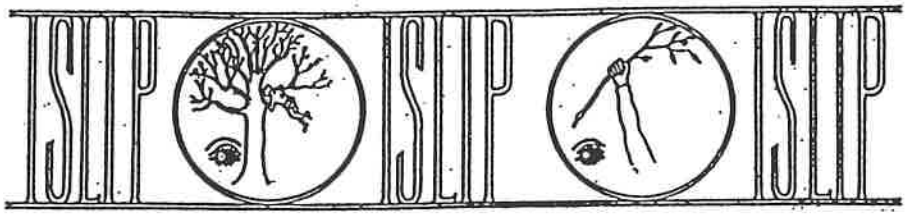
HISTORY OF SAINT MARK'S PARISH/ISLIP NEW YORK
Joseph W. DeBragga



The historic intertwining of the Church of England, the Nicoll family, the village of Islip in Northamptonshire, England, and the Town of Islip, New York is a fitting prelude to this account of Saint Mark's Parish but first it is appropriate to acknowledge the following sources from which I have drawn extensively;

"Historic Sketch of St. Mark's" by the Reverend William H. Garth, Sixth Rector of our Parish

"Fire Island – 1650's – 1980's" by Madeleine C. Johnson

"Along the Great South Bay" by our friend and neighbor, Harry W. Havemeyer

Papers of and interviews with the Venerable Jerome J. Nedelka, Eleventh Rector of our Parish

Interviews with members of Saint Mark's Parish, including William Morris, Wilma Skidmore, William Cook, and Frederic Atwood

Long before Islip/New York became a political entity as a minute part of the British Empire in 1683 there was an established community also known as Islip in Northamptonshire/England and its origin can be traced as far back as the 16th Century. At Westminster Abbey in London, where English kings and queens have been crowned since the Middle Ages, there is a sacred section known as the Islip Chapel. This Chapel was constructed under the direction of John of Islip while he was the Abbot of the Abbey from 1500 to 1532. In addition to the Islip Chapel, Abbot John also completed the Nave of Westminster Abbey and constructed its King Henry VIIth Chapel, its Oak Gallery Pew, and also its Chantry Chapel where he is buried. Abbot John came from the village in Northamptonshire known as Islip. Interestingly enough, in the Islip Chapel of Westminster Abbey you will find curious little drawings in two forms, which represent John Islip's name.

This sketch depicts the frieze that runs along the inner and outer walls of the Islip Chapel. One is an eye with a hand holding a branch or a slip: I slip. The other is an eye with a man slipping from a tree branch: I slip.

The 17th Century was a troubled time for England as well as for the Church of England. More than a few Englishmen thought the Church of England had become onerous, oppressive, and demanding. Roman Catholic rites and practices which had been abolished by Queen Elizabeth I were once again imposed with no little harshness. By 1633 dissenters – and they were many – started fleeing England. They settled temporarily in The Netherlands from whence they embarked for the New World where in 1635 they established the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Before long they spread into what is now Rhode Island and Connecticut. Soon after that they crossed Long Island Sound to establish settlements in Sag Harbor, Southold, and East Hampton.
At this same time turmoil abounded in England. Civil war broke out between the Roundheads and the Cavaliers. King Charles I was beheaded in 1649 and Oliver Cromwell ruled England until his death in 1658. Two years later the English crown was restored to Charles II and – quoting Harry Havemeyer – ". . . a new age of prosperity and overseas settlement began . . ."

But not without difficulty . . . Quoting again from Harry Havemeyer, " . . .early in his reign Charles II had aggravated the worsening relations between England and Holland by granting to his brother James, the Duke of York, the Dutch colony at the mouth of the Hudson River called New Netherland. The grant was accompanied by 4,000 English pounds for its conquest. War erupted at sea and it went badly for the British at first. James, however, was made head of the English Navy and showed himself extraordinarily able at developing English sea power . . . James also decided to secure possession of his newly granted territory in the New World and in 1664 he commissioned an expedition to do so."

James, the Duke of York, appointed Matthias Nicoll II to serve as secretary of that expedition. Matthias' father, a clergyman in the Church of England lived in that Islip village of Northamptonshire as had seven previous generations of the Nicoll family. This was the same Islip where John, the Abbot of Westminster, had been reared. Matthias II's son, William Nicoll, was also born in Islip/Northamptonshire in 1657 and it was he – William Nicoll – who was to acquire the land now known as Islip/New York. The historic intertwining of the Nicoll family, the Church of England, and the Northamptonshire village of Islip is a fitting prelude to this account of the Village of Islip/New York and our Parish of Saint Mark's.

