

## CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, PALMYRA 1884

The history of Christ Church, Palmyra, is really a story that travels down two roads which meet and become one. There is the story of the building and the story of the congregation. The one precedes the other by a full quarter of a century.

The first cornerstone for this church building was laid around 1859 at the original site, which was the corner of Broad and Main Street in Riverton. (This is the corner where, in 1976, Klipples Bakery stands.) It had been constructed by the congregation of the Christ Episcopal Church of Riverton, and served them faithfully over the years.

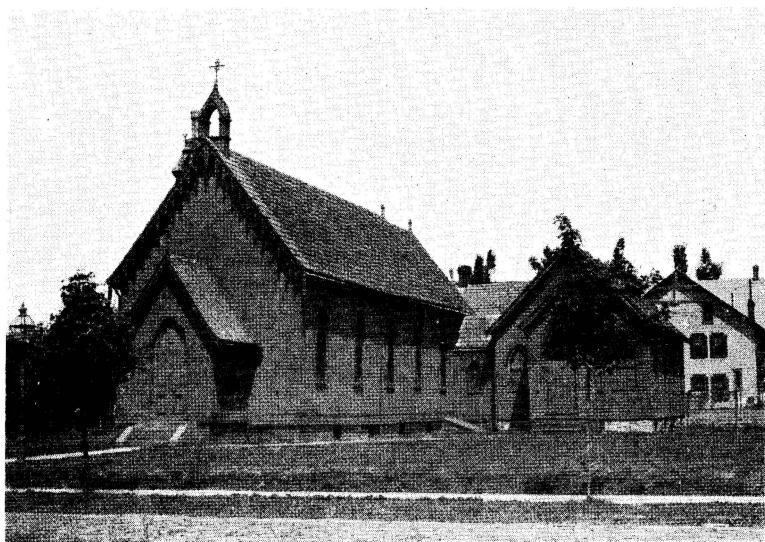
In 1871 it was decided that the church should be moved to a more central location. The town was growing and the area around Broad and Main was becoming congested. The railroad schedule was not always compatible with the worship schedule, and the noise of the trains was rather bothersome. So after having considered the matter prayerfully and practically, it was decided the best course of action was to move the church — actually, physically, pick it up and move it from one spot to another. Christ Church took its first journey from the corner of Broad and Main, to the corner of Fourth and Main.

Now, jumping forward in time to October 20, 1884, a meeting was held in Wallace's Hall in Palmyra, to organize a mission parish for the Episcopal faithful in Palmyra. The meeting was held with the encouragement of and under the authority of the Right Reverend John Scarborough who was the Bishop of New Jersey. The first meeting of the Sunday School was opened on October 26th by the Reverend Dr. H. Hastings Weld of Riverton and Miss Viola A. Pyne was appointed superintendent.

A few months before this Christ Church, Riverton had, in July, seen the completion of their new church building. It was decided, therefore, to turn the old Christ Church building, constructed in 1859, over to the congregation in Palmyra for their use.

This church building, which had taken its first trip in 1871, was moving again, this time from Riverton to Palmyra. It can truly be said that in this instance not only were the people coming to the House of the Lord, the House of the Lord was going to the people.

The transfer was begun in December, 1884. Since it took 40 days for the journey to be completed, and since the records indicate that during that time there were only sixteen days on which work could actually proceed, it must have been a harsh winter.



"Christ Episcopal Church, Palmyra, shown in 1909."

The site on Parry Avenue to which the church was being transferred was ready and waiting. Land had been donated for this purpose by Mr. W. E. Morgan, one of the participants at the preliminary meetings and an early resident of Palmyra. By the end of January the church was in place, having successfully withstood its second major move in twenty-five years. It stands in the same spot today, welcoming those who come to worship. The distinction of being the oldest ecclesiastical structures in this vicinity which have remained in constant use from the time of construction to this our bicentennial year is shared by Christ Church, Palmyra, and the Westfield Friends Meeting House.

The congregation of Christ Episcopal, Riverton, not only gave the congregation of Christ Episcopal, Palmyra, a church, they gave them their name, the furniture for the building, the Communion Vessels and the bell which hangs over the Parish Hall door. This bell had been cast in England in 1860 and so it too, had traveled a long distance until it found its resting place in Palmyra.

It was a joyful and thankful group who came together for the re-dedication of the church building on May 8, 1885. The Right Rev. John Scarborough officiated at the ceremony which gave the Palmyra Parish its own place of worship.

Among the other members of the clergy present on this auspicious occasion were the Rev. Dr. George M. Hills, and the Right Rev. H. Hastings Weld of Riverton, as well as the Rev. R. G. Moses, Rev. T. M. Reilly, Rev. J. R. Land. The Right Rev. Weld was to serve as the new congregation's first Pastor.

As the clergy moved up the aisle, the Riverton choir, who had come to sing for the ceremony, sang "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord." The records available do not mention whether or not one of the hymns chosen for use on this day was "How Firm A Foundation," but in light of the past movement of Christ Church, it would have indeed been a most appropriate choice. One year later the church rolls showed the membership to be one hundred people.

Churches are far more than buildings and bells, programs and projects. They are people, dedicated, faithful, striving together, leaning upon one another, supporting each other, studying, praying, worshipping together, all with the hope of coming closer to God.

Christ Church was blessed with a congregation who did all these things, and the benefits to the members and to the church itself were many and varied. By the early part of the nineteen hundreds, substantial advancements had been made in many years. The Sunday School mortgage had been paid off, the mortgage on the Rectory had been substantially reduced. A pipe organ valued at \$500 had been installed.

