EARLY MISSIONARIES AND
THE ORGANIZATION OF ST. JOHN’S CHURCH

The history of St. John, the Evangelist Episcopal Church in Milwaukie begins with the coming of missionaries to the Oregon Territory in the mid-eighteen hundreds. Messrs. Fackler and Richmond organized St. John’s congregation on December 10, 1851.

Much of the background and work of the early missionaries was recorded in letters and reports to the Mission Board. Some of those reports have been chosen and recorded here to provide an accurate account and mood of the period.

The long disputed claims between Great Britain and the United States over the Northwest Territory were settled in 1846. With one of the waves of migration, St. Michael Fackler came to the Willamette Valley in 1847 and took up a “Donation Claim” east of Champoeg. He met only one American acquainted with the services of the Episcopal Church, but several servants of the Hudson’s Bay Company were members of the Church of England.

On December 1, 1847, Mr. Fackler baptized James, son of Archibald and Julia McKinley, at their home in Oregon City. This is the first recorded service according the Book of Common Prayer in the Oregon country. Thus, begins the history of the Episcopal Church in Oregon.

The Missions Board in New York City, unaware of Mr. Fackler’s presence in Oregon, met in 1851, and determined there was a need for a missionary in the Oregon Territory. The Rev. William Richmond was appointed Missionary to Oregon and set sail from New York City in March of 1851. In the “Letter of Instructions” from the Missions Board, he was directed to begin missions in several villages of which Milwaukie was one. Sailing via Panama, he reached Portland early Sunday morning, May 11, 1851. The first services he held were on May 18th. Mr. Richmond states: “I preached in the Methodist house of worship and presided at the election of wardens and vestrymen, and the organization of a congregation in this place. It is called Trinity Church. It is the first Episcopal congregation ever organized in this Territory.”

Excerpts, from some of Mr. Richmond’s letters, include the following information pertaining to St. John’s, Milwaukie. Writing on October 6, 1851, Richmond describes: …“the zeal of a plain man, who, I observed, was very earnest and devout at the morning service. I saw he lingered by the door, and spoke to him, ‘I see you have your prayer-book, and are used to it.’ ‘Yes,’ was the reply, ‘I am a communicant of the Church from Indiana, and have rowed down to Portland to attend the Church service…I did not expect to find one of my clergymen in Oregon; but I heard of you at Mr. Allen’s on the Abernethy, and I have traced you all the way to Portland. I told my wife before I left, if there was a Church clergyman in Oregon, I would find him out.’

After some conversation, I invited him to call at my cabin; and as I found that he was living for the present at Milwaukie, I accepted his offer to come for me in his boat on next Monday, and try to get some people to a service there.”
Describing the first service held in Milwaukie… “On Wednesday (December 10, 1851), at Milwaukie, Mr. Fackler read prayers, and I preached in the evening. We had conversed with several persons before the service, and by their advice I gave notice of the organization of a Protestant Episcopal congregation, after the conclusion of public worship. Accordingly, we chose two wardens and eight vestrymen, and called the church St. Johns. The town is pleasantly situated on the Willamette River, about half way from Portland to Oregon City, seven miles from Portland. A call was made on Mr. Lot Whitcomb, proprietor of the town, and he readily consented to give our vestry, as trustees, until incorporated two eligible lots, and a building that has cost him about $1000, for an Episcopal Church. Thus, at last, we have one Episcopal Church in Oregon. It will be ready for our services on the first or second Sunday in January. Mr. Boys, the zealous Churchman, who first brought me here, is to finish it.”

“This donation has quite encouraged me; and the result of this visit to Milwaukie is the most consoling and satisfactory of any I have made in Oregon to advance the Church. I trust--I pray--I hope that the example of Mr. Whitcomb, and the citizens of Milwaukie, may stir up others in Portland, Oregon City, and Lafayette. I had less hope of Milwaukie than either of those places. But, the zeal of Mr. Boys, in rowing his boat down to Portland, to attend services, and taking me back by the same method, made me ashamed of my doubts.”