In his comprehensive history of this area, "Along the Great South Bay," Harry Havemeyer relates that Matthias Nicoll II and his family departed for New England in

1664. Religious refugees they definitely were not. The Nicoll family came here as privileged members of the English establishment to further the interests of the British Crown. William Nicoll did return to England to prepare for a legal career. He also served in the English army and almost died in Flanders. After recovering he returned to America and began his career in law and public service.

By 1683 William Nicoll began accumulating land from the Secatogue Indians along the Great South Bay. He received his first patent in 1684. Two more patents followed which increased his holdings to 50,000 acres – approximately 10 square miles – along the bay from what is now Bayport to East Islip as well as all the islands in the bay between Fire Island Inlet and the Connetquot River. William Nicoll is rightly recognized as the 'father of Islip', the last of eight English towns settled on Long Island. It was only natural that he would bestow the name of Islip, his ancestral home in England, upon his extensive holdings along the Great South Bay. And so he did . . . .

For many years William Nicoll was the Assemblyman for Suffolk County and he held the Speakership for fifteen successive terms. Although William Nicoll was the first and by far the largest of the patentees of what is today the Town of Islip there were five other lesser patentees: Andrew Gibb, Thomas and Richard Willets, Stephanus Van Cortlandt, and John Moubray. Andrew Gibb, whose patent consisted of the land between Orowoc and Champlain Creeks, like his colleague William Nicoll was also a lawyer and a public servant. Andrew Gibb succeeded William Nicoll as the County Clerk of Queens and later as Town Clerk of Brookhaven.

In these early days many settlers of the new towns did not lavish affection unto the Church of England. Far from it. . . One of the earliest accounts of the Church of England here in Suffolk County is a vigorous objection to the use of The Book of Common Prayer. In 1685 at a Brookhaven town meeting Samuel Eburn was requested to discontinue using The Prayer Book in worship services ". . . in regard to some tender consciences."

However, by 1702 The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel had appointed the Reverend George Keith to evangelize the huge area from Boston/Massachusetts to Charleston/South Carolina. The Society had been formed in England to help the Church of England give assistance to the Church in the American Colonies and elsewhere. The Society had three aims. First, native Americans were to be won over to the Christian Faith forming a political alliance with the British colonial power. Second, the colonial settlers were to be re-evangelized and reclaimed for orthodox Christianity as understood by High Church Anglicans. Third, the increasing number of African slaves being brought to work in North America and the Caribbean were to be instructed and baptized, affirming their humanity if not their freedom.

But there was very little progress . . . In 1704 the Rector of Trinity Church/New York reported that in Suffolk County there was ". . . neither a Church of England minister, nor any provision for one . . . the people generally being independent and upheld in their separation (from the Church of England) by New England ministers." This is hardly surprising inasmuch as the early settlers in Suffolk County were for the most part New England Puritans deeply prejudiced against the Church of England. Ever persevering, the Society sent the Reverend James Wetmore to Setauket in 1723 where he remained for two years. A regular succession of ministers, funded by the Society, followed him and this support by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel continued until the outbreak of the Revolutionary War.

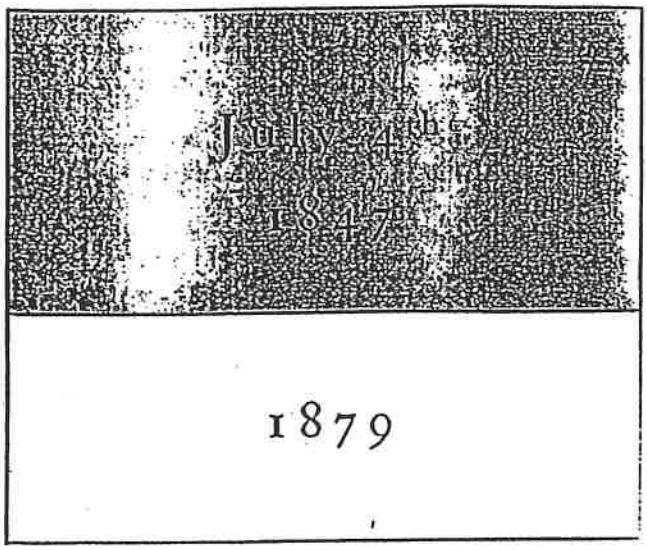
By 1730 the present Episcopal Church in Setauket was erected. At first it was called Christ Church but early on this was changed to Caroline Church to honor the Queen of George II. Accordingly, Caroline Episcopal Church/Setauket is recognized as being not only our Mother Church of Suffolk County but also the oldest building still being used for Episcopal services in the county.

