

# St. James' Episcopal Church

## Dexter, MI

1837 - present

St. James' Church is strongly tied to the early history of Dexter. After the founding of Dexter in 1824, occasional services were held by visiting clergymen at the invitation of local Episcopalians. They met in houses and also in a log school about one mile west of Dexter. Services became more regular when in 1835 a missionary came from Ann Arbor every two weeks using the village school as a meeting place. On March 13, 1837, the Rev'd David J. Urger first organized St. James' as a parish church, serving as its resident priest. Immediately after the Articles of Incorporation were signed by the first Vestry, work was begun on a log building, which served as the church until 1853-1855 when a new building was begun and finished on land donated by Judge Samuel William Dexter (1792-1863), the present site of the church. Support for the church in those days included the annual rental of pews; the ones nearer the furnace were more expensive. Judge Dexter's rental was the highest, \$20.

The first service in this building was held on June 24, 1855. The money for this construction was borrowed at a rate of 10% per year, but the parish managed to pay off the debt in December 1858, thus enabling the first Bishop of Michigan, the Right Rev'd Samuel A. McCoskry, to consecrate the church in 1859. The document of consecration, bearing the bishop's seal, hangs in the present church, together with the articles of incorporation of 13 March 1837, both framed in panels taken from the church's original pulpit.



In 1926 St. James' assumed its present physical form through a drastic renovation prompted by serious structural flaws. The original bell tower was removed, the walls and roof were lowered, and the stained glass windows put in storage. The undercroft of the church was excavated so that it could be used for meetings, and large hinged doors were installed so that the sanctuary could be separated from the nave, which was used for holiday parties, dinners, and other community events.

The church was lovingly renovated and restored in 1973-1976. The beautiful stained glass windows of the earlier church building (from 1855) were re-installed, the iron chandeliers, from the 1930's, were repainted white and trimmed in gold, and the old oak pews restored. The front doors display the arms of the Episcopal Church and the emblem of the church's patron saint, St. James the Great, in stained glass.