

St Thomas' facilities development over the last 135 years

Based on the original, hand written ledger, discovered recently in our files, the first meeting, called for the purpose of organizing a congregation, was held on May 12th, 1875 at our present location in a partially constructed, empty house. The building had been owned and started by a local soldier, Mr. Westley Wessinger, who perished at Gettysburg in 1863. At this meeting, nine men were recognized as members of this new church, and a Rev. A. L. Crouse gave a "very impressive" sermon. Although oral tradition in our community supports the use of this empty house as the first St Thomas Church home, this ledger entry is the only surviving document that actually references a "house". So, if any readers know of or have access to other documents, sketches, or photographs of our first church building, please contact our office. This unfinished house was modified in order to be used for worship services with the installation of double doors, benches, and of course they sealed the structure against the weather. It served this fledgling congregation for over a decade.



In 1889 the parishioners began to construct their first church building. They completed it by the fall of 1891 and used it for the next 45 years. Although we don't know the date the photograph above was taken, a rough count of those in attendance that day was close to 100.

As the 'Great Depression' was easing in the late nineteen-thirties, the St Thomas membership again decided they needed more space. The Second Church building construction project was begun in 1935 on land just across the old roadway from the First Church and adjoining cemetery. This old road had been closed in the early thirties after the waters behind the newly constructed Lake Murray dam had risen above its path just west of the church grounds. This relatively magnificent house of worship, shown in the photograph below, provided growing room for the St Thomas Evangelical Lutheran Church congregation for the next forty years; although, by 1952 it became apparent that Sunday School classroom space was needed. So, as was common practice at the time, members of the congregation donated the lumber and supplied the labor to build an additional facility that included six classrooms and an assembly hall.



In the early 1970's, planning began for the construction of the present brick church, which was then completed in 1976. The design of the sanctuary is traditional with the nave, including the alter and two transepts, forming the shape of the cross. Beautiful stained glass windows were custom made by High Point Glass & Decorating Company of High Point North Carolina. The artist, Mr. Thomas Dixon, had studied at the Royal College of Art in England and apprenticed in that country for seven years before coming to America. Hand blown sheet glass, made by the well known Blenko Glass of West Virginia was used in the construction.

During the construction of our third church building, our members also raised funds to install a Zimmer pipe organ, and then later, a first-class sound system. The lower floor of the building was designed to include seven classrooms, assembly hall, two offices, and a kitchen. This building that was completed in 1976 became the third generation house of worship constructed at 215 St Thomas Church Road, near the town of Chapin, South Carolina. The picture below was taken on June 16th of 2009.



Within twenty years after completing the church above, the need for more meeting and office space was recognized, and planning began for the construction of the present Parish Building, shown below. It was designed to include two offices, work room, two meeting rooms, a modern kitchen and a Fellowship Hall large enough to seat over a hundred at tables. This last addition was completed in 1992.

