

Settlement of Scranton

Scranton was first settled just before the Revolution by some adventurous members of New England families who were spurred by the spirit of exploration and by the chance to acquire vast acreage at small expense. Scranton remained for the next seventy years largely a farming community served by a few purveyors of goods and services.

By 1840, the abundant supply of coal made the area attractive for the development of the iron industry as well as the production of that natural resource. Aided by the arrival of the railways, Scranton's population grew from five hundred in 1840 to one hundred and thirty thousand in 1910.

This swift growth in population was made possible by the waves of immigration from Europe: Welsh, German, and Irish people were followed by people from Eastern Europe and Italy. These newcomers tended to settle in ethnically discrete neighborhoods in Scranton and its environs.

The Founding of St. Luke's

On August 5, 1851, after Evening Prayer and Sermon at the Methodist Church, The Reverend John Long, an Episcopal priest assigned to missionary work first in Montrose and then in Scranton, gathered some of the worshippers for the purpose of organizing an Episcopal parish. At that first meeting wardens and vestry were elected, and St. Luke the Evangelist, the "Beloved Physician," was chosen as the parish's Patron.

The First Church

In 1852, ground on the east side of Penn Avenue, between Lackawanna Avenue and Spruce Street, was broken to build the first church and rectory. The plain but comfortable structure seated two hundred and twenty-five, and the parish thrived and grew, so that this building became too small and was torn down. From 1853, when the church was consecrated, to 1865, when the railroads had pushed westward from Scranton supplying anthracite coal both to the east and the west, the parish's growth more than surpassed, in proportion, the growth of the city, making a larger church necessary.

The Second and Present Church

The architect of the church was Richard Upjohn of New York, the designer of Trinity Church on Wall Street. When built, the church's style was termed English or Ornamental Gothic, with pointed windows and arches, and exterior buttresses to support the walls which are made of locally-quarried stone. With the passage of time, this style has come to be known as Victorian Gothic. The plan for the church reflects the preference for the offices of Morning Prayer with Sermon and Choral Evensong as the usual services on Sundays. Construction began in October, 1867, and was not completed until July, 1871, because of a miners' strike. The interior of the church has been enriched by Biblical and traditional Christian symbolism which reminds us that buildings, like books, are meant to be read, to be seen as illustrations in stone, wood, and glass, of the events recorded in the Bible and of the mysteries of the Christian faith. The church comfortably accommodates four hundred worshippers. Contemporary accounts, however, confidently assert that morning and evening congregations of six hundred worshippers each opened the church for worship on July 2, 1871, when the Bishop preached extemporaneously upon the text, "The Lord is in his holy temple" (Habakkuk 2:20), and enlarged upon it by preaching that the Lord is in his holy temple through his Word, his Ministry, and his Sacraments, a preaching understood then as now to disclose the church's mission and ministry.

On Easter Day, 1905, the worshippers saw for the first time a rebuilt altar and reredos, improvements in the chancel, the new baptistry, and new decorations in the nave. The altar, reredos, and the window, depicting Christ's Ascension, were designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany, and the altar was built by the Whitman Company in Philadelphia. The altar is white statuary marble, and the reredos is sculpted from caen stone.

The front of the altar has three panels, the central one representing the Ark of the Covenant, with the outstretched wings of the cherubim covering the mercy seat (Exodus 25:10-22). The side panels are angels kneeling and adoring the Ark. The symbolism is quite clear. For Christians, the altar, where Christ is present in the Sacrament, has completed and replaced the Ark, the altar's prefigurement, where the LORD was present and met the priestly representative of the people.

The reredos also has three panels with figures in relief. The middle one represents the Crucifixion, the left represents Melchizedek bringing forth bread and wine, and blessing Abram, pointing to that "pure offering" which prophecy declared should be offered to the Most High (Genesis 14:18-20), and the right depicts the Supper at Emmaus, where the Lord made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread (Saint Luke 24:13-35). The symbolism again is quite clear. Christ's self-giving sacrifice on the Cross is made present in the Eucharist where Christians are united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

So fine is the work considered to be that St. Luke's altar and reredos are included in *Some Notable Altars in the Church of England and the American Episcopal Church* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908) by The Reverend John Wright.

Concern for the Community

A keen interest in the welfare of the community has been one thread by which the history of the parish may be traced. One of its first leaders and senior wardens, Dr.

Benjamin H. Throop, saw the need for a public hospital and persuaded the parish in 1871 to offer use of the old rectory without rent for the first free dispensary of the community.

This concern for the community continued in 1898 when the Throop Memorial Parish House, next to the church, was opened. St. Luke's followed the national trend of Episcopal parishes by opening a Parish House whose principal purpose was to be of service to the community.

From 1897 until 1921, St. Luke's provided a summer home for needy women and their children when that ministry of support and outreach was absorbed by the Community Chest. In 1911, Rogers Israel, the rector and later Bishop of Erie, founded the Girls' Friendly Society in the Parish House and provided there a "Room of Shelter" for young women arriving in the city without immediate residence. Dr. Israel similarly founded the Associated Charities, later to become part of the Family Welfare Association. The Boys' Club, later the Boys' Industrial Society, was housed in the Parish House until 1922 when it moved and became a part of the Community Chest. Responding to the movement to establish free kindergartens, Dr. Israel founded three of them at St. Luke's Throop Memorial Parish House under the superintendence of parishioners. Thriving kindergartens, they later became part of the public school system.

