

## HISTORY OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, CANAAN, VERMONT

By Robert Lee

The following account of the history of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Canaan is based on a history written by Mrs. Beatrice Schoff Holmes, a life long communicant of St. Paul's. Bea, as she is known to most of us, recalls that the first Episcopalian church services in this community were held upstairs in what is presently the second building from the Connecticut River bridge in West Stewartstown on the south side of the street. The building has been known variously as the McKinnon Drug Store, and as a restaurant operated successively by Mr. Ripley, Mr. Cook, and finally by Carroll Jackson. Services were led there by the Revs. Wilson and Bishop. Bea recalls that she was baptized in that building.

She also remembers hearing first-hand accounts of there being quite a bit of opposition to the Episcopal Church coming to this community. Some people did what they could to discourage it to the extent that men appeared at services refusing to take off their hats and also squeaking their boots to be disruptive.

As far as we know St. Paul's present church building holds the distinction of being the only church building in the United States on which customs duty has been paid. It was then called an entrance fee and amounted to \$34.90 - a considerable amount I would think back in 1899. The building was originally constructed in East Hereford, Quebec, primarily for the family of Mr. Edwin Bean on land given by Mr. Neil Tillotson adjoining the East Hereford cemetery. It was designed by the son-in-law of then Arch Deacon Rowe of the Diocese of Quebec. Rev. Ernest Wilson, who also held services in West Stewartstown, was rector when it was dedicated November 28th, 1894. Less than five years later, due to a decline in parishioners from death and moving away, Mr. Bean offered the building to the people in Canaan as a gift if they would move it. Arrangements for transferring title to the building were made between the Bishop of Quebec, and the Bishop of Vermont, the Rt. Rev. Arthur Hall.

Selecting the site for the building in Canaan was not a simple matter. Miss Eva Van Dyke offered two sites - one was the lot where the house in which Mrs. Marge Henson now lives, across the street from the old Town Hall. The other was the lot where Maurice's Motel is now located. However, some parishioners, in particular Mrs. William Moore, felt strongly that the church building should be located more centrally, in other words nearer to West Stewartstown. So, as a compromise, the present site was purchased by Bea's parents, Mr. and Mrs. William I. Schoff, and given to the Diocese of Vermont.

Mr. Claude Heston was engaged to disassemble the building during the winter of 1899, marking carefully each piece for reassembling. The first service in the building at the new site was held on or about Pentecost 1900.

Ironically, the arrival of the church building roughly coincided with the departure of what was to be St. Paul's last resident clergyman, the Rev. Watham. He was known as the "fighting Parson" due to the controversy which arose during the fund raising for a rectory while he was here. In the midst of the storm he left for Texas allegedly taking the funds he had collected with him. It was said that Bishop Hall of the Diocese of Vermont replaced these funds out of his own pocket. Also, while the Rev. Watham was here a small lot was purchased in the Riverside section of Stewartstown (next to the Lyford

At this point I would like to explain that I have deleted a substantial part of the details of Bea's history wherein she gives well-deserved credit by name to those people who over the years have generously given memorials to St. Paul's in the way of stained glass windows, furnishings, etc. I would like to make specific mention, however, of the very generous gift by the parish of All Saint's Church, Bay Head, New Jersey, which made it possible for us to install vinyl siding on the church exterior as well as cover the stained glass windows with Plexiglas to protect and insulate them. This gift was made possible through the efforts of Mr. James Bird, a member of All Saint's Parish in Bay Head, but who also regularly visits St. Paul's when he is at Quimby Country out in Averill.

St. Paul's is now part of what has come to be called the Border Ministry consisting of three missions yoked together - St. Paul's, Canaan, All Saint's, Hereford, and St. Stephen's, Colebrook. What makes the Border Ministry unique from other yoked together churches is the involvement of three dioceses; hence three bishops and two countries. This arrangement developed gradually over the years with St. Paul's serving sort of as the glue which held the three together