

St Mark's: The 20th Century and Beyond

By William J. Matsch

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[*Editor's Note:* The Language and content of Common Prayer has always been important to this Parish. When rationalism and a false so-called scientism became rampant in the 19th Century, our Bishop John Spalding exposed their faulty arguments in a series of Lectures in 1887. When iconoclasm overwhelmed protestant America, St. Mark's used beautiful stained glass and finely made Vestments and Altar frontals from England. When coarse, "charismatic personalities" demanded attention in the religious marketplace, St. Mark's continued to pray with the quiet and profound texts of the Lessons and Psalms and Liturgy, day by day and season by season. When modernism and the Novus Ordo movement overwhelmed Western Christendom, St. Mark's searched out the origins of her Apostolic Faith and, by God's grace, was restored to the original Tradition of the Fathers: the Orthodox Christian Church. This is no ordinary Parish, and by God's help, she never will be. —John Charles Connely]

SINCE today, January 31, 1999, will be the last Annual Meeting of St. Mark's Parish of the 20th Century, Fr. Connely suggested that it would be a good idea to summarize and review the last 100 years of the Parish. And, so the following report was gleaned from various writings of former Rectors, the book by Helen Bradshaw, and remembrances of long-time parishioners.



The Right Reverend John Franklin Spalding

The first Episcopal Missionary Bishop of Colorado and founder of St. Mark's Parish of Denver

St. Mark's Parish was born out of a bitter battle between the then Dean Hart of St. John's Cathedral and the then Bishop Spalding of the Diocese of Colorado. Hart, of the cathedral, wanted the diocese to grow out and from the cathedral, as is the custom in England. Bishop Spalding wanted the growth and development of the diocese to stem from the actions of the Bishop. There was money involved, and the struggle was bitter. At that time, the Bishop could have gone one way, the cathedral another and St. Mark's still another. Dean Hart wrote, It is a matter of great thankfulness that the God who maketh men to be of one mind in a an house, so granted us His Spirit of forgiveness that we were enabled to continue amicably our Church life for the next decade as if the strife about St. Mark's had never occurred.

What held it all together was the worship common to all in the Book of Common Prayer. The year was 1875. Bishop Spalding himself was founder and pastor of the new Parish.

Colorado was made a State in 1876.

The first rector of St. Mark's Parish was the Rev. Alfred W. Arundel. The first Services were in rented rooms. A handsome brick church was built in 1879 at Broadway and 13th Avenue.



St. Mark's First Building
Built in 1879 at Broadway and 13th Avenue in Denver.

In 1889 lots were purchased, and the building that housed St. Mark's up until 1987 was built at Lincoln and 12th Avenue. On June 23, 1890 the parish was incorporated and adopted its official name, St. Mark's Parish of Denver. In Dec. 7, 1890 Fr. Cyrus Townsend Brody became the second rector.

The Rev. Dr. John Henry Houghton became the third rector in 1892. He had turned down a call to be Dean of St. John's Cathedral Parish.



Inside Old St. Mark's, c. 1891

With this background we entered the 20th Century with Fr. Houghton as rector, housed in the new building and with the following stats: 1500 members; 550 Communicants; 60 Sunday School students; income of \$13,040.06; Cash on hand \$575.00; Expenses \$6,416.00; Indebtedness \$8,500.00 on building.

This was 15 more communicants than St. John's.

The choir had 28 members; junior choir 18 members.

Sister Hannah E. Austin, SSJE, was called by Dr. Houghton to serve as Parish Visitor. She made over 500 home visitations a year and was constantly a help to mothers and children and the ill. She was present when Archbishop Tikhon visited and blessed the Parish on St. Mark's Day 1904. She served until her repose February 13, 1917.



Sister Hannah Austin, SSJE

St. Mark's Parish Visitor—present at the visit of St. (then Archbishop) Tikhon

In the meantime, out in the real world, 1903 was the year of the first successful flight by the Wright Brothers. In 1914 World War I began. In 1918 the Russian Royal family were murdered by Communists and the terrible persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church began with millions of New Martyrs produced in the destruction.

