

## History of the Congregation

St. James' Episcopal Church is located at 112 Sixth Street in Watkins Glen, N.Y., the county seat of Schuyler County. The waterfront town, a tourist destination with one of the region's most dramatic gorges, lies at the southern end of Seneca Lake, the largest of New York State's Finger Lakes. The church building is located in a quiet residential neighborhood less than a half mile from the lake.

### 1825-1830

The church traces its history back to the decade after the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. The canal revolutionized travel and business in the Finger Lakes region, tying isolated rural communities to the wider world. New small feeder canals linked the Erie to Seneca and Cayuga lakes, spurring further settlement and development of what had been wild Indian Country only a few years earlier.

Steamboats were already running the length of Seneca in 1830 when Samuel Beebe organized an Episcopal parish called "St. James' Church at the Head of Seneca Lake."

### 1850s

A generation later, county lines were drawn, and it was named Schuyler County after Philip Schuyler (shown at right) of Albany, one of George Washington's most trusted Revolutionary War generals and the father-in-law of U.S. Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton.

Several members of Schuyler's family tree had fought with and later negotiated with Indian tribes, including the Seneca, in upstate New York. Several others were prominent Episcopal clergymen.

### 1861

Frederick Davis Jr. moved to town and built a malt house. Wanting his children to be brought up in the traditions of the Episcopal Church, Davis helped bring the Rev. Duncan Cameron Mann to serve both St. James' and the St. John's parish in Catharine a few miles to the south. Mann's wife, Caroline B. Schuyler Mann, was related to Philip Schuyler, and her brother was an Episcopal rector in adjoining Seneca County.

### 1863-65

The Manns and Davis, who was still relatively early in a prosperous 50-year local career, were among those who decided that St. James needed a new brick building. The cornerstone of St. James' Episcopal Church was laid in 1863, and the sanctuary was completed a year later. The first service in the new church was held on Christmas Day 1864. The following year, the vestry organized the purchase of a pump organ to replace the old melodeon that had sufficed to lead the choir.

### 1874

A 1,400-pound bell was hefted into the belfry.

### 1917

The year the United States entered the war in Europe, the vestry approved the spending of \$1,200 on a new pipe organ made by M.P. Moller of Hagerstown, Md. To run the new organ, electricity was introduced into the church. The pipe organ replaced the old pump organ, which had been pumped by -- among others -- Peter G. Phinney, grandson of a runaway slave (and later a warden of the church).

### 1920s

After World War I, the church continued to grow and prosper, and in 1930 it became affiliated with the Diocese of Rochester, ending its long ties to the Diocese of Western New York. However, the Great

Depression and World War II years were not kind to St. James'. Pledges plummeted, the vestry sold off church assets, and the parish was reduced to mission status. For the next decade the church struggled for survival.

### 1950s

In the decades following World War II, Watkins Glen began to emerge as a tourist destination thanks to the local state park — with its spectacular gorge — and the growing international reputation of its auto race track. More recently, dozens of vineyards and wine tasting businesses have sprung up along Seneca Lake, reinforcing the region's tourism economy.

Meanwhile, the St. James' congregation began to rebound, starting in the late 1950s when the Rev. William A. Howard infused new zeal in the church.

### 1960s

A house adjacent to the sanctuary on Decatur Street was purchased for use as a rectory, and in 1960 the church renewed its status as an independent parish (rather than a mission). That rectory has since been razed, and the site is a beautiful lawn often used for church celebrations and rummage sales. Meanwhile, the original rectory on Sixth Street received an addition in 1963 (shown above) and is now connected to the sanctuary and used as a parish hall.

### 1970s-Present

In the late 1970s, it became apparent that none of the churches in the county could afford a full-time rector, so St. James' Episcopal Church in Watkins Glen, St. John's in Catharine and St. Paul's in Montour Falls formed the Episcopal Parishes of Schuyler County. This evolving financial and spiritual partnership has afforded each of the churches its own community autonomy. However, some 30 years after the creation of EPSC, declining participation at St. Paul's led to the sale of that church building. St. Paul's now operates as a mission based in the parish house nearby on Genesee St. Our new rector will oversee the active church congregations at St. James' and St. John's, as well as the St. Paul's mission.

In 1980, the parish house at St. James' was renamed the Mann Parish House in honor of Duncan and Caroline Mann, the 19th century leaders who played such a key role in establishing the church.

After the turn of the 21st century, the St. James' sanctuary received 10 highly colorful, symbolic and contemporary stained glass windows. They were designed and installed by Pat Saxe, a well-known stained glass and oil paint artist from Elmira, N.Y.

The style (shown at left) is distinctly different than that of the church's much older stained glass window depicting Jesus' ministry to children, which has been the focal point of the chancel for more than a century. Saxe has had a number of other major stained glass commissions, including St. Theodore's Catholic Church in Rochester, the United States Army War College in Carlisle, Pa., and the Clemons Center Restoration Project in Elmira.

While the demographic changes of the past two decades have not been kind to the nation's mainstream churches, St. James' has weathered the challenging period well. St. James' recently retired rector, the Rev. Michael Hartney, became deeply involved in the local community.

Sept. 11, 2011

On Sept. 11, 2011, the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., St. James' welcomed as guest preacher the Right Rev. Frank Griswold III (shown at right), the former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church-USA. Coincidentally, Griswold's father, Frank T. Griswold Jr., won the inaugural Watkins Glen Grand Prix in 1948, driving a pre-war Alfa Romeo 8C.

2016

Father Hartney has announced his retirement, effective April 30, 2016. The Rev'd Sandra "Sandy" Curtis of Hammondsport has been serving as interim priest until a successor is selected.