The establishment of Caroline Church/Setauket in 1730 was followed by Saint John's Episcopal Church/Huntington which was founded in 1745 and in 1765 Saint John's Episcopal Church/Oakdale was erected. As a rule, one clergyman was believed to be in charge of all three Churches: Caroline Church/Setauket, Saint John's Church/Huntington, and Saint John's Church/Oakdale. According to Harry Havemeyer's "Along the Great South Bay," Saint John's Church/Oakdale was built ". . . largely at the expense of the Nicoll family."

In 1710 the colonial legislature authorized the organization of the Town of Islip. Its inhabitants were few and not until 1720 is there any record of a town meeting. Eighty years later —in 1790 – the Islip census lists only 106 heads of family for the entire town and in 1808 our hamlet had but a single store. More from Harry Havemeyer's "Along the Great South Bay": ". . . the census of 1810 showed that there were just 855 people in the entire township. Farming and lumbering were the major activities. Those who did settle had to be almost self sufficient. There were few shops, only one church, and very modest local government.

A soft cover booklet, "Picturesque Bay Shore, Babylon, and Islip", published in 1894 and available at the Islip Public Library, states on page 69 that an Episcopal Church was organized in Islip in the 1660's and that a fine church edifice was erected in 1766 which was destroyed by fire in the early 1800's. Be that as it may, by all accounts the year 1847 marked the beginnings of our Parish of Saint Mark's.

At this very location our Church building was located but the only record found so far of when it was constructed is the corner stone bearing the date of July 4, 1847 which is now preserved on top of the 1879 corner stone of our Church building.



Both stones are located at the base of the north wall about the middle of the building.

Saint Mark's Church had been established as a Mission Church under the direction of the Reverend William Everett, Rector of Saint John's Church/Oakdale. On November 15, 1847 that bond was severed when the Reverend Everett resigned ". . . that portion of the Church in Islip heretofore under my spiritual charge, erected into a new parish by the name of Saint Mark's Church." Soon thereafter, – in June 1848 – the Reverend James W. Coe was called to the Rectorship of Saint Mark's and he served until 1853. Our next Rector, the Reverend Henry W. Davis, served from 1853 until 1861. In addition to his duties here, he was also in charge of Saint John's Church/Oakdale. The Reverend Davis officiated at alternative morning and afternoon services with Saint John's/Oakdale, except during July and August when he conducted morning services here. In 1859 during the Rectorship of the Reverend Davis, a parsonage was provided – but not the parsonage that is adjacent to our Church building. Our first parsonage was located in East Islip at the southeast corner of Main Street and Woodland Drive. After the present parsonage was erected, the first parsonage became the East Islip Hotel.

The Reverend Reuben Riley succeeded Reverend Davis in 1861. During his fruitful ministry, which spanned 28 years, he established five Mission Churches: Christ Church/West Islip, Saint Peter's Church/Bay Shore, Church of the Messiah/Central Islip, Christ Church/Brentwood, and Emmanuel Church/Great River. Just as Saint

John's Church/Oakdale is the Mother Church of our Parish, Saint Mark's Church is the Mother Church of these five other Churches.

In our archives there is a fascinating document written by the Reverend Reuben Riley. It is an account of the remarkable evangelistic achievements of this energetic, devoted, dedicated Priest of our Parish. The following particulars have been extracted from that document (and it is fitting to cogitate that the Reverend Riley could not have established these missions without the support of the vestry and the parishioners of Saint Mark's Church).

The Reverend Reuben Riley accepted the call on May 3, 1861 and at a vestry meeting held on June 3, 1861 it was resolved that the Church would be open for night services. The sum of $40 was appropriated to furnish light for those services and it was also resolved that the Reverend Riley would furnish evening services in Babylon from July until November. The Reverend Riley was in charge of this Mission Church until August 28, 1869 when it became Christ Church/West Islip.

In November 1862 Saint Mark's Chapel was constructed in Youngport (now known as Great River) by individual subscriptions on land donated by William Nicoll, yet another member of that distinguished family. During the summer months night services were held under the direction of the Reverend Riley. In July 1873 this Chapel was annexed to Saint John's Church/Oakdale and in 1878 it was enlarged and organized as an independent parish under the name of Emmanuel Church.

