

PART III

THE BUILDING BEFORE 1909

Our church building also has a history and although its past predates our association with it, the fact that it has been so long our home should make the early records of interest to us.

In 1854 the plot of ground 31' x 112' 2" was purchased for \$ 496 dollars which formerly belonged to Abraham Schuyler. At the rear of the property in 1860 a chapel was completed which was used for worship through 1865. This is the part of the building today that houses the Sunday School quarters, meeting rooms, kitchen and the church office. The completed structure was called Bayard Street Chapel. In 1863 an attempt was made to begin construction on the large auditorium to be directly in front of it but the Civil War was in progress and funds were slow in appearing. In 1864 the first parsonage on 60 Bayard Street was purchased for \$ 5,000. April 21, 1865 saw the cornerstone of the big auditorium or sanctuary laid. On that solemn morning the body of assassinated Abraham Lincoln passed slowly through New Brunswick by train, only a few feet away.

As the building on the church progressed, the chapel also was remodeled and the congregation temporarily worshipped in the Court House just down the street, and on June 17, 1866 the formal dedication service was held in the newly completed addition which cost \$ 75,000 - a considerable sum in those days. The congregation called itself The Bayard Street Methodist Episcopal Church and then shortly after changed it to The St. James Methodist Episcopal Church (that section had at one time been known as St. James Place).

The structure was a very imposing one with a steeple which was the tallest in the city, a Gothic spire rising 196 feet and 4" into the air with a gold cross atop. Although not the largest church in the city it was considered as one of the most beautifully decorated. Its pastor at that time described the new section - "our house of worship is a beautiful temple. Its windows gorgeous in color, the finished work of the artist tells the story of Christ, its ceilings representing Heaven's blue, studded with the constellations of stars around us, woodwork of rare and costly material..."

An interesting side-light is a custom of the time of renting pews to families. After the service had progressed for ten minutes, visitors were allowed to occupy any vacant pew!