The St. Mary's and Saint Agnes Guilds had rendered valuable assistance. Memorial pieces, including sanctuary lamps, brass altar rail candlesticks, and gifts which included a chalice, altar cross, eucharistic lights, altar hangings, processional cross, altar service books, vestments, baptismal ewer, crucifix and lectern Bible, were all in the church, in use and adding their beauty to the services.

Up to the present time there have been twenty-one Rectors at Christ Episcopal Church. Two members have entered the service of the Lord. The Rev. Elworth Stone is currently serving as Rector of the Church of our Savior, in Pennsgrove, New Jersey. The Rev. Fred Miller was ordained on October 25, 1975, and is now serving as an Assistant at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Westfield, New Jersey.

The St. Agnes Guild continues to contribute to the life of the church. Its members are active in many different endeavors. They regularly contribute funds to the Tri-borough Head Start Program. On the second Tuesday of each month, the women of the congregation, many of whom are members of the St. Agnes Guild, serve a luncheon to the public that is well attended and actually a traditional meeting place. Many people have come to know and look forward to the good food served from 11:30 till 1:00, most especially the homemade desserts.

Every year in late May or early June there is a church picnic, which is as much a family day now as it has always been in the past. There are all the traditional games and competitions, and the food is plentiful and especially good when eaten in the open air with friends and loved ones.

Improvements and maintenance of the building are a constant concern. Back in 1945, some outside renovation was done. The paint had peeled in one section and while a torch was being used to burn away what was left so the new covering would bond more securely, some material caught fire. Before the blaze could be put out, the back wall of the church had been burned and the beautiful round "Rose Window" over the altar that had for so long lent its loveliness to the structure, had been destroyed.

Inside the church things are much the same as they have always been, except for the continuing additions of those objects and furnishings that add to the beauty of the

small, warm sanctuary. The latest additions are a free standing altar, donated by Mr. and Mrs. Sam Handle, long time members, in loving memory of Mrs. Handle's mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Watson, and a table that holds the Tabernacle in which the Consecrated Sacraments are held in reserve. The table is a memorial to the late Mrs. Olaf Fleisher, a long time, faithful member of the church.

Yet another way in which the members serve is in the Acolytes' Guild. This is comprised of lay people who assist the Priest. The boys and girls of high school age have their special program also. Their group is called the Episcopal Young Churchmen, and they meet once a week for fellowship, study and recreational purposes. They have advisors who aid them in their activities and assist them in whatever ways they can. The facilities of the building are also utilized by both a Brownie and a Girl Scout troop.

Each year the community is invited to join the congregation at the Church Bazaar, sponsored and put on by the church women. There are all sorts of things offered for sale on Bazaar Day — food, hand-made specialty items, White Elephants, and used books. The Bazaar is a long-standing tradition that everyone anticipates with much pleasure.

Christ Episcopal has a small choir of six members who add the fine blending of their voices to the services with their gift of song. The church has a fine pipe organ which also brings the beauty of music to the people. The church organist is Mr. Donald Greth.

Christ Church is often referred to as a family church and this is indeed the case. They gratefully count among their membership any number of people who have grown up in the congregation and remained members for a very extended number of years. The oldest active member is Mrs. Mary Stanton who observed her nintieth birthday on March 7, 1976. The church members honored Mrs. Stanton with a party and reception on her birthday. She is a most treasured and loved member.

It would be impossible to name all those who have worshiped at Christ Episcopal for long periods of time. One of the names that come most readily to mind is Stone. Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Stone, Sr., whose son is now Rector at the Church of our Savior in Pennsgrove, N.J., have worshiped at Christ Church for the past fifty years. Mr. James Hughes, who for forty-two years was a teacher at Palmyra High School, is another who is nearing the half century mark. Mr. Hughes has been in attendance for forty-six years, and during that time has served as a Vestryman, Junior and Senior Warden.

Christ Episcopal, Palmyra, celebrated its 90th year as a congregation in November of 1975. The church rolls show that there are one hundred and seventeen regular members and two hundred and thirty baptised members. There are forty-six pupils in the Sunday School which is under the Superintendency of Mrs. Donald Given.

The church and its people have moved forward and been active in community work and contributed significantly in many different projects. Father W. Kenneth Gorman, who before his recent departure was a member of the Board of the Triborough Community Center, led the community CROP Walk in November, 1974. This walk raised over \$5,000 to help feed the hungry people of the world.

The Cinnaminson-Palmyra-Riverton Council of Churches has benefited greatly by having among its members Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Caruso and Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Handle who have served as representatives of Christ Episcopal. Joe Caruso served as president between 1973 and 1975. Sam Handle continues as treasurer in 1976.

At this time the membership is looking forward to the arrival of Father Hugh McGlashon, Jr., who will be arriving in September and will be the twenty-second Rector.

Even as it has been in the past, while the members of Christ Episcopal have been following the ways of the Lord in the present and striving to do that which He would ask of them, they are preparing themselves for the future, holding themselves ready to obey His will in whatever lies ahead.

The church bell, cast in England one hundred and sixteen years ago, still calls the faithful to worship on the Sabbath. In the years to come, those who enter into this place, who heed the call, will find within this house of worship the comforting warmth and traditions of the past mingled with the work of the here and now, and they will ready themselves for the challenges of the unknown future. As they walked in the past with the Lord in His chosen way, so too will they step forward in trust and dedication to meet what is to come, secure in the knowledge that God Endureth to All Generations.

