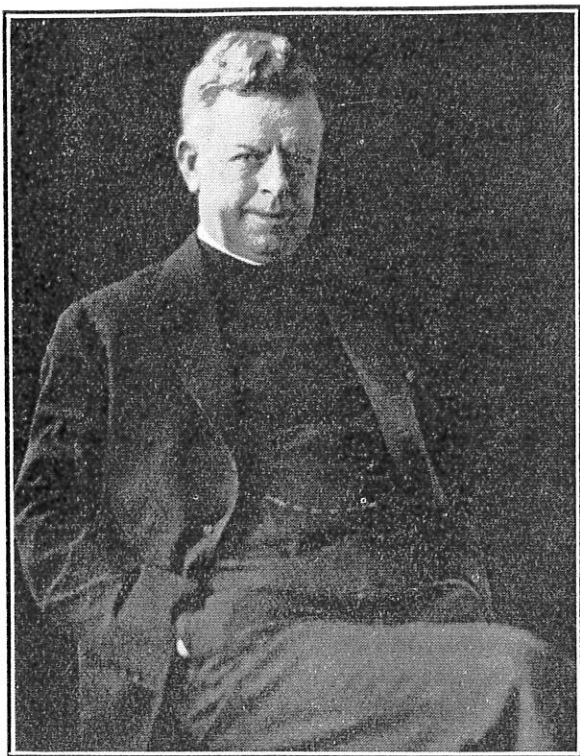


REV. HENRY J. SIMPSON

February 1, 1911, the Reverend Henry J. Simpson entered upon his incumbency. The growing need of a larger church building was now becoming acute and the outstanding feature of the next few years was the fulfilment of this need. Never a rich parish, St. Paul's found it difficult to finance a suitable building, and so the final plans and their development into an actual structure were the work of the rector. A talented artist with an engineer's technical training, Mr. Simpson had only to turn to his European sketch-books to find the details which he worked into the design of the building.

During these years, Mr. Simpson also made his lasting mark upon the community at large. He was a member of that small group of citizens who successfully accomplished the pioneering work of organization and public education culminating in the Lansing Social Service Bureau.

Mr. Simpson, so successful in both church building and community building left the parish in 1916 to accept a diocesan position. The richness of his character was well described, at the first parish meeting held under his successor, when Bishop Williams referred to him as, "that godly man and Christian gentleman, Henry Jerome Simpson."



REV. JAMES M. COLLINS

During the troubled years, 1914-1918, of our participation in the World War, the Reverend James M. Collins was Rector of St. Paul's. Since all forces must necessarily be directed toward the needs of the national crisis, parish work was limited to an effort to lose no ground gained rather than to making new advances. Mr. Collins is distinguished in the memory of his former parishioners by the keen aesthetic sense which made his services a combination of rare spiritual beauty and inspiration, and by the fine intellectual equipment which he brought to discussions of religious thought. A delightful side of Mr. Collins was shown in his work with children. He carried on a well-organized and successful church school and developed the first children's choir. In 1916, Mr. Collins accepted a call to become Rector of the Church of the Atonement in Philadelphia.

In the same year, the Reverend Virgil Boyer began his work in the parish. With rare intellectual gifts and an unusual ability to quietly and unobtrusively effect a splendid organization, Mr. Boyer enabled St. Paul's to take long steps forward. The Woman's Guild, always a most powerful force, was strengthened and extended. The business women affiliated with St. Paul's were brought into the circle of workers in the vigorous and



REV. VIRGIL BOYER

efficient St. Catherine's Guild. The young people were organized into a branch of the Episcopal Young People's Association. The church school made steady progress and was assured of a permanent advance when Mr. Boyer succeeded in adding the trained mind and devoted zeal of Mr. K. G. Smith to its leadership.

In the first years of his ministry, Mr. Boyer, with the able co-operation of the leaders of the Woman's Guild, welded the social activities of the parish into a unified force so strong as to leave no doubt of either the need or the possibility of a new guild hall. The old wooden structure which had been the parish church for forty years was still very dear to the hearts of those who had worshipped in it. Happily it was possible to use it as the core of the new structure and so a modern and spacious Guild Hall was built and furnished in 1922. This physical equipment which has made possible and easy the further growth of the parish and its organizations stands as the material evidence of Mr. Boyer's strength.