The structure donated by Mr. Whitcomb stood near the site of the present Milwaukie Elementary School. Heavy timbers, sawed in Whitcomb’s mill and joined with wooden pegs were used for framing. Siding of a quaint, rustic pattern was fastened to the studding with cut nails of a primitive type.

It was during the year 1852, that Mr. Richmond wrote of holding services at Portland on Sunday morning and at Milwaukie in the afternoon and evening: “Jan.11, A.M., Portland; eighteen present. P.M., Milwaukie; forty present. Evening, same place; eighty present. St. John’s Church is to be ready the first Sunday in February.”

Mr. Fackler writes in one of his letters to the Missions board in 1853: “I officiated at Champoeg, at 11 A.M., and at Chehalem City, commonly known as Roger’s Ferry, at 4 P.M. The alternate Sunday is spent at Oregon City, Milwaukie and Portland. I generally ride down on Saturday, and spend Saturday night in Oregon City. The morning services are held at half-past 10 A.M. Immediately upon getting something to eat I ride to Milwaukie, where we hold services at 4 P.M. After this service, I ride seven miles further to Portland, in time for the evening service at 8 P.M. I find this to be very laborious, even during the long days of summer; and since the rainy season set in, and the days have become so very short, I have hardly had daylight enough to accomplish it. Up to this time I have missed but once, and that was in consequence of an attack of fever, which kept me at home for about a week.”

An excerpt from the Report of the Domestic Committee (Nov. 1853) relates: “The first Missionary (Mr. William Richmond) appointed to this territory has been compelled, by ill health, to return to the East. The Rev. Dr. McCarty having offered himself for the appointment, has been sent out by the Committee.”

Dr. John D. McCarty, an ex-army chaplain, was appointed missionary to the Oregon Country in the fall of 1852. In one of his early letters to the board of missions he
reports: “I arrived here on the 19th of January last, after an unusually tedious journey of sixty-one days from New York City.”

“I found Portland, called a city, a newer and smaller village than I had expected, containing, it is supposed, about twenty-five hundred inhabitants, which is about four times the population of any other place in Oregon.” …”I have officiated three Sunday afternoons and a Thursday evening at Milwaukie, a small village of about one hundred and fifty inhabitants, six miles up the river, on the opposite side, where a Church was organized by the Rev. Mr. Richmond, and where we have a neat small Church, the liberal gift of Mr. Lot Whitcomb, the original proprietor of the place. I found but few persons acquainted with our Church, and little else to encourage me but the Church building and a tolerable good attendance of the inhabitants on our services as they would go to any religious meeting. …”Here I have given and intend to continue service every other Thursday evening. The Rev. Mr. Fackler is also to give a service every other Sunday afternoon, when he officiates in Oregon City in the morning. Thus, securing to Milwaukie a weekly service.”

The Rev. Dr. McCarty was appointed Post Chaplain for Fort Vancouver. He was to reside in Vancouver for one half the week to discharge his duties there. The other half of the week he would reside in Portland. He states in a letter “As yet, I have gone to Milwaukie and Vancouver on foot; in this place, where living is about four times as dear as in the Atlantic states, I could not keep a horse without great expense.”

In one of his later letters, the Rev. McCarty states: “Since my report made March last, I have been employed in the duties of the ministry at this place (Portland) and at Vancouver, according to the arrangement therein mentioned, which I have hitherto been able to keep up with regularity, although the high water in the Columbia at this season overflowing the bottom of the south bank, makes the passage from one place to the other, between morning and evening service on Sundays, very difficult. The state of things remains much the same in both places. I have continued to officiate at Milwaukie, Thursday evening of every other week.”

THE COMING OF THE BISHOP TO OREGON AND THE CONSECRATION OF ST. JOHN’S

On January 8, 1854, the Rev. Thomas Fielding Scott was consecrated as Bishop of the Missionary Jurisdiction of Oregon and Washington Territories in Savannah, Georgia. He arrived in Portland on April 22, 1854. The second convocation took place in Portland on June 17, 1854. The Bishop, two presbyters Messrs. Fackler and McCarty and eight laymen from Portland, Oregon City and Champoeg were present.