In 1916 St. Mark's became the sixth largest parish in the West with 776 communicants. Dr. Houghton retired in 1917 after presenting his last Confirmation Class. Elizabeth Eckstein was in that Class. Elizabeth still attends Morning Prayer and Mass every week. She catches a ride with Mary Gay Sullivan.



The Reverend Dr. John Henry Houghton Memorial

The third Rector of St. Mark's Parish

The next Rector after Dr. Houghton was the Reverend Fred Ingley, who after four years became the Bishop coadjutor of Colorado under Bishop Johnson. Because of the Bishops Spalding and Ingley St. Mark's was always called the Bishops' Church and served for many years as the choice where Ordinations of new clergy were held.

The next rector was the Rev. Herbert W. Prince. In 1918 World War I ended. In 1919 the Treaty of Versailles redrew the map of Europe; in 1920 victory by the Red Army ended the Russian Civil War. In 1922 Alexander Graham Bell died. He had obtained a patent on the invention of the telephone in 1876. In 1927 Lindbergh flew non-stop across the Atlantic, the same year that Fr. Grace came to St. Mark's to take charge of the Mission to the Deaf which had been started in 1907 by Fr. Cloud. All Souls' Mission to the Deaf served the hearing impaired for 39 years. Services were held in the Chapel of the Holy Comforter, starting with 10 persons and growing to over 70.



Chapel of the Holy Comforter at Lent, c. 1975

The Rev. Elmer Schmuck succeeded Fr. Prince, serving two years before becoming the Missionary Bishop of Wyoming. The Rev. Walter H. Stowe became rector in 1925 and served to 1929, the year the stock market crash triggered this country's worst Depression. The Rev. Thomas J. Haldeman became rector in 1930 and served to 1942.

These were indeed trying times: in the midst of the Depression in 1933, Adolph Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany; in 1939 Germany invaded Poland and World War II began with Hitler's program to exterminate the Jews. In 1941 Japanese planes bombed Pearl Harbor, and 1942 the Atomic Age had begun. During these difficult times, Fr. Haldeman's tenure reflected a large drop in church membership and income.

It is also interesting to note that the Episcopal Church held the general convention in Denver September 1931. Six thousand delegates attended during which two of the major topics discussed were artificial methods of birth control and the seething tide of Russian Communism. At this time the present standard edition of the Book of Common Prayer was presented to the church.



Inside of Old St. Mark's, c. 1975

In 1943 the Rev. Frank Walter Williams became rector. His major effort was to bring the parish back to some of its former prominence. He took charge of a church which had begun as a suburban church on the outskirts of the city with lots of space and individual homes, and which had become an urban church in the middle of apartments.

Many of us became members of St. Mark's under Fr. Williams. One of his major accomplishments was bringing six men into the priesthood. He also built a large young people's organization. He was a fine musician and left St. Mark's with a great amount of church music, some of which we still use. He was affectionately called Pop by all parishioners.

During Fr. Williams' tenure, history was being made: in 1944 Allied Forces invaded Europe at Normandy; in 1945 the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan; in 1948 the State of Israel was established, and in 1949 Mao Tse Tung and the Communists took over China, and in 1950 President Truman ordered the Air Force and Navy to Korea. That was the same year that Fr. Williams left St. Mark's and was followed by the Rev. H. Evans Moreland. During his six-year tenure, the building had deteriorated to the point that the tower toppled and fell. At that time the Parish had to spend \$40,000 to refurbish so that the building could be occupied.



Inside Old St. Mark's during Lent, c.1975

In 1952 the first hydrogen bomb was exploded; in 1953 the Korean war ended in armistice but no permanent peace; in 1955 Dr. Jonas Salk discovered polio vaccine and in 1957 the Space Age began with Russia's launch of Sputnik I. That was the year, 1957, that the Rev. Harvey Livermore Wolverton became rector. In 1959 Castro took over Cuba; in 1960 twenty African nations gained independence by throwing off colonialism; in 1963 the nation mourned the death of President Kennedy; and in 1964 the Congress gave the president power to wage war in Vietnam. The 1960's became one of very trying times for all churches—the trend of families away from the parish area had begun. But, during these years St. Mark's had many dedicated laymen and vestrymen, who wrestled with financial and promotional problems.