The Reverend Mr. Boyer's death in 1926 brought to a close the longest rectorship in the history of St. Paul's Church. For nearly six months longer his skillful leadership held sway as the parish, for probably the first time, lost no ground during the interval without a leader and was taken over by his successor as a substantial structure upon which he could continue to build without having to first repair the foundations.

Mr. Boyer's successes as an executive are less important than the commemoration of his more spiritual achievements. His intellectual distinction and his strength of character were widely felt outside the parish as well as in it, and the lapse of years has not dimmed the luster of the quality of friendship in which he excelled. Modest to the extent of self-effacement, he has left a record of countless acts of generosity both of material aid and



REV. ERIC M. TASMAN

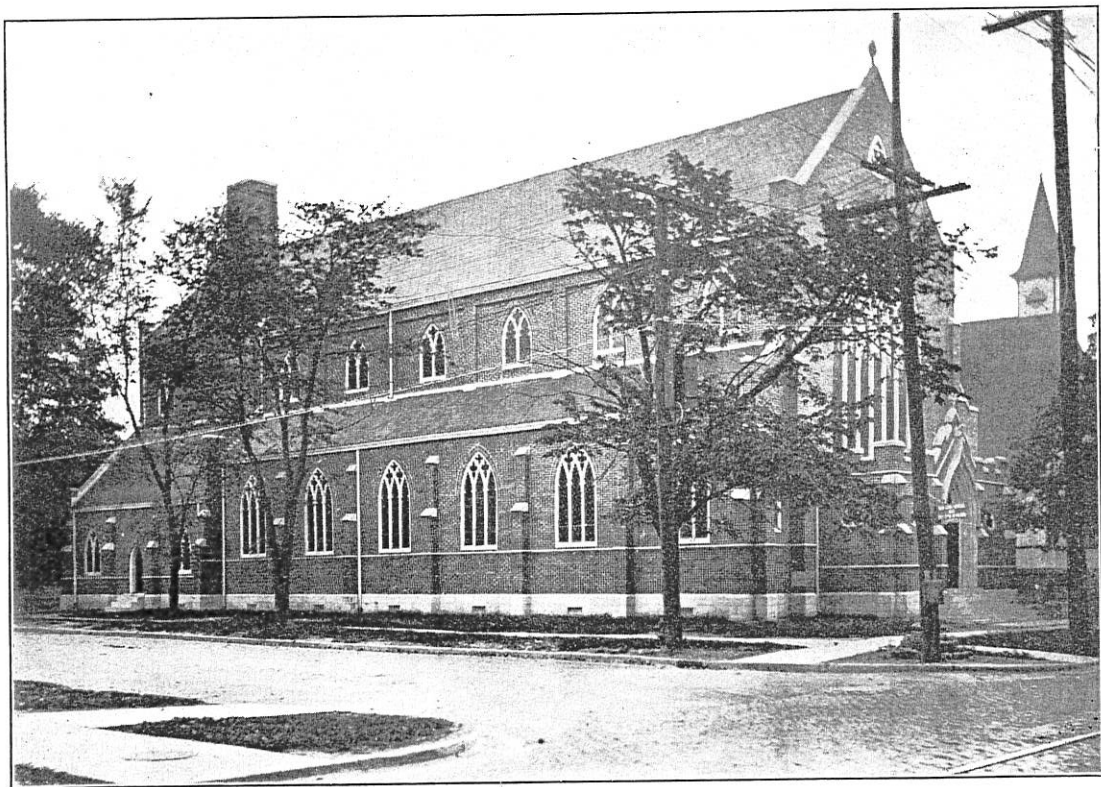
personal service which slowly comes to light as friends and acquaintances recall his many faceted and still vivid personality.

December 4, 1926, the Reverend Eric M. Tasman became Rector of St. Paul's. His analytic study of the conditions as he found them quickly revealed the salient point toward which future expansion and development must be directed—the work with children and young people.

Mr. Tasman was successful in awakening the parish to the need of a trained and paid worker who should be able to bring this important parish activity to the level of efficiency reached in other parishes and in sister religious bodies. Miss Joan Grassly and Mrs. Charles T. Lawton successively undertook this responsibility and the present well-organized and graded Church-school, overflowing the quarters assigned to it, attests their success.

Every kind of organization today is alive to the importance of enlisting junior workers in order that it may continue its existence. The entrance of St. Paul's parish into the last quarter of its first century of ministry to the spiritual life of its communicants, and of its community, is bright with promise because it can offer rich and stimulating opportunities for training, service, and worship to every age from the youngest to the oldest.







INTERIOR OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCH