

History of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

The Original St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

Much of this information was taken from the History of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Louisville, Kentucky written by Ann E. Miller, a parishioner.

1839 - John & Helen Bullitt Massie Martin deed one acre at Gilman's Point for St. Matthew's Church.

Helen Bullitt Massie Martin and her husband John were among those families, and on May 8, 1839 they deeded one acre for the purpose of building a church. The Vestry, previously appointed by Bishop Benjamin Bosworth Smith, receiving this deed at the office of the Jefferson County Clerk, consisted of Robert M. Smith, Davis S. Chambers, William L. Thompson, James Brown, and John Brengman. The land (located at Westport Road at St. Matthews Avenue, eleven years before the railroad was built) did have a caveat included. The deed specifically stated that the property was to be used exclusively for the benefit of the Protestant Episcopal Church as a place of Christian worship; to be used for no other purpose and that it always be devoted to the "pious purpose of providing a place of worship for Episcopalians". Not to be sold if it ceased to be used as a church for five or more years, the property would be reverted to the Martins or their heirs. This location was what was known as Gilman's Point, presumably named for the Gilman Tavern, a way station between Louisville and Frankfort. It appears that the congregation and Vestry were in place before the deed had actually been signed by the Martins.

1839 - The Rev. Charles H. Page is Rector.

In June 13, 1839, at the 11th Convention of the Diocese which was held at Calvary Church, Smithland, a tiny community on the Ohio River about 200 miles southwest of Louisville, Bishop Smith reported that "St. Matthew's parish, located five miles east of the city of Louisville had erected 'a neat little church edifice' which was consecrated May 11, 1839. The Vestry called the Rev. Charles H. Page of Virginia as its Rector. Father Page reported a "neat and commodious church has been erected and consecrated to the worship of God and the prospect of rearing a good congregation is flattering."

1846 - The Rev. R. M. Chapman becomes Rector.

In 1846, Mr. Page moved to Indiana and the Rev. R. M. Chapman of Massachusetts came to officiate at St. Matthew's. He reported that in 1849 the Sunday school was not doing well due to the irregular attendance of—not the children, but the teachers! By the following year, the Diocesan Journal shows the Rev. Chapman to be "residing in Louisville," but lists no report for the St. Matthew's Church. The years 1852-53 show the church to be vacant.

1850 - St. Matthews, Kentucky is named after St. Matthew's Episcopal Church.

By 1840, the area now known as the City of St. Matthew's was known as Gilman's Point, after local tavern owner Daniel Gilman. The name St. Matthews emerged in 1850, after the area's first church, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church. It became official in 1851 when a newly opened post office adopted the name. The City of St. Matthews was not actually incorporated until 1950.

1854 - The Rev. George Beckett becomes Rector

In February 1854, the Rev. George Beckett came to St. Matthew's Church from Grace Church, Hopkinsville, KY. He reported to the convention that spring that the Sunday School had grown to fifty children. While at Grace Church, the Rev. Mr. Beckett operated a school for young ladies. He initiated another one in Louisville, and again when he moved to Tennessee. He was thirty-three years old when he and his wife, Ann, arrived at St. Matthew's. He guided the church through a prosperous period when in 1855 there were six teachers, thirty-six scholars, and thirty colored scholars. In 1859, the Protestant Episcopal Orphan Asylum (eventually to become part of the Home for the Innocents) reported to the convention that "St. Matthew's parish is the only congregation in the Diocese that ever aided our work."

1858 - Church burns to the ground. Martin gives two more acres to church.

The original church was burned to the ground around 1858, but was soon rebuilt. Many members contributed money, materials, and labor—much as the present day commitment of time, treasure, and talent in stewardship. The same Helen Bullitt Massie Martin, and then Key, who had donated the original acre for the first building, gave an additional two acres, as well as \$4000. Theodore Brown gave \$300 and other contributors included Joshua Bullitt, Dr. Henry Chenoweth, Richard Ten Broeck, Mrs. L. L. Dorsey, Miss Mary Anderson (who was later to marry Meriwether Lewis Clark, grandson of the explorer, in the new St. Matthew's Church, Mrs. Floyd, and Thomas W. Bullitt, who incidentally rode with John Hunt Morgan's 2nd Kentucky Cavalry during the Civil War. Many of these communicants' descendants' have been leaders in the growth of Jefferson County for generations and their names mark geographic points throughout the county.

1870 - First service conducted by the Rev. William Perkins in rebuilt church.

The new building was a Gothic board and batten structure, designed by the architect W. H. Redin who was paid \$598.00 by Mrs. Key. The Rev. William Perkins conducted the first service on October 2, 1870.

1871 - The Rev. Meade Nelson becomes Rector.

Services continued until the Rev. Meade Nelson of Virginia arrived in June, 1871. On June 25, 1871, the Rt. Rev. George David Cummins, Asst. Bishop of Kentucky, consecrated St. Matthew's new church, assisted by the Rev. Dr. Perkins, the Rev. Messrs. Page and Halliken of the Kentucky Diocese, plus the Rev. Mr. Matlack of Pennsylvania, and the Rev. Mr. Thome of Connecticut. A most impressive array of clergy to launch this "country church."

1873 - 1906 - Original St. Matthew's Episcopal Church struggles, never recovering from the fire in 1858.

In 1873 the St. Matthew's church property was valued at \$12,000.00 with 12 communicants. It seems the church, despite the new building with space for 250 members, had only a few good years under Father Nelson. By 1876 there was a vacancy in the pulpit with the Diocese reporting only four families and "whole number of souls, 29." By 1877, the Diocesan Journal reported "the church and rectory are sadly out of repair. The rectory is now vacant, with no probability of renting it. She (the church) is struggling for existence. The Rev. Mr. Flowers has been officiating for us most of the winter and spring, also the Rev. Mr. Leacock has very kindly volunteered his services." The little church continued to struggle, to no apparent avail. It had become a mission and by the turn of the 20th Century, a Rev. C. L. Pindar, who was trying to keep her functioning, appeared to be losing out to the newly established St. Mark's Church in Crescent Hill. In 1906, the Rev. Mr. Pindar conducted twelve services up to May 1. He died in November of that year, but his widow and daughter continued occupying the rectory for several years afterward. In the 1950s the rectory was used as the St. Matthews City Hall. Eventually, it was used for a practice fire supervised by the St. Matthews Fire Department.

1913 - The property of the original St. Matthew's Episcopal Church is sold.

In 1912, a lawsuit was brought to return the property of the now St. Matthew's mission to the heirs of Mrs. Helen Key. Sadly, the Rev. Robert L. McCready of St. Mark's, with eighteen others, tried valiantly to keep St. Matthew's alive, holding four services and two business meetings there despite its dilapidated condition. However, based on the stipulations of the original deed, the Circuit Court Commissioner, Eustace L. Williams, sold the property at the courthouse door to Ida Staebler for \$2340.00 in February, 1913.