It should be noted that St. Mark's parish had helped to start six missions, all of which have become parishes: the Ascension, Sts. Phillip and James, St. George, St. Michael & All Angels, the Epiphany & St. Peter's.

In 1965 the Rev. Edward S. Gray became rector. It is interesting to note that at the time Fr. Gray was called, the Bishop of Colorado, Bp. Minnis, wanted St. Mark's for his chapel and did everything he could to discourage the vestry from appointing a new rector. Fr. Gray was well known by the Presiding Bishop, therefore, he was duly appointed.



Window Inside Old St. Mark's, c. 1975

The nation was shocked by the assassination of Martin Luther King, and in 1969 Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on moon. In the meantime the National Church was heading into a different direction by issuing a book of four different service rites. These were to be tried so that when the General Convention was held a decision could be made on the Book of Common Prayer. Fr. Gray explained to us that this was a very big change from our present Prayer Book and warned us that it would be changing the faith and not just the liturgy.

We, (St. Mark's Parish) therefore, started to make plans to keep our faith where it had been for 100 years. The St. Mark's Investment Corporation was formed to move all our liquid assets into the corporation and invest in worthwhile church projects and to preserve our capital. In 1970 this corporation came into being with each communicant of St. Mark's Parish a stockholder.

The Rt. Rev. William C. Frey had been ordained Bishop of Colorado in 1971, and he and Fr. Gray were in constant conversation on the Prayer Book. Although they did not agree, St. Mark's was left alone to continue the traditional service.



Inside Old St. Mark's, Facing West, c. 1975

In 1974 President Nixon became the first (and only) president of the United States to resign. In 1975 Vietnam War ended with capture of Saigon. In 1977 Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak built the world's first personal computer, the Apple 1, in a garage. Fr. Gray hired the Rev. Louis Tarsitano as the assistant rector.

St. Mark's mourned the sudden and unexpected death of Fr. Gray in 1981. Fr. Tarsitano became rector and hired the Rev. David K. Wilson as his assistant.

Bingo came into St. Mark's parish life in the 1980's to assist in paying for operations and to help purchase hardware when needed. The entire operation was by St. Mark's volunteers under the direction of Martin Long, a member of the Vestry. This was phased out in 1990.

In 1983 French researchers identified HIV as the precursor to AIDS.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Fr. Tarsitano and Bp. Frey did not get along, and it soon developed into a bitter relationship which was terminated by the Bishop in a letter to the rector informing the parish that it was being dissolved on April 27, 1984. The Parish immediately consulted with the late George Rice, an attorney and a communicant of St. Mark's, and for the first time St. Mark's Church was closed on the following Sunday. It was felt that the Diocese might move in and take the property.

Two law firms were hired, one for St. Mark's Parish and one for the Investment Corporation, and two lawsuits were filed on April 30th, 1984.

Fr. Tarsitano moved to New York to help the Prayer Book movement which was gathering members and money to preserve the 1928 Prayer Book in the Episcopal Church. Fr. Wilson became the rector, because the vestry felt Tarsitano would not return. Tarsitano became incensed over the appointment, and in turn was dismissed by the vestry.

Now the church had a large split with 40% of the parishioners going with the Bishop to St. John's Cathedral Chapel and 60% staying with the St. Mark's Parish.

In the meantime, St. Mary's Parish had filed a lawsuit against the Diocese in 1980, and the suit was finally settled by the Colorado Supreme Court, which stated that the Diocese was the owner of the property, not the Parish. When this decision became known to the law firms representing St. Mark's, the answer was obvious: St. Mark's did not have a chance, and our lawsuits were dropped.