The Bishop reports that, “There are, so far as I have ascertained, but three organized congregations of our Church in these Territories. …Our only church edifice is a small one at Milwaukie, which has never been finished, and has been used for various purposes of public meeting. I trust we may be able soon to have it completed and consecrated, and statedly used for public worship.”
In Bishop Scott’s address to the Convocation of 1855 he reports that, “On Sunday, 18th February, assisted by Rev. Mr. Fackler, I consecrated St. John’s Church, Milwaukie. The ground was given by Capt. Whitcomb, and with it the small building to which I alluded a year ago. The house was turned so as to front towards the river, ten feet were added to its length, and the whole ceiled with cedar. It is complete in its arrangements, including a bell (also the gift of Capt. Whitcomb,) and will seat about a hundred persons. The population of the village is small, but the attendance upon the service as always been quite encouraging.”

He also reported donations from Grace Church, Baltimore, Maryland; Charleston, South Carolina; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and San Francisco, California, in the amount of $443, aided in the completion of St. John’s Church. Bishop Scott had also conducted fifteen sermons or lectures during the year at St. John’s.

**SPENCER HALL AND ST. JOHN’S FIRST MOVE**

In 1861, the first diocesan school for girls was organized and housed in what was formerly the Veranda Hotel. This new school was known as Spencer Hall for Girls, and was the forerunner of St. Helen’s Hall. St. John’s Church served as the chapel for the school.

The “city” of Milwaukie at that time was much like other pioneer centers in the Pacific Northwest. Streets were nothing more than stump-studded wagon tracks plowing through deep mud in fall, winter and spring, and dust in summer. Hogs wallowed in deeper puddles, cows and horses wandered at will. Citizens seldom ventured out at night, and when they did they carried kerosene lanterns to find their way through total darkness.

The school was centrally located, near present Jefferson Street and McLoughlin Boulevard, and some distance from the church which was on the fringe of town. In bad weather the girls found difficulty walking the long trail through the woods between church and school so on December 4, 1862 the little church was moved to its present location at 21st and Jefferson Street, and set down upon brick pilasters. With winter winds racing beneath the floor, the wood stove at the rear of the church often worked overtime to maintain a comfortable temperature.

In writing about the move of the church, Bishop Scott stated in the January 1863 issue of The Oregon Churchman: “The little church which was consecrated in 1855 and stood a little out of the village, has recently been moved to a central and convenient location near the main street. The citizens generally turned out, putting their shoulders to the wheel and making the removal a common work. ...When the removal was complete one of the oldest proposed ‘three cheers for the Church,’ which were heartily given. ‘After which, another proposed, ‘three cheers for the Bishop,’ which were heartily given, accompanied by the ringing of the bell. ...Those engaged in the removal spent the Tuesday evening, 23rd December, sociably at Spencer Hall.”

The bell was a donation from Lot Whitcomb and some say it was taken from a steamboat which came around the Horn. This bell is still in use at St. Johns.
Bishop Scott and his family lived at Spencer Hall for some time. The Bishop held some of the services at St. John’s. Johnston McCormac also held some services while in charge of St. Paul’s, Oregon City.

In June 1867, Bishop Scott had to leave Oregon because of Mrs. Scott’s health, and they had scarcely reached New York when he suddenly died, having been exposed to an epidemic during the trip. For two years, the Oregon-Washington country had no Episcopal Bishop.

THE SELLWOOD ERA (1864-1892)

In South Carolina, the brothers, John and James R.W. Sellwood, received the call to come to Oregon. With funds raised by the churches of North and South Carolina and Georgia, they left on the steamer “Illinois” for Oregon, April 5, 1856. At Panama the party was attacked, massacred and plundered. The Reverend John Sellwood was beaten, shot in the chest, robbed of the missionary funds entrusted to him and left for dead. James, who lost only his missionary funds, proceeded to Portland with his family. John regained enough strength in about two weeks to follow him to Portland.

