

## History of St. Matthew's.

There was streetcar service from the city centre south on Bank Street to Lansdowne Park. The streetcars were reliable, inexpensive and reasonably fast. They also were heated by electricity -- the first in North America! In what is today the Glebe's main shopping area, there was only a grocery store, a dry goods store, a butcher's shop and a Chinese laundry.

St. Matthew's was the first parish created in the new Anglican Diocese of Ottawa. Much of the area was still scrubland with only a few houses and market gardens. The founding group bought four lots at \$300 each from the Glebe Trustees of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

Prior to the building of the new church, the first service in the parish was held on Jan. 9, 1898, over a grocery store. A fierce snowstorm whipped around outside. The streetcars weren't operating so the young minister, J. Arthur Tancock, and his wife had to make their way there in a covered sleigh. Work on the new church began in the spring and was finished by early summer. Painted a light grey-blue, it had white trim around tall narrow windows. The inaugural service was on July 17. A choir of two accompanied the pianist, Emma Hammill.

Designed by John W. H. Watts, an English architect who later became curator of the new National Gallery of Canada, the nave of the wood-frame building could hold 260. An open part of the basement was used for Sunday School classes.

### **The Glebe: a distinct community**

The story of St. Matthew's is intertwined with the growth of the Glebe itself. By the early 1900s and within a few years of each other, all major Christian denominations had established churches in the area. Population growth required more churches, new schools and new recreational facilities for sports such as tennis, boating, lawn bowling and hockey.

The success of the streetcar service allowed civil servants to return home from their offices for lunch. The electric streetcars were also well used for holiday outings to Britannia and Rockcliffe Park and had a huge impact on the development of the Glebe. By 1909, its population was around 4,000. By 1914, it had become a distinct community within the City of Ottawa -- mostly English speaking, mostly Protestant and mostly populated by employees of the federal government.

When World War I broke out, house prices in the Glebe were between \$3,000-\$5,000. Building lots went for \$1,000. The war's demands on resources slowed down residential construction. Lansdowne Park was used as a training and holding camp for the Canadian military. But by the end of the war the Glebe was a firmly established community. By 1920 it had a population of around 10,000 and little St.

Matthew's had grown to be the largest congregation in the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa.

In 1904, the church bought a large house on First Ave. to serve as a rectory. Its good-size garden supplied flowers for the church during summer. Around this time, the church was enlarged in two stages that took seating capacity in 1908 to 900. By 1914, St. Matthew's had 2,240 members. Nearly 600 children attended several Sunday School classes. By 1920, the church was free of debt.

It was against this backdrop that in the late 1920s the parishioners and their fifth rector, the Irish-born Canon Robert Jefferson, made plans to build a much larger church and parish hall at a cost of \$250,000. In those days, that was a staggering amount. The fund-raising campaign included hundreds of personal pledges and door-to-door calls by children. A former mayor of Ottawa, Frank H. Plant, personally pledged \$35,000 (later he would become mayor again). But the project suddenly turned quite risky because of the 1929 stock market crash and ensuing hard times. The will and financial resources of the congregation were severely tested. Many pledges couldn't be met. A \$100,000 mortgage at 7% was taken out against vacant lots the parish owned and was later increased to \$125,000. This allowed construction to continue and the impressive new stone edifice opened its doors just before Christmas Day 1930.

Designed by Cecil Burgess, a well-known Ottawa architect, the building's gothic revival style was described by the Ottawa Journal as "architecturally a triumph." The beautiful new church could seat 1,100 and accommodate a choir of 60. The parish hall could hold 600. The energetic Canon Jefferson would go on to become the third Bishop of Ottawa.

By the mid-1930s, the church's finances were in better shape, but with anxious times during World War II it wouldn't be until 1962 that it was debt free again. That year its burdensome mortgage was ceremoniously burned at a vestry meeting. A consecration service for the church was held three days later, attended by some 1,000 people.

Between 1918 and 1945, St. Matthew's was not just a place for worship. The church and its spacious Jefferson Hall offered a busy social and cultural scene quite different from anything today. Activities included many church dinners, lively bazaars, a variety of recreational events, drama clubs and youth-oriented programs. During the 1950s, Ottawa grew explosively. By the 1970s, the Glebe had become a very desirable -- even trendy -- place to live and raise a family.

When St. Matthew's turned 100 in 1998, the most visible change since its half-century anniversary was the often-stressful replacement of Jefferson Hall. By the late 1970s, many of its functions had been taken over by community centres and family lifestyles had changed. Also, the building was badly insulated and costly to maintain. Plans to redevelop the site included public-sector options for social housing but for various reasons these didn't jell. Eventually the site was sold to a local private developer who dismantled the hall and built a group of town houses

and apartments. The new housing complex retained the Jefferson name and incorporated limestone from the old hall to fit in with the exterior of the church. Its entrance also remained linked to the church through an original lychgate. At the same time, the lower level of the church was renovated for use as a meeting hall, with offices, a kitchen and a kindergarten.

