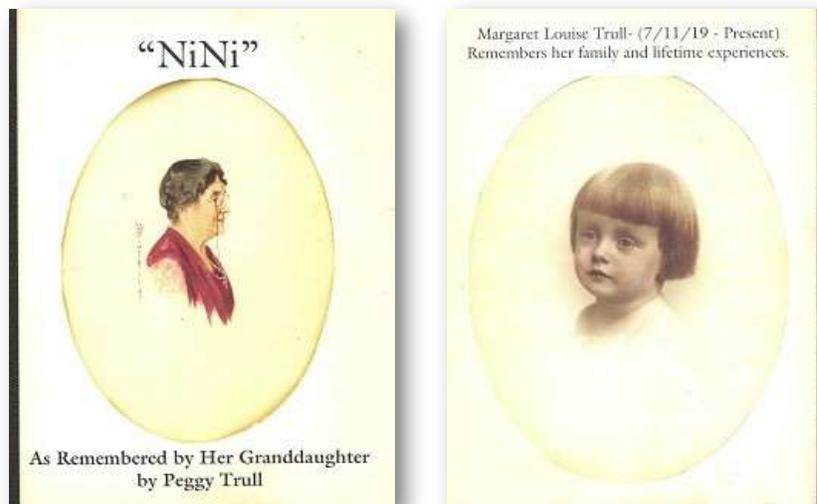


Seventy-Five Years of Challenges and Transitions

*A Presentation by Allen Cronenberg on behalf of the Parish Archives and History Committee
for the Sunday Forum on Stewardship, October 24, 2021*

(Introductory remarks about the outgrowth of this presentation from an Adult Forum program that was scrubbed by the Covid pandemic in the spring of 2020. That program was to look at the enormous changes St. Matthew's has undergone over the years. The idea germinated from a small memoir in the Archives written by Peggy Trull titled *Nini*. What, we wondered, was the arc of Peggy's life but also that of St. Matthew's.)



Memoir by Margaret Trull – St. Matthew's Parish Archives

St. Matthew's in 1945

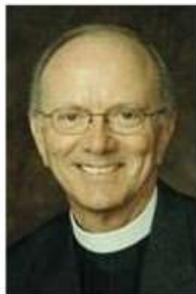
Imagine, for a moment, a church without rooms for Sunday School but where classes meet in pews scattered around the sanctuary and in the balcony. There is no nursery or a place to gather for coffee after church or to have dinners or a kitchen to prepare meals? Or the lack of proper office space for the rector, a part-time secretary and—do you remember?—the mimeograph machine? What about a church in which women were not allowed to read the lessons or prayers

or assist at the communion rail or to comfort the sick as ordained ministers? Or girls processing as acolytes? What about a church whose vestry is composed of men from only a handful of families and who serve year after year, one for thirty-three years, another who retires as Senior Warden in 1957 after joining the vestry as a young man in 1908? How many of you would volunteer to serve on a vestry for fifty years? Can you imagine a church that feels no special obligation to perform good works in the community or to welcome warmly the less privileged to join in worship? Imagine a mother having to hurriedly cross the road to take her child to go potty in the rectory?

Well, that was St. Matthew's seventy-five years ago right after World War II. How things have changed! The following years addressed these and many other challenges and transitions. Change was made possible by the stewardship of the parish—not only financially through pledges and bequests, but through prayerful, generous service and leadership.

Space Needs

Let's begin by considering the space needs for St. Matthew's. To paraphrase the words of Charles Fulton, the former head of the Episcopal Church Building Fund: "church buildings can be the cathedral of evangelism."



The Reverend Charles N. Fulton III
Director of Congregational Development, President
of the Episcopal Building Fund

***“Church buildings
can be the
cathedral of
evangelism”***

Even before World War II the need for a parish house to provide office space, education and fellowship was recognized. At the annual meeting in early 1941 the rector, Jim Beckwith, reported: “The need of a Parish house is very great. We want an aggressive educational program for every member of the Church.”