In a letter, published in the September 1856 issue of the Spirit of Missions, the Rev. John Sellwood states, "...my Master, in his own good time and way, provided all things needful for me. He furnished me, while in the hospital, with all necessary medical attendance, nursing, food and clothing; and before I left, put it into the heart of a resident of the place to give me a little money. On board the steamship which carried me from Panama to San Francisco, several of the passengers gave me each a trifle, and when I arrived in San Francisco, through the kindness of Bishop Kip and the Rev. Dr. Clark, I likewise, received a small sum. The agents of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, likewise gave me free passage from thence to this place (Portland), remarking, that I was as one risen from the dead, and they could not think of charging me one cent for my passage. Thus far, therefore, the Lord has provided me; and having preserved my life, so wondrously, I indulge the hope that He has got work for me to do in Oregon."

Immediately, upon his arrival in Oregon, James R.W. Sellwood was sent as a Deacon to take charge of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Salem. The Rev. John Sellwood stayed with his brother in Salem, while recovering from his wounds. In 1857, sufficiently recovered, he went to serve in Trinity Episcopal Church, Portland.

The Reverend James R.W. Sellwood was elevated to the priesthood at St. Paul’s, Salem on October 7, 1860. Young John W. Sellwood, son of James R.W. Sellwood, assisted at St. John’s, Milwaukie shortly after he was ordained a Deacon in 1862. According to a memorial article in the April 1894 Oregon Churchman, Rev. James R.W. Sellwood remained at St. Paul’s until 1865, “when he purchased a farm, near the then village of Milwaukie, taking occasional services at St. John’s”

John Sellwood resigned from Trinity Church because his health was so fragile that he was unable to continue to attempt to carry out a full ministry. He took over the mission at St. John’s, Milwaukie, only because the congregation was so small that it placed little burden on him. A letter written by the Rev. William Stoy in 1869, reported that the
Reverend John Sellwood moved “...from Trinity to Milwaukie and took charge of the little church in that quiet pretty hamlet. He purchased a small home with a few acres in a secluded place within convenient reach of the church and removed to it his library....and for more than twenty years he has been the recognized and self-sustaining minister and rector of St. John’s”

In 1874, the Rev. Sellwood reported there were three communicants and a Sunday School class consisting of students from Spencer Hall; a total of twenty. He also reported that the last family attending the church had moved several months before. By 1882, members of the church had nearly reached zero. The following letter, from the Rev. Sellwood, was included in the report sent to the Twenty-ninth Annual Convocation. “Rt. Rev Sir: I send you my report for the last year, but alas! What a report. The church not open for many Sundays. However, my days for working for my master are nearly gone by. I am seventy-six years of age. Last winter I was confined to my house for a considerable time, being very sick, but the Lord has raised me up again, to the enjoyment of my usual health. Two or three Sundays when able to officiate, I got no congregation.”

The Rev. John Sellwood continued the services until his death, in 1892, at the age of eighty-six. After his death, his nephew, Thomas R.A. Sellwood, carried on the work.

Thomas Sellwood, son of James R.W. Sellwood, served as lay reader and kept the church open when no minister was assigned the place, which happened frequently during his forty years’ residence in Milwaukie. He was the superintendent of the Sunday School and the organizer of the Women’s Guild.

GROWING IN THE FAITH

In 1868, the Rev. Benjamin Wistar Morris of St. Luke’s Church, Germantown, Pennsylvania was elected as Bishop of Oregon and Washington Territory. Bishop Morris came in June 1869. For a time the new Bishop and his family resided at Spencer Hall, so that they were in close touch with St. Johns. In his first Convention address in September he states; “The interior of St. John’s has been greatly improved by the enlargement of the chancel, new carpets, chairs, painting, and the purchasing of a cabinet organ.” Mr. Michael Oatfield donated an altar which is still in use in the chapel. This was one of many attempts to improve the church’s appearance. The cabinet organ is presently housed in the guild room at St. Johns.

