

St. John's Episcopal provides a magnificent spiritual home

By Ruth Hultz

Herald-Whig Staff Writer

St. John's Episcopal church is Quincy's oldest church building, and throughout its long history, church members have joyfully maintained their magnificent spiritual home.

The church was dedicated in 1852. Since then its members have added artifacts that the congregation has worked diligently to preserve.

For 85 years Quincy was the see of the Episcopal Diocese of Quincy and the church then was called St. John's Cathedral. Because of its cathedral status, and because of the generous contributions of its members, the church is the home of many majestic gifts dedicated to the glory of God.

"We are small in numbers, but large in spirit — God's Holy Spirit," said the Rev. H.W. Sandy Herrmann, rector of St. John's Church.

"We believe we were blessed by God in many ways and one of the most visible ways is this facility. It's marvelous. It's not only historical, but beautiful.

"Over the years, a lot of energy has been put forward for the benefit of maintaining this facility — Quincy's oldest church. It's expensive to maintain, but we don't believe it's just ours. We have a large responsibility to pass on that which was given to us," Herrmann said.

The first congregation built a stone Early Gothic Revival church building. That building is the nave and bell tower of the current church.

The original building had four spires. By 1866, the congregation added the transepts and chancel. The chapel and chapter room were added in 1879.

The architect for the first section was Charles Howland of Massachusetts. Quincy architect Robert Bunce designed the chapel and chapter room addition.

The congregation immediately dedicated itself to the upkeep of the church. In 1879 members replastered the church and redid the frescoes. In 1883, they added the high altar made of carved Caen stone, a rippled limestone quarried in Normandy, France.

The reredos, or set of carved panels, behind the high altar were added as a memorial in 1907. The singular piece was designed by famous eastern church designer Ralph Adams Cramm of Boston, hand carved in Germany, and assembled in this country. The altar is one of six American altars featured in the book "Notable Altars of England and America."



Incorporated in the carvings are paintings by Bavarian priest/painter Johannes Oertel. The central painting depicts "The Final Harvest," a theme that is carried on again in the pulpit front piece "The Sower," symbolic of sowing the good seeds of the gospel.

A year after the reredos was installed, the congregation completed an extensive renovation, costing about \$50,000.

The church's varied types and styles of stained glass windows are glorious contributions to the beauty of the church, and the congregation has been diligent in their



H-W Photos/Michael Kipley

The Rev. H.W. Sandy Herrmann, rector of St. John's Episcopal Church, stands outside the church building in Quincy, at left. Other photos show a detail of the altar, top left; a stained glass window, top right; and the church interior, above.

upkeep. The church has a signed Mayer window that incorporates painted and stained glass. It also has two signed Tiffany windows that are unparalleled in their subtlety of color.

The congregation's most recent labor of love was raising funds to purchase an 188 E.&G.G. Hook, Opus 326 organ, which will be installed in 2004.

For 149 years, church members have been scrupulous in their preservation of their church, not only for themselves, but for the community. The Muddy River Opera Company, Quincy Symphony Chorus and Quincy Civic Music Association regularly choose St. John's for performances because of its good acoustics.

Over the years, the church building has been home to such local programs as CASA, Alcoholics Anonymous, Helps Ministry and the Hereford, Germany, exchange program. Currently, the Orthodox Church of America meets in the All Saints Chapel.

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