

# 1902

At the foot of St. John's is a stone with a simple inscription: "1902 A.D." From that bare date, it is difficult to reconstruct the excitement of building a new church from the ground up.

Also difficult to appreciate is that this congregation, always known for its achievers, was then in the midst of serious money problems. The 1890s were a time of deep recession. Saint Paul, a boom town for lumber and grain, was hit especially hard. Even the rich, recalled the usually ebullient Rev. Mr. Dudley Rhodes, who arrived at S. John's in 1896, were poor at that moment.

"Everyone was poor and new enterprises were impossible," Rhodes wrote. The "leanness of the times" led Mr. Rhodes to refuse part of his salary, and the following year to propose to accept even less.

Yet that difficult moment was when the church made a giant leap forward.

In 1900 Rhodes stepped down for reasons of health, to be replaced by the Rev. Mr. Theodore Sedgwick, then ministering in Williams-town, Massachusetts. Sedgwick was blessed with an improving economy. The 600-member congregation decided that a new church was needed to replace the first-generation church built 20 years earlier at the corner of Mackubin and Ashland Avenues.

That church had been expanded four times over that period, and there was no more room to grow. A Guild House had already been erected at Portland and Kent, anticipating the new church.

A local architect, Clarence Johnston, was hired to sketch a new building, in consultation with Cass Gilbert. Gilbert had designed the Guild House and so many noteworthy public buildings, like the State Capitol, the University of Minnesota Mall, and U.S. Supreme Court. Johnston's sketches used Gilbert's Guild House as a stylistic touchstone.

In 1902 the cornerstone was laid, and the Pioneer Press published a lengthy account of the event, focusing on the contributions of some 400 Sunday School children. Rev. Sedgwick had galvanized, both at St. John's and at his other ministries in the city.

The weather for the ceremony on November 10, 1902 was raw and cold. Sedgwick, Bishop Samuel C. Edsall, wardens and vestrymen, and a 40-person choir led the congregation from their old quarters to the new site. The choir sang "The Church's One Foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord."

The \$200 for the stone came from the savings of the Sunday School children, so a special children's procession

made its way from the Guild Room to the platform by the curb.

"After the reading of a psalm, a copper box containing a hymnal, the records of the church, copies of the addresses of the day, the St. Paul daily papers and a program of the day's activities was placed in the cavity in the center of the stone." The stone was rolled into place, Bishop Edsall struck it three times with a hammer, and a new era began.

The new church, fashioned from St. Paul limestone and Bedford stone, would cost \$75,000. An altar was supplied by Mrs. Amherst Wilder and her daughter Cornelia Day Wilder Appleton. Item by item -- windows, organ, baptismal font, pews -- were provided by the names we see on brass plates in the church today.

On October 19, 1903, the congregation gathered in the new church and worshiped there together for the first time.



Rev. Rhodes



Rev. Sedgwick



Clarence Johnston



Cass Gilbert



Bishop Edsall



## THE CORNERSTONE Children's

On the centenary of the 1902 laying of the cornerstone at the Church of St. John the Evangelist

A hundred years later, St. John's embarked on a project nearly as fundamental as the original church: excavating a large section the undercroft and repairing and remodeling it for church activities. The redesign followed the original ideas of architects Johnston and Gilbert. But it was a gruesome, dusty, disruptive, expensive project.

But the 1902 cornerstone reminds us: it was ever this way. And in times of challenge, leadership in faith can arise anywhere, even among our very youngest.

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Relying on material from the book, *Church of St. John the Evangelist Centennial History 1881-1981*, written by the Rev. Robert Orr Baker and parishioners of St. John's. Poster by Mike Finley.