Because Portland and Oregon City controlled the trade necessary to the advancement of Milwaukie, the town which Lot Whitcomb had wished to see head of commercial enterprises on the Willamette River, decreased in population. This resulted in a decrease in church membership.

The records of the Annual Convocation of 1883 indicate that St. John’s, Milwaukie had began a gradual increase in attendance, and it became necessary to make additional improvements to the Church structure.

In 1888, Thomas Sellwood, with the help of the women and some generous men of the community, organized the repairs of the building. The old framework was found to be solid and good. A new roof and siding were put on outside and wainscoting of fir put on
diagonally inside. The aging square windows were replaced with Gothic style windows. A stained glass chancel window was installed, it being the gift of the 1889 Bible class. The vestibule and a tower surmounted with a spire and cross were added. The tiny balcony which had held the organ was removed providing more floor space.

On March 31st, 1889, services were resumed in the re-conditioned Church. Bishop B. Wistar Morris presided at the first service, assisted by Rev. John Sellwood, then 83 years old.

Little information is recorded about St. John’s Milwaukie for several years. Services were held when missionaries from nearby churches were available. The Rev. William Powell, of Portland, officiated from 1895 to 1901 and the Rev. P.K. Hammond, from Oregon City, provided services at 3 o’clock in the afternoon during the years 1901 to 1908.

In the 1909 December issue of The Oregon Churchman, the Rev. F.T. Bowen writes, “St. John’s Parish, Milwaukie, has awakened to a new life, and gives promise of growth...Services are being held every Sunday and are well attended...Mr. T.R. Sellwood, who through the long period of depression never lost faith in the ultimate prosperity of the parish, is faithful in attendance, and foremost in efforts for the good work. A Sunday School has been started and is making satisfactory progress with Miss Gould as superintendent.”

The Oregon Churchman in 1913, reports that the “Rector of St. Paul’s, Oregon City, has volunteered to take charge of St. John’s Milwaukie... The Rector of St. Paul’s is now the only priest in the County of Clackamas, a territory one and one-half times larger than the State of Rhode Island... St. John’s is called the only English Church in Milwaukie. In view of the larger German population this in an important incentive to its preservation.”

In 1915 it is reported that a woman’s guild was organized at the home of Mrs. Richard Scott. New steps were added to the front entrance and a walk placed at the front of the property. All of this work has been “under the supervision of Messrs. A.P. Wilson and T.R.A. Sellwood, who have contributed liberally of money as well as time... While few in numbers, the congregation of St. John’s excel in efficiency and loyalty, and every missionary and other obligation has been promptly met by them.”

Late 1917, St. John’s received a gift of a Service Book from T.R.A. Sellwood, its Senior Warden and Lay Reader. The Oregon Churchman states “Probably no layman in the diocese has attended more of the diocesan conventions than Mr. Sellwood, and although he has passed his seventieth year, his interest in the Church was never greater, and he is rendering most valuable personal service.”

In 1928, with the permission of Bishop Walter Taylor Sumner and a gift from him, of $100.00, the Church was moved across the street. The move was made so a basement could be added. This provided much needed space and included a small kitchen and lavatory.

On February 18th and 19th 1930, special services were held to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the consecration of St. John’s Church. The Reverend E.H. Clark celebrated Holy Communion at the evening service on the 18th. The Rev. J.A. Cleland was in charge of the service the next evening, assisted by Bishop Sumner,
Chaplain Chambers and Archdeacon Black. The Rev. Upton H. Gibbs also had a part in the ceremony.

The 1930 December issue of The Oregon Churchman reports that the Girls’ Friendly Society presented two shadow pantomimes, “Ching-a-Ling” and “The Toy-maker’s Dream.” They also stated the “St. John’s Guild now numbers between 30 and 40 members, and there is always a good attendance at the monthly meetings.”