In November 1863 Episcopal Services were conducted for the first time in Central Islip at a school house by the Reverend Reuben Riley and in October 1869 he laid the corner stone for the Church of the Messiah/Central Islip. Another parish had entered the Diocese under his guidance.

In June 1864 the Reverend Riley conducted the first Episcopal services in Brentwood – once again in a school house.

Several years later – in April 1870 – Walter Shutt deeded half an acre for a building to house this latest Mission Church of Saint Mark's. Its cornerstone was laid in September 1872 by the Reverend Mytton Maury whose sister built and furnished the church which was consecrated in August 1873 as Christ Church/Brentwood by Bishop Abram Littlejohn.

In August 1873 the Bay Shore Mission was commenced by the Reverend Riley in the Congregational Church building there. From this hospitable act it is obvious that ecumenicalism is not a recent development! The Reverend Corneille assisted in

conducting the services but after his retirement they were suspended for a while. In the summer months of 1878 services were resumed when the Reverend W.H. Cook of Trinity Church/New York was available. By 1882 Saint Mark's Chapel, the Mission Church, was erected on ground rented from George W. Crum and evening services were conducted there. In May 1884 this Mission Church was re-named as Saint Peter's Chapel and functioned under the direction of a committee chaired by the Reverend Cook. The rented property was then acquired from Mr. Crum and in July 1888 the congregation was organized as the Parish of Saint Peter's Church.

Recapping the above, the perseverance of the Reverend Reuben Riley spurred the growth of the Episcopal Faith in this area by leaps and bounds. Think of it! In 1861 there were two Episcopal Churches – Saint John's Church/Oakdale and Saint Mark's Church/Islip. By 1888 there were five more – Christ Church/West Islip, Saint Peter's Church/Bay Shore, Emmanuel Church/Great River, Church of the Messiah/Central Islip, and Christ Church/Brentwood. Truly remarkable! The Reverend Reubin Riley started the first Mission Church in 1861, the same year he became our Rector of Saint Mark's Church. In the successive years of 1862, 1863, and 1864 he started three other Mission Churches and when the last of these three became Christ Church/Brentwood the Reverend Riley established yet another Mission that became Saint Peter's Church/Bay Shore. Truly remarkable!

At this point it is appropriate to note that the first land that comprised Saint Mark's Church property was given by Mr. and Mrs. Harvey W. Vail. It ran along Saint Mark's Lane (then known as Johnson Avenue) for 128 feet and along Main Street (known then as South Country Road) for 81 feet. The property was enlarged in November 1879 by an additional 821 feet along Main Street and another 60 feet on Saint Mark's Lane. This additional footage was donated by Dr. and Mrs. A.G. Thompson. Several months later the Thompson estate sold an additional parcel of land to the Church.

From Harry Havemeyer's comprehensive account, "Along the Great South Bay" we learn that soon after William K.Vanderbilt had completed his splendid manor Idle Hour in Oakdale he propsed that the renown architect, Richard Morris Hunt, who had created his manor would – at Mr. Vanderbilt's expense – design a new Church and Rectory for Saint Mark's. Richard Morris Hunt had also designed other Vanderbilt projects including Biltmore in Ashville NC, Marble House and The Breakers – both in Newport RI – and was responsible for early work on the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. This latter assignment, incidentally, was completed by his son, Richard Howland Hunt, who also supervised the re-design of Idle Hour in Oakdale after it was severely damaged by fire.

There is unfortunately no description of the rapturous wave of gratitude that must have swept over Rector Reuben Riley, the vestry, and the parishioners. Their enthusiastic response to this unbounded act of generosity can only be imagined. What Mr. Vanderbilt offered – and provided – was to replace a simple, rectangular, 30-year old, white frame building with a magnificent stave Church. And he did it at his expense, including the cost of bringing craftsmen and materials from Norway. Other parishioners covered the expenses for constructing and furnishing the Rectory and the Church organ.

The unique architectural style of our Church building was inspired by several Norwegian churches including Fantoft in Bergen/Norway. In all the world less than three dozen of these stave church buildings (stavkirken) are believed to be still in existence and Saint Mark's Church is probably one of a very few – if not the only – Norwegian stave church in the United States. Fashioned in a Scandinavian timberwood style our Church building is characterized by shingled wall surfaces and numerous pitched gables that are surmounted by inspirational carvings. It has been said that in invention, freedom, and picturesqueness no building designed by Richard Morris Hunt was superior to Saint Mark's Church.
Construction of the new Church was rapid, to say the least. Work commenced in the fall of 1879 and on June 22, 1880 Saint Mark's Church/Islip was consecrated by the Right Reverend Abram Littlejohn, Bishop of Long Island.

