

CELEBRATING **St. Paul's is Celebrating its 125th Anniversary Celebration**

October 8, 2023

In preparation, Ron Fritze and Beth Hornish are leading us through our history in preparation for this grand celebration.

Anyone wishing to participate in its planning may contact Beth or Ron!

ST PAUL'S GET ITS FIRST BETH-EL

Praise the Lord!
Praise the name of the Lord, give praise,
O Servants of the Lord,
who stand in the house of the Lord,
in the courts of the house of our God.

Psalm 135, vs. 1-2

After the St. Paul's congregation was founded in 1898 with twenty-five charter members, it began to grow. The names of some people serving on the earliest committees of the church were not on the list of the twenty-five charter members. Clearly new members were joining St. Paul's. Growing membership meant meetings for services in the homes of members were becoming increasingly cramped. The need for a church building was becoming indisputably obvious. On 6 November 1900, the congregational president George Feyerabed appointed a building committee consisting of Ben Scheider along with Heinrich Papenburg, the secretary of the congregation, and Jacob Voge, the treasurer. After conducting several studies, the committee presented their findings to the voters' meeting on 6 January 1901. At that point, another committee was formed to determine how a building could be acquired. Ben Scheider continued on the new committee and was joined by Louis Ellner, the new congregational treasurer and Max Mittweide. The second committee quickly identified an existing church building that was available for purchase. It was a Congregational Church located on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Sherman Street. It belonged to The Congregational Church's Mission Organization of New York. That church was built in 1880 when the national Congregational Church was hoping to plant a new church in Decatur. That effort failed and the church was empty and unused.



At that time, the area around the church building was known as Albany or New Decatur and so was not part of the city of Decatur. That area was located along Sixth Avenue and the

streets of Sherman, Grant, and Johnson among others was a developing residential area. At the time, there was an influx of people from the Northeast into the

Decatur area which explains how streets ended up being named after Grant and Sherman even though it was located in a deep South town. It also meant that the German immigrants of St. Paul's were not the only strangers in a strange land. Most of the homes on Sherman Street date from the late 1890s to the 1920s. Photos of the church show there was a lot of undeveloped land around it. So as St. Paul's grew so did the neighborhood.

On 24 February 1901, the congregation of St. Paul's in a meeting with twelve members present unanimously voted to purchase the Congregational Church. The purchase price was \$1600. St. Paul's made a \$200 down payment with an annual payment of \$100 at 5% interest. Although this purchase price for the church building might seem ridiculously low to people living in the early 21st century, it is important to remember that wages were similarly small. St. Paul's initially paid its first pastor W. G. Hussmann \$450 a year which was quickly increased to \$600 a year. The members of the congregation were probably earning similar salaries. Railroad workers were relatively well paid compared with other workers. Their job security was also more stable and they had to contend with fewer layoffs. Still, the commitment and expectation of shown growth by St. Paul's members reflects their bold and faithful view of the future.

The new church property included parsonage right next to it. Pastor Hussmann held a school there. The current proud owner of this historic building told us that the house initially had a large room for the school's classroom. Remember, this was still an era where one-room schoolhouses were common. The parsonage was renovated later to divide the large classroom into more homey smaller rooms as the school was shutdown after the departure of Hussmann. This church on Sherman Street would be the home for St. Paul's for the next approximately sixty years. In fact, St. Paul's first home still survives and is now used by the Vintage Faith non-denominational church.

Ron Fritze and Beth Hornish



*What year was this picture taken? Can you name any faces?
Submit your answers to the Church Office mailbox!*