In 1986 Fr. Wilson called Fr. John Connely to be his assistant.

In 1987 St. Mark's was notified by Bp. Frey to vacate the building and leave all property therein by September 1, 1987.

Fr. Connely found St. Mark's a church home in the North Presbyterian Church in north Denver. A lease was signed on September 7, 1987 on a month to month basis. A dispute arose between Fr. Wilson and Fr. Connely, so a recently retired priest, the Reverend Donald W. Lloyd, D.D., served an interim rector until the dispute could be settled. Fr. Lloyd continued to serve the Parish, and especially the eight o'clock Sunday Mass, until he moved to Madison, Mississippi in 1991. He is a much beloved 'Emeritus' and often visited by our faithful. Fr. Connely was then named by the Vestry as rector. With no church building and few vestments or furnishings, we met at the North Presbyterian Church and held regular Services. This unsettling move with nothing but our faith and dedication to the cause is what held us together. I might add that no one left in this move, which proves that bricks and mortar do not make a church: Faith does and God does.

We all worked and gave to St. Mark's, and with God's help, and sixty dedicated laymen, we located the Church property which you are now using. The building was purchased on September 15, 1988, due to the diligence of Fr. Connely in locating the property, and we moved in October 1, 1988. When Fr. Connely first found the S. Vine Street church for sale, he immediately called Peggy and Bill Matsch to come take a look at it. The building was in terrible condition, but again with generous gifts and laymen working day in and day out cleaning, painting and renovating, we have this jewel of a church building.

In 1989 the Berlin Wall came down, beginning the demise of Soviet communism. About that same time the rector of St. Gabriel Episcopal Church, Fr. Mustoe, came to join us and brought about fifty of his parishioners with him.

But, during all of this time we had no bishop, so we could not have Confirmations. So, Fr. Connely contacted a group of Episcopal bishops who had continued the 1928 prayer book. Bishop Pope came to Denver to see what could be done; nothing happened, in fact he lied to us. Bishop Davies came, was heartbroken over what had happened to us, but was unable to help us.

Fr. Connely looked into the Polish Old Catholic Church, and a group of us went to Toronto to one of their big meetings. It became obvious to us that we did not fit. However, Fr. Mustoe and his people did move out and joined the Polish church.

In 1991 the U.S. led coalition defeated Iraq in the Persian War. That same year Fr. Connely found that we had an excellent fit with the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church and the St. Tikhon liturgy, which is almost identical to the Communion Service in the 1928 American Book of Common Prayer.

In 1991 the following report was read to the parishioners of St. Mark's:

Essay on the Easter Faith

By the Rev. John Charles Connely, M.A

When asked, Why do you rob banks? John Dillinger answered: Because that's where the money is. When a Christian is asked Why do you follow Jesus Christ?, the answer should be equally obvious, something like Because He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life or Because He is the Resurrection and the Life. These are equally true answers, and they point to the fact that a Christian is seeking in Christ the Way of Life and Truth. Likewise, we require in our Church complete fidelity to Jesus Christ who has given Himself to us in the Scriptures and the Sacraments to make us like Him—Victorious over sin, sickness, hell, death and the grave.

When asked, Why do you want St. Mark's to join the Orthodox Church? I answer: Because that is where the true Doctrine of Christ and His Sacraments have been preserved for two thousand years. Those good things that we used to seek from the Episcopal Church: a) Apostolic order and Priesthood, b) Apostolic Doctrine faithful to the Scriptures and Creeds, c) the Sacraments and prayers of the Church administered according to the Book of Common Prayer—are found in the Orthodox Church today!

We have looked elsewhere in vain. The continuing church is divided into at least nine small sects which often deny each other's validity. The Old Catholic movement is likewise divided and mostly following modern Roman Catholic and Episcopalian trends away from Traditional faith and practice.

I do not deny that there are many committed believers in other churches. Many of them are dear and true friends of St. Mark's Parish. What we need, however, is an affiliation with the universal Church which guarantees our Prayer Book tradition within the larger Holy Tradition of Christ and the Apostles.