The following December issue reports The Girls’ Friendly gave a masquerade party in October inviting young people of Portland parishes. “There were about ninety present, and judging from the spirit of fun and the noise made, they all enjoyed a good time... Our Church School has made a very good start this year. Five Bishop’s crosses were won the past year.”

A reed organ, Estey make, was presented to the church in 1935 by Mrs. J.H. Willman, daughter of Richard Scott, a long time parishioner. In 1937 a new Altar was purchased and dedicated on September 5th.

On December 10, 1941, the Reverend R.T.T. Hicks, vicar, held a service of celebration commemorating the ninetieth anniversary of St. John’s. Bishop Benjamin D. Dagwell assisted him.

Among the gifts presented to the church on this occasion was a plaque commemorating its founding. Two myrtlewood offering plates were given in memory of Mrs. Dorothy M. Winters along with a new church flag, a gift from the Sunday School class of 1941.

For many years, an old wood-burning pot-bellied stove that stood in the back heated the inside of the church. Since it had no automatic heat control, it caused the interior of the church to become occasionally uncomfortably warm and at other times just the opposite. A new furnace was purchased on December 9, 1946.

THE BUILDING OF A NEW SANCTUARY

In the course of time Milwaukie and its surrounding countryside, like many suburban communities throughout the nation, grew exponentially. The little pioneer church which had seen the beginning of so much history, had in fact been part of that history, was outgrown. In 1945, St. John’s had 100 communicants and a seating capacity to accommodate 60.

A new church was needed, not because the old one was worn out, but because it was too small for the congregation. Plans were made to have the old building turned over to the Oregon Historical Society and moved. The Church was described in the Oregon City Enterprise: “...as an early specimen of Oregon architecture. The Church is nearly the same as when it was first built 94 years ago. Very little repair work has been necessary and the major part of the structure is the original building. It was built without the aid of modern materials and the main structure is held together with wooden pegs.”

Bishop Dagwell, in 1948, persuaded his old friend, the Rev. Frederick Clayton, to forsake his retirement in Omaha and come to St. John’s as vicar. Besides his normal
Dr. Clayton was charged with planning a new church building, organizing its financing, and undertaking its actual construction. A bequest of $10,000 by the late Rosalie S. Willman, long a member of St. John’s, became the foundation of a fund for the building of a new church.

Dr. Clayton plunged into his task with unbounded enthusiasm. First, he made friends with the merchants and townspeople, inviting them to the church services and enlisting their good will and support. During the noon hour he was often seen on the high school campus, talking with students and encouraging them to come to church services. To keep them interested he devised several programs, all designed to develop potential leaders and workers in the church.

As a result of these efforts, coupled with a great ability as a dynamic preacher, the congregation grew in size and effectiveness.

A new church, which was designed to incorporate the existing old church structure, was finished in October 1948. Bishop Dagwell, assisted by the Vicar, Rev. Frederick Clayton and other clergy of the Diocese, consecrated it on October 31, 1948.

The old church was retained as a chapel, parish hall and Sunday School annex. For a few years a Quonset hut adjoined the old church and provided more adequate parish hall facilities.

FROM MISSION TO PARISH

In 1954, with the Rev. Rob Roy Hardin as rector, St. John’s became a parish. The Enterprise Courier reported in its March 10, 1954 issue, “Last Sunday night members of St. John’s Episcopal Church, Milwaukie, assembled to adopt the prescribed constitution of Parishes and to make a formal organization. Following the formal adoption of the constitution the members present signed it, making it a valuable document to be treasured in the archives of the Episcopal church in Oregon. …The parish, dedicated to St. John the Evangelist, has some 500 baptized members and approximately 350 communicants in good standing.”

In 1955 the ‘little red house’ sitting just to the west of the church was purchased to provide additional growing space.

Now the little church stood on the corner it was to occupy until 1961. It was still little changed from the original ‘unfurnished building’ although the profile had been slightly altered by the addition of a simple belfry accommodating the ship’s bell donated by Whitcomb.