The Rev. James D. Beckwith
Rector, 1938-1941

Our Parish has a few consecrated people who see the need of Church School education. They are doing more than their share. They are faced with the almost impossible situation of adjusting a course designed for an individual class room to a pew in the open Church. The need of a Parish house is very great. We want an aggressive educational program for every member of the Church.

Remarks by the Rev. James Beckwith (Rector 1938-1941) at the congregational meeting held Jan. 12, 1941

America’s entry into the war, of course, nipped that dream in the bud. (A footnote to the Jim Beckwith ministry. When he arrived at St. Matthew’s in 1938 he was a bachelor. At his ordination in Clinton, N.C. in 1936 a lovely member of the choir sang a solo. He was smitten and a long-distance courtship ensued. A month after he arrived at St. Matthew’s the couple married.)

The death of former parishioner Elizabeth Gwynn Hayden in 1945 and her will’s very generous bequest (roughly \$177,000 or roughly 2.5 million today) to St. Matthew’s enabled the vestry and congregation to move forward. (Incidentally, the bequest included proceeds from the sale of her house in Clearwater, Florida, whose value was recently estimated at \$1.25 million, and two chests of silver, as well.)

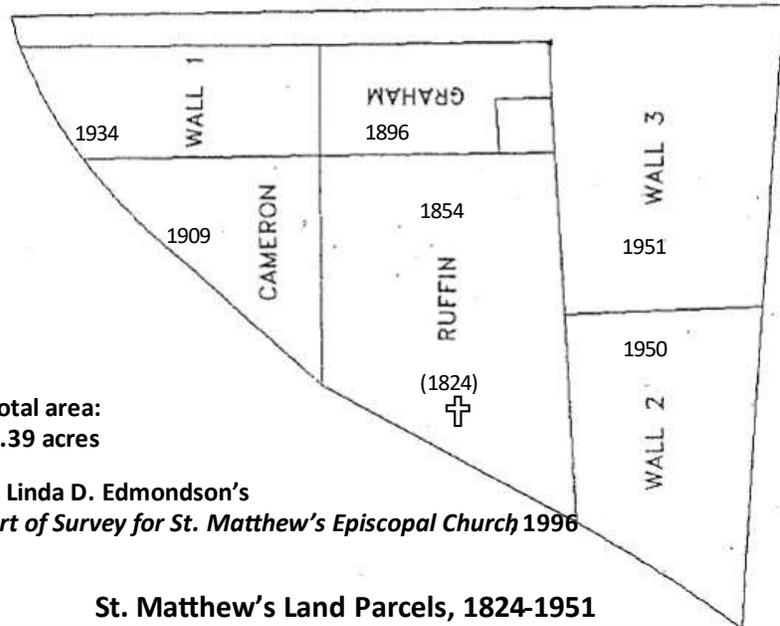


Elizabeth Gwynn Hayden, 1861-1945

Treasurer Oscar Parsley pointed out that in order to proceed we needed more land.
 By 1951 purchase of two adjacent tracts of land from Miss Rebecca Wall was finalized.



Oscar Grant Parsley



**Total area:
5.39 acres**

**From Linda D. Edmondson's
Report of Survey for St. Matthew's Episcopal Church 1996**

St. Matthew's Land Parcels, 1824-1951

Construction of a parish house was completed in 1957.



Original appearance of St. Matthew's Parish House before 1999 renovation and expansion

This new building named for Mrs. Hayden greatly altered the life of St. Matthew's. It provided rooms for religious education, a nursery, office space, a kitchen and a room for fellowship. An early use of the Hayden Building was a bazaar that was the forerunner of today's FeST.



**The Rev.
Jerry Fisher
Rector, 1984-1989**

As the congregation grew in size by the late 1980s, a new rector--Jerry Fisher—impatiently pushed for the construction of a new parish house. Failure to realistically calculate the financial capacity or to cultivate stewardship proved divisive and doomed the project.



In the end, the only achievement was the building of an ill-fated pavilion that would be bulldozed after Fisher's departure.



