

# History of Saint Paul's Church

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church of Durant, Iowa, has been a community of prayer and worship for over 150 years. In 1856, the first religious service of any kind to be held in Durant was led by the Rt. Rev'd. Henry Washington Lee, the first Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa. The Rock Island depot, then the community center of the rapidly growing village that had been founded just two years earlier, was transformed into a church. Boxes of freight containing champagne formed the pulpit, altar, and pews for the members of the congregation.

After the service, Bishop Lee presided at the meeting that organized what would become Saint Paul's Church. The name was chosen to honor Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in New Haven, Connecticut, where many of Durant's early settlers had been members. In response to a letter from Mr. Joseph Weaver, one of the founding members of the mission, Saint Paul's, New Haven, donated the \$75 which began the building fund for the new church.

The land on which the first church was built was donated by Thomas C. Durant, founder of the city and the same man who drove the Union Pacific's golden spike connecting America's first transcontinental railroad. The first church building, which was located on the north side of Durant, was dedicated in October 1856 by Bishop Lee.

That same year, the first vicar of Saint Paul's, together with his wife, mother, and sister, founded a "seminary" or junior/senior high school for girls to supplement the education available at the local grade school. In the early 1870's the need to educate the young men of Durant became apparent, and so the seminary curriculum was expanded, a library built, and the co-ed boarding and day school was renamed the Boardman School, after its chief benefactor. The school continued into the 1890's, when Durant's public secondary school was begun.

By May of 1895, the congregation had outgrown its first building, and so on May 28, the original building was sold, and the present building purchased from the Congregationalists, who had built it in 1856. The members of Saint Paul's were careful to move the beautiful bell donated to the first church in 1874 by the Sunday School children, the stained glass windows, and the furniture of the old church.

The sanctuary of the present church was added in 1895 to accommodate Episcopal worship. In 1898, the young men of the parish built the parish hall, or "Reading Room," which stands next to the church. Over the years it has served as Sunday School building, vicar's office, town library, and town community center.

Between 1925 and 1944, Saint Paul's, the only one of Durant's original five churches to survive, was itself unable to hold regular worship services. In spite of this fact, the residents of Durant maintained the "Old Church," as it was known, in the hopes that it might someday reopen. In June 1944, clergy and lay leaders from Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Davenport re-started services, which have continued to this day. Improvements to the property have been made over the years, with an undercroft added to the church in 1950, and a detailed restoration of the "gingerbread gothic" steeple and belfry in 1979. In 1981, the pipe organ of Trinity Cathedral in Davenport was rebuilt and moved to Saint Paul's

Today, Saint Paul's is a lively parish, part of a lively and growing community. Recently, the town of Durant celebrated the sesquicentennial of its founding in 1854. And just a few years after that, in 2006, Saint Paul's parish celebrated 150 years of life in the community. The members of Saint Paul's Church welcome you to join us in worship whenever your travels bring you to Durant.