ST. JOHN’S “ON THE MOVE”

As the community and parish grew, it became apparent that the original church structure was no longer adequate for the needs of the Parish hall, office space, and the Sunday School. In 1961 a new modern three-story education center was planned to replace the 109-year-old church edifice.
On Saturday May 11, 1961, Ormond Bean of the Portland City Council saw a news item in the Oregonian concerning the old Episcopal Church. If all local efforts to save it failed, the historic structure would go under the wrecker's hammer. Mr. and Mrs. Bean drove to the site where preparations for razing were already under way. Mr. Bean was told by the contractor in charge that a reprieve would be granted with expiration date the following Wednesday.

Mr. Bean then went into vigorous action. Parks Superintendent Harry Buckley was very much interested in the then infant Oaks Pioneer Park to be established near the end of the Sellwood Bridge and encompassing the old Oaks Amusement Park. Mr. Buckley agreed that the pioneer church surely would grace the entrance to the park. Then things moved fast.

A barge was floated up the Willamette River to a point just below the church. Already placed on rollers, the building was eased down the hill and onto the barge. The way was through mid- Milwaukie, holding up all busy traffic, but there were no protests. At the site the church was hauled up the steep hill. St. John, the Evangelist, Milwaukie’s original structure, now stands at the entrance to Oaks Pioneer Park in Portland near the Sellwood Bridge. Weddings and occasional services arranged through the Park Bureau are still held there.

CONTINUING TO GROW IN FAITH

With the original church now in place at Sellwood Park, the congregation proceeded with plans for a new parish hall. Under the guidance of Rev. Frank Evenson the new facility was constructed. It contained church offices, a large parish hall, kitchen, side-aisle chapel, and Sunday School rooms. The bell from the old church was installed in the steeple of the new addition. A special dedication ceremony for the new parish hall was held November 18, 1962.

This building program began with a fund raising drive in September 1957, which was inspired by a generous bequest by Mrs. Ethal Pierce. The new chapel was dedicated in her memory.

After serving as a church annex, antique shop and beauty parlor, the house west of the church was demolished. The property was developed as a prayer garden with, perhaps, eventual space for off-street parking of a few automobiles whose drivers are busy on church business.

In 1976 a three-day celebration marked the 125th birthday of the foundation of St. John’s in Milwaukie. The activities included the dedication and consecration of the new church building and the burning of the mortgage. In 1981 another renovation was undertaken at St. Johns. Changes made in the sanctuary included a freestanding altar with the addition of a leaded glass rose window placed on the wall the south wall. The leaded glass window was acquired from St. David’s church in Portland where it had been stored in the basement for many years. Susan Holzworth, an artist and member of St. Johns, releaded and prepared the window for placement behind the altar.

A new larger organ, built by the Bond Pipe Organ Company, was installed in January of 1982 at the rear of the nave. The choir pews were moved next to the organ.
The remodeling of the sacristy, in 1984, provided a much-needed area for the preparation of the vessels for communion and for vesting by the clergy. In May of 1985, an electric lift and entrance ramp were installed, making St. John’s more accessible.

**ANOTHER “TURN OF THE CENTURY”**

After serving parishes in Portland, Baker City and Seattle, The Rev. Canon Richard K. Toll became rector of St. John’s in 1984. Under his vision and leadership, the decade preceding St. John’s 150th anniversary year was marked by sustained growth in membership, vitality in parish programs and activities, development of Christian education and liturgy, improvements to facilities and renewed commitment to the community of Milwaukie and the Diocese of Oregon.

In 1991, three parishioners, John Brown, Val Wallace and John Ross, initiated a free Sunday afternoon meal for the homeless. Though volunteers outnumbered guests the first few Sundays, the number of diners grew steadily until a hundred or more began to attend regularly. Since that first Sunday, dinner and companionship have been offered every week without fail; over 50,000 meals have been served. Nowadays it isn’t uncommon for several cooks and two dozen helpers to serve 150 meals on a Sunday. Hundreds of volunteers and dozens of churches, schools and civic organizations participate in *Feed the Hungry*, which is now incorporated as a non-profit organization.

