

A Brief History of OSL's Buildings

...by Canon Rev. Richard W. Davies

From the establishment of a military garrison at today's site of Old St. Luke's church, we presume military chaplains in the British army offered occasional worship at the garrison. In 1770 Maj. William Lea registered his King's grant land, which he received for being a part of Gen. Forbes' attack on Ft. Duquesne. Lea and his wife Dorothy were married and established their home in 1774. Their newborn daughter Jane was baptized. Other settlers slowly moved into the Chartiers Valley, including Gen. John Neville and his wife Winifred. These families were members of the Church of England (Anglicans) and again we presume that they utilized their respective homes for Christian devotions and the occasional visit by a clergyman.

THE 1790 FRAME CHURCH

Following the American Revolution, and the dis-establishment of the Church of England in the new states, the Church of England was reconstituted in 1787 as The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. In 1790, Lea and Neville, being close neighbors and now fellow Episcopalians, decided to erect a much needed church structure. Lea dedicated 10 rods (165 ft) square of his land for this structure. Neville sponsored the theological education of Francis Reno, a Methodist student attending the Presbyterian school in nearby Canonsburg, Pennsylvania. Because Reno was impressed with the orderliness of the Book of Common Prayer, and the leadership of bishops, Reno entered the Episcopal Church. He was ordained in 1791, and became the first vicar of (Old) St. Luke's Church, Chartiers. He served through the Whiskey Rebellion, 1794, and the distress the insurrection caused in the congregation and neighborhood.

No one knows precisely how long the frame church building survived. Perhaps the lingering animosity against anything relating to England in the Revolutionary War and in the War of 1812 impacted this church. No other clergyman is known to have served from the years 1797 to 1852, except for 1832 and 1833 when the Rev. Sanson K. Brunot served here part time and another diocesan congregation.

ST. PETER'S, PITTSBURGH

In 1851, the Rev. Theodore Lyman, rector of Trinity Church, (now Cathedral) Pittsburgh, began an amazing project of erecting two new churches. The first was a "Chapel of Ease" at the corner of Grant Street and Seventh Avenue, named St. Peter's Episcopal Church. Trinity Church could not accommodate all of the worshippers, so an auxiliary structure was built. Within six years, St. Peter's became a congregation separate from Trinity Church.

The architect for St. Peter's Church was John Notman. We believe he also designed (Old) St. Luke's, expressing his English gothic architectural aspirations here in a more modest way.

In 1901, the industrialist Henry Clay Frick chose the location of St. Peter's Church for his new office building. He had the entire structure dismantled stone by stone, and moved by horse drawn wagons to Fifth Avenue, in the Oakland of Pittsburgh. St. Peter's marked the western gateway to the university and college section of Pittsburgh. After the collapse of the congregation, the building was deconsecrated in September 1989 and was

demolished.



(OLD) ST. LUKE'S CHURCH

On August 24, 1851 Dr. Lyman came to a Methodist Meeting House in the Chartiers Valley, to revive the congregation of (Old) St. Luke's Church. We believe this new structure was intended to be another Chapel of Ease, an auxiliary facility to the sponsoring church, providing ease of travel and participation. It was a successful venture. On September 17, 1852, the cornerstone for the present Gothic stone church was set. The construction is of locally quarried stone, set as random course rubble, and

with hand dressed gothic arches and keystones.

After the collapse of the congregation in 1930, the church stood relatively abandoned. In 1945 and in 1949 efforts were made to simply save the building. Summer services were held in 1955 to 1960. In 1960 to 1966 a significant restoration project was conducted by St. Paul's Church, Mt. Lebanon. The major restoration effort began in 1974 after the Bishop of Pittsburgh challenged a small group of friends to either sell the structure for \$1, give the building to Scott Township for a youth center, or demolish the building. The committee chose to restore the still consecrated church building and the burial ground. The prefix "Old" was added to the name of St. Luke's Church. Restoration and conservation efforts continue to this day.

[\(back\)](#)