The local newspaper of the 1880's, *The South Side Signal*, described our Church building as being ". . . of timber construction, showing the masonry to represent stone, with shingled sides and steep sloping roofs. It has many fine points and broken gables but no lofty spire . . . Over the main front entrance, carved in wood, is the Lion of Saint Mark's behind a shield bearing the Latin inscription of 'Pax Tibi Marce Evangelista Meus' (Peace to you, O Mark, my Evangelist)." Our Lion of Saint Mark's is an exact copy of a similar emblem of Saint Mark's in Florence, Italy.

Ten years after the construction of the Church building – on July 24, 1890, to be specific – a meeting of Saint Mark's pew holders was held at the residence of Henry H. Hollister to consider the construction of a Parish House. The concept was approved and R.F. and W. Baird Cutting, William K. Vanderbilt, H.B. Hollins, John H. Vail, Benjamin Wells, Samuel R. Peters, Bradish Johnson, et al., were among the contributors. Once again construction was rapid and fifteen months later it was dedicated.

The Parish House, architecturally different but complimentary to the Church building, was designed by Isaac H. Green in the Beaux-Arts style, and constructed by George B. Howell. It was not the Parish House we know today. Upon entering from Main Street one beheld a huge lounge with comfortable club-like chairs and a large fireplace. At the south end of the lounge a staircase led down to a gymnasium where Sunday School

classes were conducted for the very young children. This basement area now comprises the main section of the Thrift Shop. On the second floor was an auditorium at the south end of which was a stage that was also used for Sunday School classes for older children. The Parish House was constructed during the Rectorship of the Reverend Henry R. Freeman who was succeeded in 1892 by the Reverend Ralph L. Brydges. In 1908 the Reverend William H. Garth became the sixth Rector of Saint Mark's. During his long tenure of 26 years (1908-1934) the belfry was added, the front porch on Saint Mark's Lane was enclosed creating the Narthex, and the Parish celebrated its 75th Anniversary.

In the archives of Saint Mark's Church is a letter dated April 26, 1921 from Gertrude Moulton addressed to the Rector, the Reverend William H. Garth, which reads as follows:

> "I have brought with me from France a very old Processional Cross which I wish to present to Saint Mark's Church in memory of my father, Mr. Henry Duncan Wood. The Cross is a historical one, and came from the Royal Chapel at Le Mans, and belonged to Queen Berangere, the wife of Richard Cour de Lion and dates accordingly from the Crusades. My father, during his lifetime, often expressed a wish to give to Saint Mark's such a Cross, so that it is with a great deal of sentiment and pleasure that I have, with great difficulty besides, achieved this offering. Will you kindly ask the Vestrymen at their next meeting, whether this token is acceptable, and I trust that you will use this Cross occasionally in memory of him whom we all loved at Islip, and who did so much for Saint Mark's."

That Gertrude Moulton's generous gift was accepted with profound gratitude goes without saying. However, by 1978 the physical condition of this sacred relic had severely deteriorated. William H. Russell, Jr. – then a parishioner who in later years was ordained an Episcopal priest, served in this Parish and later became Rector of Saint Paul's Church/Patchogue – was entrusted with the assignment of its restoration. Bill Russell took the Cross to the Cloisters in New York City where curators determined that in all likelihood it dates back to the 14th to 16th Century, that it is of Germanic style and further, that the base upon which the Cross rests dates from the 19th Century. Be that as it may, this sacred, historic, and now restored Cross adorns our Church as Gertrude Moulton wished and our gratitude to her is unabated.

Following the retirement of Reverend Garth, Saint Mark's was served by the Reverend Ralph S. Meadowcroft for five years and in 1939 the Reverend Newell Lindner came to our Parish. His pastorate was interrupted by World War II and during his service to our country Parish activities continued under the leadership of those who remained at home. After V-J when Reverend Lindner had returned, Saint

Mark's celebrated its Centennial by launching an ambitious and successful campaign to repair the Church building and to refurbish the Parish House. Reverend Lindner later returned to the Chaplain Corps of the United States Navy and was succeeded by the Reverend Frederick R. Isacksen in 1949. The tremendous growth in the population of Islip hamlet necessitated an addition to the Parish House to accommodate the younger generation. Father Isacksen met this challenge by directing the construction of its west wing. Having done so, his pastorate was abruptly interrupted when he was recalled to military service. He served for one year as a Chaplain in the United States Army and then returned as our Rector for two more years.