Further extensive renovations to the church were launched in 2005 to ensure its structural integrity. There had been damage over the years to exterior masonry. Other repairs were needed. This work was financed by a \$1.9 million fundraising campaign that included selling an under-used next-door rectory. The workmanship of the restoration project earned St. Matthew's a 2008 Ottawa Architectural Conservation Certificate of Merit. The building is recognized as an historic city landmark.

### **Worship, Outreach, Music: setting high standards**

Throughout its history, St. Matthew's has been blessed by a succession of rectors who contributed to the life of the parish in distinctive ways. They set high standards in the conduct of divine worship and involved themselves personally with their parishioners and the community. The first two rectors served only briefly but effectively. (The second died at age 38 of typhoid contracted while visiting a sick parishioner.) The third rector, Walter Muckleston Loucks, was an avid sportsman known for his "muscular" brand of Christianity. (Also chaplain to the Ottawa Rough Riders, he came back to preach the sermon at the 1930 dedication of the new church building.) During World War I, the fourth long-serving rector, George Spooner Anderson, had the church raise money to buy a machine gun for a Canadian battalion overseas. The seventh rector, Ven. Eric Osborne from the Ottawa Valley, believed passionately in joyous music as an underpinning for worship. He supported the inauguration of an all-male choir whose large repertoire of liturgical music has become so much a part of the St. Matthew's tradition.

In 1998, the 10th rector was the first woman to be appointed -- the Dublin-born Rev. Désirée Stedman, much admired for her caring pastoral work. Her successor was also a woman, the Rev. Canon Pat Johnston. As part of her initiatives to widen the church's connections with the community, in 2007 she started its "Open Doors" policy (opening the church to the public during weekday lunch hours).

Rectors come and go but over the years all have relied on the generous volunteer work of their parishioners to carry out the church's many day-to-day functions and the planning for the years ahead. Present-day volunteer activities include the Altar Guild, servers, greeters, Healing Team, Talent Club, Sunday School and committee work dealing with music, education, stewardship, outreach, communications, finance and property.

Through its social outreach projects, St. Matthew's has long been involved in helping the poor and disadvantaged in the wider Ottawa community and beyond. Under Canon Keith Calder, its eighth rector, the church in 1987 established Harmony House, a supportive safe housing shelter for women and their children

who have been victims of domestic violence. It now operates independently but gets financial support and maintains close links with St. Matthew's.



In terms of its public profile, St. Matthew's is perhaps best known for its excellence in choral and organ music. This took root in the 1950s when Gerald Wheeler, a talented young English organist, was hired as music director. He established an accomplished men and boys' choir in the English cathedral style. A magnificent new organ also was installed. (In later years, a women and girls' choir was also formed.) A series of outstanding music directors (such as Mr. Wheeler, Brian Law, Richard Dacey, Matthew Larkin), turned St. Matthew's into a training ground for many acclaimed singers and musicians. Among them: noted composer Paul Halley, international bass-baritone Gerald Finley and countertenors Matthew White and Daniel Taylor. In 2007, the men and boys' choir celebrated its 50th anniversary with a glorious concert and other special reunion events.

Over the decades St. Matthew's has gone through many changes and some uneasy times as well as bright ones. Through all, though, the church has remained an integral part of the Glebe community: a place of worship, a social centre, a vibrant heart of musical life. Its mission statement is to be a welcoming Christian community committed to growing in faith, offering joyous worship and reaching out in loving service. This reaffirms the vision the founding families of St. Matthew's had when they built their little wooden church more than 110 years ago.

### **Acknowledgements:**

This short-version history of St. Matthew's Anglican Church in the Glebe was adapted by Neville Nankivell from the book "A Church in the Glebe" written by parishioner David Farr and published in 1988. It also draws on "Completing the First Century" -- a 1998 commemoration of 100 years of worship and service in the Glebe that included contributions by David Farr, Mabel H. Porter, Verna Wilson, Richard C. Day and Jim McCarthy.

Glebe: An old English word the name Glebe was used in the past to describe a grant of reserve lands set aside for church use. The Glebe in Ottawa referred to about one square mile allocated to St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. When the area began to be developed as a residential community, real estate agents called it the Glebe. The community's present-day boundaries are the Queensway to the north, Bronson Avenue to the west and the Rideau Canal to the south and east.