On its Fiftieth Anniversary, in 1922, St. Luke's was "as it turned the half-century mark, equipped to minister in every way in a varied physical and spiritual program, to meet the needs of its many parishioners, who were now spreading out in all directions over a rapidly growing city."

The Church in the Heart of Things

Robert P. Kreitler was installed as rector in 1912, succeeding Rogers Israel who had been elected Bishop of Erie. Kreitler was said to be "probably the best known and

best loved clergyman to take Scranton to his heart.” The new rector followed in his predecessor’s footsteps by being active in the community, and St. Luke’s became widely known as “the church in the heart of things,” a title taken by Kreidler as the subtitle of his *Seventy-Five Years in Saint Luke’s Church 1851-1926* (Scranton: International Textbook Press, 1926). This history was continued by the next and tenth rector, Richard K. White whose *A History of St. Luke’s Church 1927-1952* (Scranton: St. Luke’s Church, 1952) chronicled the involvement of St. Luke’s in the community and in ecumenical affairs. Without these two books, this short history of St. Luke’s could not have been possible. Robert Kreidler had made St. Luke’s the site for all joint religious services of the Central City Protestant Churches, and Richard White perpetuated this involvement and expanded upon it while undertaking substantial improvements, renovations, and repairs to the church and the Parish House. Richard White, too, in the years following World War II, succeeded in adding numerous memorials to the All Saints’ Memorial Endowment Fund, established in 1926, to benefit the ministry of St. Luke’s.

With but one interruption, when the Parish House was given over to become and to house the Lucan Center for the Arts, the rectors following Dr. White have continued to develop confidence in the parish to provide its own programs and outreach to the community. St. Luke’s helped to found the Senior Craftsmen Shop where hand-crafted merchandise made by senior citizens was sold on consignment. The Shop provided an expression of seniors’ creativity, and special and unique gifts, clothing, and home decorations. St. Luke’s, with the Diocese of Scranton, Covenant Presbyterian Church, and the Lackawanna Jewish Federation, established Scranton Neighbors, now Lackawanna Neighbors, and through it owns a portion of the Midtown Apartments on Adams Avenue. The vestry has taken responsibility to select leadership which encourages programs and activities for the parish’s well-being.

Historical Roots Feed a Contemporary Church

Following the Episcopal Church's adoption in 1979 of a new edition of The Book of Common Prayer, the rector, Everett W. Francis, encouraged by the bishop, Mark Dyer, led the parish in a renovation of the church, especially the chancel, which more comfortably serves the Episcopal Church's emphasis on the Eucharist as the principal act of worship on the Lord's Day. The pews of the chancel were removed, and a free-standing altar, allowing the celebrant to face the congregation, was added. The organ console was made portable and moved to the left side of the chancel. The altar rail was moved from the sanctuary steps to the nave. And an aumbry, in which the blessed Sacrament is reserved, was installed in the place of the side altar, to the right of the chancel. The entire interior of the church was repainted and relighted. The rectors of St. Luke's have thoroughly embraced the new Prayer Book with its preference for the Eucharist which is celebrated at weddings, funerals, confirmations, ordinations, and public baptisms, as well as at all Sunday services.

The Recent Past

St. Luke's created a Youth Center on the second floor of the Parish House. The church and the first floor of the Parish House have been air conditioned. Kreitler Hall has been refurbished along with the rector's study, and a meeting room and offices upstairs. Bishop Paul Marshall blessed and rededicated the Parish House to the use of the parish following its use as the Lucan Center for the Arts. New slate roofs have been installed throughout the church and the Parish House, and structural repairs to the columns in the church, compressed by the weight of the roofs and by age, have been accomplished.

Liturgically, the Prayer Book's recommendations for the services on Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday have become normal. An early family service on Christmas Eve, with a Christmas story for the children, has been added. Congregational and choral, in English and Latin, settings of the Eucharist are sung on Sundays. St. Luke's has hosted diocesan conventions, the Bishop's days for children as well as special events for church

musicians, clergy Bible studies with the Bishop, ordinations, and regional confirmations.

The vestry has been encouraged to assume greater responsibility by chairing the parish committees and controlling their committees' parts of the parish's budget. The recently-established Pastoral Care Committee, responsible for the parish's Lay Eucharistic Ministry, has charge of the pastoral needs of the parish and discharges them with the rector. Also recently-established, the Youth Committee oversees the Sunday School and sponsors events and activities for the youth of the parish as well as inter-generational events and meals. These newer committees take their place alongside the important services to the parish by the Finance, Property and Buildings, and Stewardship Committees and the Women of St. Luke's whose projects, especially baking Welsh cookies, benefit several charitable organizations.

Members of St. Luke's are determined to continue in the tradition they have received to be an open and welcoming Christian congregation equipped to meet the needs of the parishioners and the community, and to serve the larger Church.

Adapted from <http://ec.scranton.edu/Kingsley/StL/history.htm> 3/20/2014