In October 1964 the Reverend William H. Wagner, Jr. became our tenth Rector. During his service the cloister between the Church building and the Parish House was constructed, the Rectory was renovated, the Sacristy was enlarged, an electronic organ replaced the very old pipe organ, and the original section of the Parish House was completely renovated. The lounge area disappeared, having been converted into class rooms, the library, etc. The landscaped parking area at the rear of the Parish House was also constructed at this time. The auditorium on its second floor was enlarged, the stage disappeared, and a new kitchen was installed with professional equipment. To Father Wagner we owe a debt of gratitude and to this day we are mindful of his call for the preservation of sacred objects in our Church building, the beautification of the Church grounds, the expansion of our outreach, a wider parking area at the rear of the Parish House was also constructed at this time, and also a wider participation by parishioners in Church activities. Other constructive innovations of Father Wagner's which continue to this day include the revolving tenure for vestry memberships and the election of lady vestry persons. Restructuring Saint mark's stewardship program was another of his accomplishments.

In 1978 the Reverend Jerome J. Nedelka was called to our Rectorship. An integral part of his Ministry was to reach out and expand Saint Mark's involvement in the life of the larger church and the community. His fascination with the historic background of our Parish and his admiration for the achievements of the Reverend Reuben Riley had no bounds. That he was a most talented administrator is evidenced in the magnificent restoration of our Church building which was virtually destroyed by a senseless, vicious act of arson.

In the early morning hours of December 5, 1989 Father Nedelka was awakened by flashing lights and fire sirens. Thinking that a neighboring house fire had caused the commotion he looked out the window facing Saint Mark's Lane and was horrified to see firemen pulling their hoses towards the Church building. The smoke and flames

rising from the roof and east entrance completed his realization of the calamity that was at hand. That Father Nedelka was stunned is putting it mildly. The dimensions of his horror, shock, disbelief, and despair surely must have exceeded the euphoric jubilation that Reverend Reuben Riley had experienced 120 years earlier when William Vanderbilt delivered his glad tidings. . . Fire companies from Islip, East Islip, and Bay Shore battled the blaze for five hours but their valiant efforts could not save the Church building. Most of the roof, the beams running across the inside of the Church, and more than 55 percent of the building were destroyed along with many of our priceless stained glass windows. I personally saw the debris. The sight of the Resurrection Lilies window – shattered, broken, warped, and lying in mud, ashes, and debris outside the charred south wall – I will always remember. The hours and hours of work by dedicated volunteers who laboriously sifted the dirt and muck to find pieces of stained glass should be a continuing inspiration to us all.

In Father Nedelka's own words, this is an account of what transpired: "The response to our tragedy was overwhelming. Dozens of our parishioners took the day off to help carry what was salvageable from the smoking ruins, and we set up temporary chapels in our parish hall, St. Olaf's in the upper auditorium (now known as Fenton Hall), and St. Nicholas' in the lower. Committees were formed, food was provided for the tireless workers, and by midnight that first day the volunteers had placed a temporary roof on the church with its distinctive blue tarp. A group of dedicated people started sifting through the ashes. Within two weeks, 97% of the pieces of stained glass were found to restore our priceless windows. A security network was formed to guard our church 24 hours a day until the building could be completely secured. The Vestry met in an emergency session. Bishop Orris G. Walker, upon returning from a conference, immediately paid a visit to St. Mark's.

"The entire community poured out its love towards us. Within days, we received hundreds of letters, dozens of phone calls and countless visits from sympathetic friends. Eventually, we would count over $130,000 in aid without even asking for a cent.

"To this day, many persons remain nameless, although they rendered their time, talents and treasure anonymously. God knows.

"The months following the fire were filled with hours of hard work and required incredible understanding and patience on everyone's behalf. Fortunately, the problem

of restoring the stained glass windows was solved. We retained the services of Jack Cushen, an expert on Tiffany glass. While the wardens and I began dealing with the Church Insurance Company, the vestry hired a fund raising firm, Community Counseling Service, to help us raise monies, which would be needed beyond any settlement. The selection of an architect took six months because of the magnitude of our project. David Helpern was chosen because he promised to rebuild our historic Norwegian Stave structure as if he were looking through the eyes of the original architect, Richard Morris Hunt. He would bring our church into the 1990's."

