

Church Built to Honor Daughters Memory

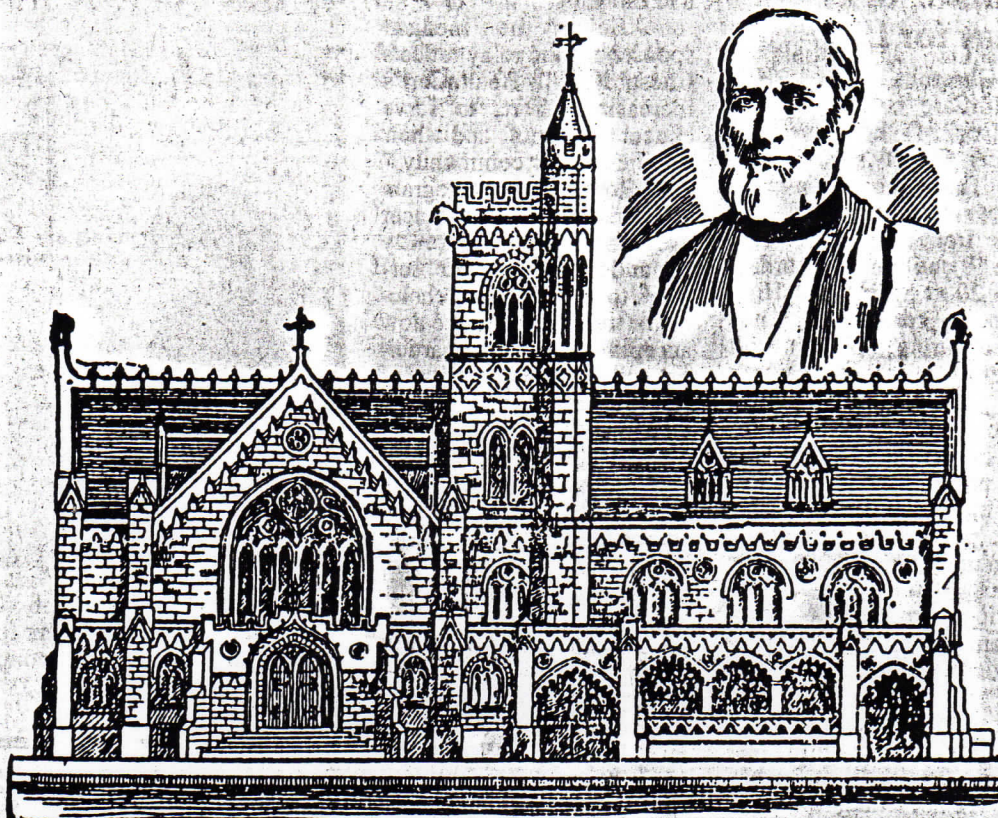
by Newton M. Howard

Early in 1891, the need for a Mission in Ambler was felt by St. Thomas' Episcopal Church in Whitmarsh. The minister, Rev. Samuel Snelling, arranged for the group's first meeting in a classroom of Sunnyside Academy in Ambler, at the corner of Main & Butler. Meeting place later was a room in Keasbey & Mattison's Opera House Building.

The group was known at first as St. Thomas' Protestant Episcopal Mission. Late in 1897, industrialist Dr. Richard V. Mattison asked that they choose a new name, with their choice being "Trinity Mission". By Spring of 1898, Doctor Mattison and his wife announced they would build a church for the Mission in memory of their deceased daughter Esther Victoria. It would be called Trinity Memorial Church, with plans for the structure being prepared by Lansdale architect Milton B. Bean, well-known for the buildings in Ambler he had designed.

Work on the new edifice was underway in mid-summer with cellar excavation completed and foundation begun, using stone brought from Mattison's Quarry a block away at Highland Avenue and Farm Lane. The estimated cost at that time was \$40,000.

When the walls of the church had reached sufficient height, the cornerstone was laid in the base of the tower by the Bishop of Pennsylvania, O. W. Whitaker. Contained in the cornerstone box were Esther Victoria Mattison's full name, date of birth and death, a bible and prayer book, plus a copy of the Ambler Gazette of August 11, 1898, which showed architect Bean's drawing of the church. This was held on a day late in September at 3:30 pm, with 32 clergymen present. After the ceremony, officials and guests attended



Drawing of Trinity Memorial Church prepared in 1898 by Architect Milton B. Bean for Dr. and Mrs. Richard V. Mattison, in memory of their daughter Esther Victoria Mattison who died in 1887 at the age of four years. Inset shows Bishop O. W. Whitaker who laid the cornerstone in the Fall of 1898.

a luncheon at the Ambler Country Club, a short distance away on present-day Trinity Avenue.

Original plans called for a state roof, but were changed to tile, making it

necessary to install heavier rafters. In the meantime, the Mattisons were meeting with the well-known New York firm of Fred S. Lamb, engaged to do the stained glass work in the new

church.

By May of 1899, work on the tower had progressed to the point where it had risen above the roof line.

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At this time Mattison made a change, not in the architect's plans, which was to prove disastrous. He decided to install a large clock in the tower, with a face 10 feet in diameter, large enough to be seen from the railroad station and other parts of Ambler. This decision made it necessary to increase the tower's height by thirteen feet, resulting in the lack of sufficient support for the extra weight.

On a Monday afternoon just before 4 o'clock, about 20 feet of the top of the tower came crashing down without much warning, doing damage amounting to several thousands of dollars. Two large holes broke through the tile roof, crushing the rafters and hurling tons of stones, mortar and debris into the cellar. This accident made it necessary to remove about 50 feet of stone from the tower down to the roofline and begin again, this time eliminating the Doctor's plans for the clock.

By Spring of 1900, work on the church was being pushed along by Leidy Heckler and his carpenters. Efforts were being made to

complete the Sunday School room first in order that services could be held here early in May, at which time the congregation would be vacating their rented room in the Opera House Building.

With consecration scheduled for early in 1901, and ceiling work being completed from scaffolding high in the church, tragedy struck when a young carpenter stepped back, plunging to his death on the cement floor below.

Though the church was not completed, consecration was held on Esther Victoria Mattison's birthday, February 2nd, 1901, at which time she would have been eighteen years old, had she lived.

On June 16, 1986, disaster struck when fire destroyed the "Church of the Beautiful Windows", as it had become known. The devastation was so great that little could be salvaged, making it necessary to

rebuild.

Work began on the new building late in 1988 with completion the following year. During construction of the new Trinity Church, services were conducted just across the Pike in the chapel of St. Mary's Villa, owned since 1936 by the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Incidentally, St. Mary's property had once been the home of Dr. & Mrs. Richard V. Mattison.

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Man to Man Cancer Support Group

The next meeting of the Man to Man prostate cancer support group will be held on Thursday, May 21 from 8 to 9 a.m. in Laughlin Hall, room D. at Chestnut Hill Hospital, 8835 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia. Members will discuss the upcoming Relay for Life to be held at Springfield High School in Erdenheim on June 19 & 20.

Meetings are held in conjunction with the American Cancer Society and meetings are typically held the third Thursday of each month. For information, call (215) 248-8395.