(A former parish wit remarked that the pavilion could only be used comfortably for about three weeks out of the year—when it was not too cold, not too hot and when there weren't a lot of mosquitos.)

His successor, Brooks Graebner, proved to be far more diplomatic and strategic. Many of you witnessed and contributed in many ways to the accomplishments of the next twenty-seven years. Overcoming considerable opposition—and today we wonder what the fuss was about—the first achievement was the construction of a handicap ramp to the church.



(In the late 20th century the national Episcopal Church began encouraging parishes to make their spaces accessible to people with disabilities—from walking, to hearing, to low vision. Perhaps scriptural authority is found in Isaiah: “Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low....”)

Perhaps an added impetus for a new Parish House was the need for more room for Brooks’ books!



The construction of a new parish house and renovations to the Hayden Building were completed in 2000.



Restorations of the 1883 Hook & Hastings organ, the bell, and the Good Shepherd window followed.



Also, the sanctuary restoration, new roof and steeple cross, the improved walkways in the churchyard, dedication of a beautiful sacred memorial garden,



**Sanctuary
Renovation!**



New Roof!

**New
Steeple
Cross!**



**Churchyard
Walkways!**



**Memorial
Garden!**

and, most recently, the addition of a beautiful education building and remodeling of the Hayden Building.



Education Building

Each of these steps enhanced worship, Christian education, social ministry, more functional administrative space and, our committee thankfully adds, adequate space for a real archives.

**Parish
Archives**



Transitions in gender issues and parish governance in the seventies and eighties were monumental.

The vestry needed reform. Some people have remarked that St. Matthew's resembled a private chapel for a small number of families. Vestries were habitually composed of males from those families. A large pool of untapped resource for vestry service was, of course, the women of the parish whose roles had been largely confined to the Altar Guild, ECW and preparing meals for fellowship dinners.

**The Rev.
Lauton W. Petit
Rector, 1954-1980**



Although the rector, Lauton Pettit, reminded parishioners in the mid-1960s that women were also eligible for election to the vestry under canon law that didn't happen at St. Matthew's for another seven years. In 1972 the plain-spoken Elizabeth Collins, better known as Boo, was elected to the vestry. I rather doubt Boo was a radical feminist, but the sixties and seventies were decades in which the women's rights movement gained traction. I suspect that Boo's leadership as a lieutenant in the Women's Army Corps in the Pacific during the World War II had something to do with developing her impatience over constraints on women in church leadership. Following Boo many women have been elected to the vestry. I think I counted six women on the present vestry.

Other expanded stewardship roles for women in the church came with their appointment as lay readers, chalice bearers and representatives to diocesan conventions. The breakthrough occurred in the early 1980s when Bill Price appointed Lucile Dula and four other women as lay readers.

June 22, 1981

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Mr. Price appointed five new Lay Readers: (to assist the current ones) Debbie Lominec, Lucille Dula, Norma Cady, Janet Gunn, Victoria Faherty. Ed Cady, Arthur Plambeck and Edna Lunn are current Lay Readers. Also Ted Moore and Marie Atwell are technically Lay-Readers but their main function is Chalice Bearer.

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Also Ted Moore and Marie Atwell are technically Lay-Readers, but their main function is Chalice Bearer.

Vestry Minutes, 1955-1984, p. 315

And we find his endorsement of the first woman chalice-bearer noted in the vestry minutes of May 1981:

May 25, 1981

Mr. Price made other reports: The new Chalice Bearer, Marie Atwell had served one Sunday and we were happy to have her in this role. Jack Gilbert and Jane Brega have accepted the O.C.I.M. appointment. Their first project will be to work on wheels. The C.R.O.P. walk was a success.

Mr. Price made other reports: The new Chalice-Bearer, Marie Atwell had served one Sunday and we were happy to have her in this role ...

Vestry Minutes, 1955- 1984, p. 311

The first woman to serve as Senior Warden was Margaret Trull, familiarly called Peggy, who was a close friend of Boo and who had also served in the WACs as a captain and worked as a professional in later years. Their friendship that was formed in the Pacific was one that endured for the remainder of their lives.