And to his everlasting credit, David Helpern did just that – under the continuous supervision of Father Nedelka. Father Nedelka did more than repair, and more than restore our historic, sacred Church building. Under his tireless direction, he did all that and far more. The lighting and ventilation systems were updated. Other improvements included a complete climate control system, new chandeliers with hidden speakers for voice enhancement, the completion of a new undercroft, and the installation of a new pipe organ. The damage from the fire exceeded $2.3 million and our insurance covered about half that amount. The tremendous outpouring of community support plus other fund raising efforts left the Parish only $50 thousand short of paying for the complete restoration. Unsolicited contributions literally poured into Saint Mark's from more than fifty different churches, synagogues, schools, and other organizations. Very appropriately, one of the first services conducted in the newly restored Church building was a joyous occasion. On February 29, 1992, Pamela Greene and Wayne Nester were joined in Holy Matrimony.

The Islip Bulletin/March 19, 1992, reporting the re-opening of Saint Mark's Church building, included this passage:

> "Father Nedelka has been at St. Mark's for 14 years but said it feels like a new experience for him. 'I view this as two ministries,' he said. 'My first 11 years here was one ministry and from the day of the fire has been my second ministry. It's just amazing to me how much can be accomplished through the grace of God, prayer . . . and a little money.' Father Nedelka smiled when he added 'a little money' to his statement. But after the arduous experience of the fire and the rebuilding effort, he has reason to smile."

I would supplement Father Nedelka's statement by adding that by the grace of our Lord this Parish throughout its critical period from 1989 until 1992 was blessed with a caring Rector who prioritized the restoration of our historic and sacred Church building and

the improvement of its physical plant above merely repairing the horrific damage it had suffered.

Just about two years ago, troubled by eyesight problems and probably not just a little burned out by his arduous directorship of the rebuilding/restoration campaign, Father Nedelka announced he would retire as Rector of our Parish effective April 30, 2000. For his constructive ministry of 22 years at Saint Mark's Church we and future generations will be forever grateful.

The Reverend Frederick Nestrock then served as our Interim Rector, and although he was with us for a relatively short time, his profound devotion to our Lord and to this Parish was readily apparent. The strong bonds that developed so rapidly from his pulpit to the pews of the laity will endure for years to come.

The blessings of our Lord unto this Parish were again manifested in His year of 2001 by the Reverend Richard E. Simpson's acceptance of our call to assume the Rectorship of Saint Mark's Church. In less than a year Father Simpson has evidenced his energetic and enthusiastic dedication to our Savior. He has demonstrated the constructive leadership our Parish needs to increase its strength and to expand its outreach in a world polluted by secularism. In the relatively short time Father Simpson has been our shepherd he is admirably fulfilling his supplication to promote the salvation of the people of Saint Mark's Parish by devoting himself – body, soul, and spirit – to our Lord and to His service. With energetic reverence Father Simpson is fulfilling his personal ministry statement, to wit., 'In the service of God, Parish, and Diocese I am called to a joyful ministry of the word and sacrament, spiritual renewal, and parish education.'

The expansion of Saint Mark's Outreach Ministry, another worthy accomplishment, was initiated in February 2002, under the direction of parishioner Eileen Judice and with the invaluable assistance of Deacon Gail Kertland. In addition to the original programs, - a weekly non-perishable food collection and distribution of Thanksgiving/Christmas baskets, - the Outreach Ministry currently includes back-to-school supplies for local students in need, infant provisions, toiletry items for women at the County Coalition Against Domestic Violence, wash kits which are distributed through local soup kitchens and emergency housing sites, winter outerwear donated to Episcopal Charities and local church ministries. During the summer of 2004, our Outreach Ministry sponsored a "Walk" and raised $1,500 for urgently needed repairs to our Mother Church, the sacred, historic Saint John's Episcopal Church/Oakdale,

NY. These promising activities are the foundation of an ever-increasing commitment to a basic tenet of our Faith – to love thy neighbor as thyself. Under the leadership of Colin McEntee, Marjorie Cooper and Patricia Weickart – and with assistance from our parishioners -, the Outreach Ministry of Saint Mark's Church will attain its Vision of God's hands reaching out to others.