Centrally located near the Milwaukie transit center, St. John’s hosts a branch of the Samaritan Counseling Center and provides convenient meeting space for various AA groups, scouts, community health and parenting programs, a grief support group, Loaves & Fishes and diocesan activities. The community and the congregation, with good reason, consider St. John’s “The Heart of Milwaukie”

Father Toll saw several opportunities for renewal and growth in the parish. He implemented a biennial all-parish retreat offering programs for children and noted guest speakers, such as former Presiding Bishop Edmund Browning; priest and author Herb O’Driscoll and the Rt. Rev. Rustin Kimsey (Ret.) former bishop of Eastern Oregon.

In 1988, Fr. Toll encouraged the hiring of an associate to help the parishes’ growth in Christian education and outreach ministries. With financial support from Bishop Ladehoff, the Rev. Lark Stephenson was hired. During her tenure, the youth program grew rapidly. Under the leadership of Mar Goman and Connie Ross, the Sunday school program was revitalized to the extent that attendance more than doubled.

On October 4, 1993, Stephen M. Denny, a lifelong member of the parish, was ordained to the diaconate at St. John’s. In addition to assisting Fr. Toll, Steve’s ministries include Christian education, hospital chaplaincy and Acolyte Master.

During the past dozen years, St. John’s has served as an “on-the-job” learning center for others, besides Deacon Denny, who have gone on to distinguished ordained ministries. Under Fr. Toll’s tutelage, seminarians Paula Nesbitt and Mary Allen both served and were served by the parish. Both are ordained priests; Mary is rector of Grace Church in St. George, Utah, and Paula, who is also an author, teaches at UC Berkeley. As a member of St. John’s, Milwaukie, Jane Nelson-Low completed seminary
and was ordained deacon. As a priest, she now serves as associate at The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Spokane. While at St. John’s, Jane was instrumental in establishing the Samaritan Counseling Center office and beginning an Education For Ministry class.

In the early 90’s St. John’s was one of the first parishes in the diocese to begin a Eucharistic Ministry program. After training, chalice bearers are licensed by the bishop to deliver the sacramental elements during Sunday visitations to those who cannot attend the service. These visitations augment an active parish ministry in local assisted-living and nursing home facilities.

A major remodeling of the narthex was completed in 2000. This entry space was lengthened, widened and heightened with a contoured wall directing visitors right to the church or left to the parish hall or the columbarium, which itself was added during the past decade. An automatic door was added for improved accessibility.

Long-range building plans call for adding a west wing to house offices and meeting space where once stood the “little red house”. A capital funds drive was begun in the spring 2001 and construction could start as early as 2002.

**ST. JOHN’S BICENTENNIAL, 2051**

In many ways, the members of St. John’s, 2001 aren’t too different from the founding members of 1851, and we hope and expect the parishioners of 2051 won’t be too different from us, at least insofar as we are striving “to serve God, to serve others and ourselves, in the spirit of Christ, who unites us.”

Over the years there have been troubled times for St. John’s; deficit budgets, unexpected growth, no attendance, divisions and controversy, discouragement, loss. We expect the first vestry dealt with all that and more and the vestry of 2051 will be able to produce their own list of trials and tribulations.

We suspect though, that even had Mr. Boys foreseen the future, he would have kept rowing his boat downriver to Portland, because “I told my wife before I left, if there was a Church clergyman in Oregon, I would find him out.” If we’re not so different from the zealous Mr. Boys, we’re not so different from those first disciples, who rowed across the Galilee “to seek Him out.” Their legacy has continued for 2,000 years.

Having inherited this church, this tradition of 150-years of Christian service, we hope we have been good stewards of all that was freely given us, that we might bequeath to St. John’s 2051 a firm foundation on which to build, a sense of community and service, and the spirit of pioneers.

- Amen