Boo & Peggy in front of their quarters on Dutch island of Biak, 1944



Peggy & Boo Venice, Italy, 1964

(Here they are seen on the Pacific Island of Biak during World War II and many years later in Saint Mark's Square in Venice on one of their several travels.) Peggy was elected Senior Warden in 1989. I didn't remember off the top of my head how many women have been Senior Wardens, but Elaine produced a slide showing there have been thirteen women and thirteen men Senior Wardens since Peggy's time.

Year	Senior Warden
1989	Margaret Trull
1990	Margaret Luth
1991	Arthur Plambeck
1992	Judy Cox
1993	Karen Ireland
1994	Beverly Webb
1995	Frank Williams
1996	Steven Burke
1997-1999	Karen Ireland
2000	Betty Wolfe
2001	Kenneth Garrison
2002	Charles Murphy
2003-2004	Richard (Rick) Brewer
2005	Gerald (Jerry) Workman
2006	William (Bill) Kodros
2007	Ben Scaggs
2008-2009	Julia Workman
2010	Richard Hicks
2011-2012	Suzanne Maupin
2013	Richard (Rick) Brewer
2014	Spencer Weig
2015	Chris Peterson
2016	Helen Conrad
2017-2018	Marion Youngblood
2019-2020	Jehanne Gheith
2021	Elizabeth Hays

**Senior Wardens
1989-2021:
13 women & and 13 men**

Governance Reform

Procedures for election of vestries took a radical turn in 1973. These changes brought tectonic changes to the composition of vestries. It was a long-serving vestryman who proposed vestry members should be elected for three-year, staggered terms. Staggering terms ensured vestries would always have seasoned members with one or two years of experience as well as new blood. Two years later, a further provision limited vestry members to two consecutive three-year terms. This guaranteed even more new voices and a more representative vestry.



**The Rev.
William P. Price
Rector 1980-1983**

William Price’s ministry in the early 1980s was brief but pivotal for parish management. He encouraged improved business practices. The vestry approved his proposal for a two-part budget: one for operating expenses and the other for capital improvements. The vestry hailed this as a “significant step in the life of the church.” More recently, the operating budget has been further refined into a core budget and discretionary spending.

In the midst of important and draining discussions about resolving space issues and attendant worries about fund-raising, Brooks grew concerned that administrative and leadership duties were taking their toll on his pastoral responsibilities. He was also concerned that programming was being neglected. Senior Warden Steven Burke skillfully guided discussion at a special vestry meeting—without Brooks, but with his encouragement—in December 1996 about how to

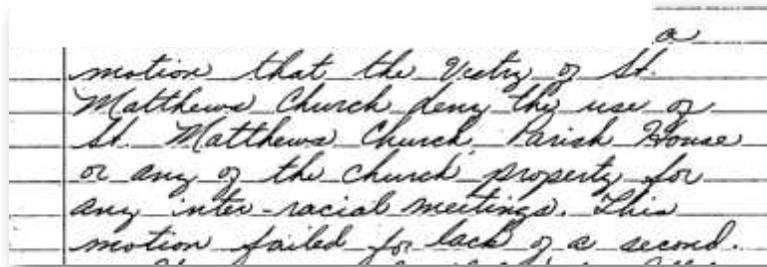
tackle these issues. The result was to formulate a new approach to leadership. Under this new arrangement, the vestry assumed more managerial functions in the parish. From then on, the Senior Warden chaired meetings. Also, more responsibility now fell on the shoulders of committees, their chairs, and other parish leaders. The development of a statement of Core Values followed. St. Matthew's was becoming more of a program-centered, rather than rector-centered, parish.



Nationally, social issues confronted churches—civil rights and poverty among them.