Two significant features of our Church building are the carved angel standing over the Sanctuary and the winged Lion of Saint Mark that is mounted above the eastern entry of the Church. Carved by Scandinavian craftsmen who erected the building, the Lion, damaged by the 1989 fire, had deteriorated beyond repair after more than 120 years of exposure to the elements. The heroic replacement now adorning the entry was carved by Richard Selgrad, Sr., a long-time parishioner. The winged lion holds a symbolic shield inscribed: "Pax Tibi Marce Evangelists Meus." This quotation is from a medieval legend that during a journey to Rome an angel appeared to Saint Mark and said, "Peace to you, Mark, my Evangelist." Richard Selgrad, Sr. constructed the winged lion from an 11-foot long, 4-inch thick, mahogany plank. The lion was completed in the spring of 2003 and was then gilded in bright gold by Gary Krockta, a fellow woodworker and restorer. On June 22, 2003 the Lion of Saint Mark was dedicated and blessed before being installed above the east entry by the Islip Fire Department.

The blessing and dedication of our Winged Lion marked the completion of our Church Building's restoration. Our Rector then proposed that the Vestry consider a new building needed for children's and small family services with a separate area for the repository of ashes of deceased parishioners and others of Episcopal Faith. His proposal was reviewed and discussed at length. After many months study, the Vestry approved the new building project, thus epitomizing Father Rick's personal ministry statement, " . . .a joyful ministry of the word and sacrament, spiritual renewal and parish education."

On the glorious day of September 12, 2004, the Celebration and Ground Breaking of All Souls' Chapel was conducted by Father Rick and our Curate, The Reverend GaIL Kertland. More than 100 parishioners were present, including Church Wardens, Richard Stevenson and Richard Selgrad, Jr., as well as Building Committee Chairman, William Cook. In the spring of 2005, the Choir Room of the Parish House was demolished, new footings for the Chapel were poured, foundation walls were formed, poured and backfilled. The Dedication and Consecration of the Chapel was celebrated on the Fease of All Souls' Day, November 2, 2007. The Service was conducted by Father Rick, the Reverend Nigel Bousfield, and The Right Reverend James Ottley, Assistant Bishop of the Diocese of Long Island. Be it noted our Parish of Saint Mark's is most grateful to one and all who have supported and constructively participated in

this project – including the shingle dippers – and especially to our Church Vestry, Wardens Charles Muller and Marjorie Cooper, Chairman of the Building Committee, William Cook, Architects, Tom Penn and Harry Van Meter, Jeffry Scott Construction and Anthony Quintal and Company.

The expansion of Saint Mark's Outreach Ministry, another worthy accomplishment, was initiated in February 2002 under the direction of parishioner Eileen Judice and with the invaluable assistance of Deacon Gail Kertland. In addition to the original programs – a weekly non-perishable food collection and distribution of Thanksgiving/Christmas baskets, – the Outreach Ministry currently includes back-to-school supplies for local students in need, infant provisions, toiletry items for women at the Country Coalition Against Domestic Violence, wash kits which are distributed through local soup kitchens and emergency housing sites, winter outerwear donated to Episcopal Charities and local church ministries. During the summer of 2004, our Outreach Ministry sponsored a "Walk" and raised $1,500 for urgently needed repairs to our Mother Church, the sacred, historic Saint John's Episcopal Church/Oakdale, NY. These promising activities are the foundation of an ever increasing commitment to a basic tenet of our Faith – to love thy neighbor as thyself. Under the leadership of Colin McEntee, Marjorie Cooper and Patricia Weickart – and with assistance from our parishioners – the Outreach Ministry of Saint Mark's Church will attain its Vision of God's hands reaching out to others.

An unanticipated blessing of this new facility is its superb acoustical qualities. Indeed, it is an enhancement of Father Rick's ministry avowal for a joyful ministry of word and sacrament.

Although this paper has ranged beyond the history of St. Mark's Parish, I hope its readers will now have a greater appreciation for the valiant and devoted services of the eleven Rectors who preceded Father Simpson as well as the unmentioned Curates who assisted them and also for the Wardens, Vestry members, and the parishioners who supported these Priests of our beloved Church.

In conclusion I would like to quote the very meaningful words spoken by a past Senior Warden of Saint Mark's, Frederic Atwood, in 1997 at a celebration of the 150th anniversary of our Parish:

> "It was not just the generosity of the Vanderbilts and others that has kept St. Mark's as a beacon of hope, a leading and vital organization which has shaped and defined the community in which it serves. It was generation after generation of parishioners from all walks of life who have sustained, developed, and given life and purpose to St. Mark's and its mission. With quiet dignity and beauty it stands as a monument to the dedication and

stewardship of the people it serves and to those who have served it. Pyramids crumble and great castles fall into ruin but the continued loving care and concern of its parishioners will sustain St. Mark's for another 150 years and far beyond."

File: HISTORY OF ST. MARK Sheet dated January 8, 2008