The Orthodox Church exists today around the world. The Orthodox Church in the Antiochian Patriarchate, offers an Eastern and a Western Liturgy, including our beloved Prayer Book under the name of the *Liturgy of St. Tikhon*. Archbishop Tikhon served as head of a united orthodox jurisdiction in North America in the opening decade of this century. He soon realized that the Orthodox Church had restricted opportunities in mission unless it was willing to adopt an English language Liturgy in the western mode. He sent our American Prayer Book to the Holy Synod of Moscow, and they sent back their advice regarding the use of the Prayer Book, instructing him to make necessary adjustments. This permission, following the corrected Latin Rite of 1875, opened the way for an English language Orthodox Western Rite. Archbishop Tikhon was recalled to Russia in 1907 and made Patriarch of all the Russian Orthodox Church in 1917.

After the Communists came to power in 1917 they imprisoned him. Lenin had the Patriarch poisoned in 1925 because he would not give up the freedom of the Church. Some 50 years after his death at the hands of atheists, the Patriarch was recognized as St. Tikhon, Enlightener of America and for us, Patron of the Western Rite. Our American Prayer Book, which after his inquiry, was introduced into orthodox use, is therefore known to Orthodox as the *Liturgy of St. Tikhon*.

These days if we want educated and believing clergy to serve this church, then we must look to the Orthodox. If we want the holy Tradition of the ancient Church of Christ as kept for two thousand years, then we must look to the Orthodox. If we want to join with people who value tradition as much or most then we do and who will honor our steadfast resolve to keep the Faith, then we must look to the Orthodox. They are over 250 million strong worldwide and over 5 million in the United States. There are ten orthodox Parishes in Metro Denver alone. Three new congregations were added here just last year. The Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese nourishes a fast-growing Orthodox Western Rite in the United States. Former Episcopalians have founded new orthodox parishes in places like Omaha and Santa Fe. Even where the Orthodox Liturgy is in the Eastern or Byzantine Christian mode, the Faith is entire and the Sacraments valid. The spiritual resources, educational resources, clergy resources and mission resources of the Orthodox Church are, for traditional churchmen, unmatched by any other.

In answer to the question, Why choose the Orthodox Church? I answer Because that is where the Faith of Jesus Christ is kept whose, according to the Tradition of the Apostles. For the future of St. Mark's and for those who should share the experience of the Prayer Book tradition within the greater Tradition of the Holy and Undivided Church of Christ, let us approve the Resolution.

In 1994 South Africa held its first multi-racial elections, ending 46 years of apartheid. In 1995 a truck bomb killed 168 people in Oklahoma City, impacting Denver considerably, since the trials of the suspected bombers were moved here. And, in 1998 President Clinton had been impeached.

Today we stand as a parish which has endured nearly 125 years. We come to the end of a century and by the Grace of God and with renewed faith we enter into the 21st Century.

And, as we enter the 21st century, certain challenges face us:

- To continue our faith we must train priests in the Liturgy of St. Tikhon. Therefore, Fr. Connely must encourage men to vocations to Holy Orders, work with the Hierarchy to establish missions, and develop St. Mark's Parish.
- Also, as staff must be assembled to handle future growth. Each member of the parish should be responsible for bringing in at least one new member, learn the Faith and help others to learn the Faith. Sunday School must increase in staff to teach children our faith.
- With growth, physical facilities should be increased and up-graded, including the Library, Archives, Bookstore, and Meeting space.
- Music, which has always been an integral part of St. Mark's, should be constantly encouraged to enlist more members into that program. The Colorado Children's Choir and the Classic Chorale both started at St. Mark's and became important music organizations in Colorado. Martin and Jane Long had much to do in making the Children's Choir a success.

- Junior Choir and junior Altar Guild and Acolytes should be trained in our faith to become our future leaders.

St. Mark's has proven, with God's help, that we can overcome adversity. Let us go forth with praise and thanksgiving into the 21st century a strong parish dedicated to the traditional Faith.