As for civil rights in the turbulent fifties and sixties, there is little in church records to address the parish's response to race relations as it was then known. But having grown up in eastern North Carolina during the 1950s, I suspect I know the attitudes of most members. I am reasonably confident there were few, if any, flaming integrationists. But, there is one revealing episode, however. When the Hayden Building was completed in 1957 one member of the vestry proposed a policy to deny the use of any church property for "inter-racial meetings." Interestingly, dead silence ensued and the motion died for a lack of a second.

July 15, 1957



a
motion that the Vestry of St.
Matthew's Church deny the use of
St. Matthew's Church Parish House
or any of the Church's property for
any inter-racial meetings. This
motion failed for lack of a second.

... a motion that the Vestry of St. Matthew's Church deny the use of St. Matthew's Church Parish House or any of the church property for any interracial meetings. This motion failed for lack of a second.

Vestry Minutes, 1955-1984, p. 31

More recently, of course, we joined hands with Dickerson Chapel AME Church to hold periodic joint worship services. Our Racial Justice and Reconciliation Committee seeks to educate St. Matthew's on institutional racism and help find ways to combat it. Some members of the committee have joined Orange County Justice United, a force for change partnering with working class families in support of improvements in areas such as housing, education, court fees, and bus service.

In the early eighties, St. Matthew's concern with poverty and other social issues grew. It was the rector William Price who revolutionized involvement in the life of the community. Price and two other Hillsborough ministers got together to do lectionary study of Biblical texts. These study sessions led to a discussion of local problems of hunger and poverty.



In early 1981, three pastors gathered weekly for lectionary study of Biblical texts. Out of these weekly meetings arose discussions about the human needs of Orange County and ultimately, the idea to meet those needs through the united efforts of local congregations.

News of Orange, 2006; 25th anniversary of OCIM

They, in turn, were joined by two other ministers to found Orange Congregations in Mission “to feed the hungry and clothe the naked.” A room in the present OCIM building is named for him. Our current contribution to OCIM, of course, is the monthly collection of cans of beef stew for its pantry. Also, all funds raised by the holiday season FeSTs go to Social Ministries.



FeST!

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James 2:26 ESV “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”

In addition to the traditional ministries of the church Mary Rocap's leadership in founding and nourishing Faith and the Arts (now continuing under the leadership of Kim Powell Cox) has enriched the spiritual life of the parish and community.



Michael Jones & The Mount Vernon Baptist Church Inspirational Choir

Sunday, February 16, 2020
Concert co-sponsored by Faith & the Arts and
the Racial Justice and Reconciliation Committee

Finally,

Other Challenges and Transitions

There have been other challenges and transitions in recent decades which have proved contentious. Examples are: replacing the 1928 Book of Common Prayer in the late 1970s, the ordination of women, the election of a homosexual bishop and the renaming of the parish house. Whether those developments have been embraced or only gracefully accepted are, in my mind at least, acts of stewardship.

Most recently, of course, the COVID pandemic has obviously posed many challenges. We became a virtual parish. Robert and Mary Rocap and, I don't know who else, have done a masterful job of keeping us more or less together through Zoom, rector video chats and informative newsletters. The future is uncertain. What is certain is that this challenge, too, will be met with resilience and thoughtful, prayerful response.

The evolution of St. Matthew's from a rector-based church to a program-based one is perhaps best illustrated by our mission statement setting forth our core values:

St. Matthew's Mission:

“Feeding God's people from the abundance of God's grace”

Based upon our mission statement, we share the following vision for St. Matthew's now and in the Future:

- To welcome all people to share with us in celebrating Christ's Eucharistic feast in the tradition of the Episcopal Church.
- To nurture a multi-generational community through worship, learning, and fellowship.
- To celebrate the gifts of the rich history and heritage of St Matthew's and look to the future in service and fellowship with our Hillsborough community
- To carry the spirit of Christ into the world, both locally and globally, by serving and working in partnership with others.
- To encourage each person's spiritual growth through individual and communal service and ministry.
- To show respect and gratitude for the abundance of God's gifts by caring for God's world and being mindful of the environment in all we do.

Adopted by the Vestry, February 23, 2010