

A History of Trinity Episcopal Church

by
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History of the Trinity Episcopal Church Prior to the Current Building

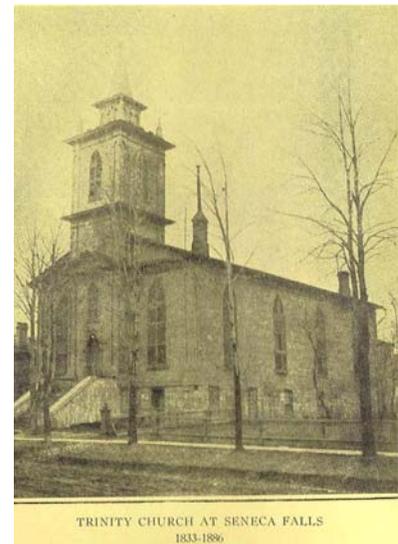
In 1830, Eleazer Hills and Everard Peck purchased the old “Globe Tavern Stand,” at the time called the “Western Exchange.” Hills and Peck built a general store building on the Cayuga Street side of this lot.¹ This store was located just north of the present-day Five Star Bank (formerly the State Bank).² They rented the second floor to Lewis Bixby for his private school. It was in this room that a small group of Episcopalians gathered to worship. On the last Sunday in December and the first Sunday in January 1831, notice was given at each service that a meeting would be held on January 13, 1831, for the purpose of incorporating themselves as a religious society.³

On January 13, 1831, the parish was organized, with the official name “The Rector, Church Wardens and Vestrymen of Trinity Church in the Town of Seneca Falls.” The Rev. Reuben Hubbard was then made rector. On March 25, 1831, the certificate of incorporation was recorded in the Seneca County clerk’s office. On August 7, 1831, the Rt. Rev. Benjamin T. Onderdonk, the Bishop of the Diocese of New York visited the parish, which was meeting in the Baptist church, which had just been completed, and administered the first rite of confirmation to eleven persons. Most Episcopal services were being held in Bixby’s school room.⁴ Mr. Bixby moved his school to East Cayuga (in Cayuga County) in December 1833, so the Episcopal church services were thereafter held in a large room over the Post Office on the northeast corner of Bayard and Ovid Streets.⁵

In January 1833, a lot was purchased from Ansel Bascom for \$500 (half as cash and a note for the balance) (with Ansel Bascom then donating back \$100⁶) as a site for building a new church. This lot was on the south side of East Bayard Street, a few lots’ distance east of Ovid Street. On November 18, 1833, the cornerstone was laid. While this new church was being built, the services were held in the large room over the Post Office in the building on the northeast corner of Bayard and Ovid Streets. The new church was first used on Sunday, July 27, 1834. The new building consisted of a basement of stone and superstructure of wood.⁷

In 1851, a new bell was placed in the church tower. In 1856, a new organ was purchased from Henry Erben of New York, at a cost of \$1,000, and a new baptismal font was obtained.⁸

In 1859, the church structure on East Bayard Street was enlarged and improved, at an expense of about \$2,000. The chancel was enlarged, a vestry room was added, and the organ was moved from the balcony at the rear of the nave to the



chancel. The seating capacity was also increased by the addition of 30 pews. A stained glass window was placed over the altar.⁹

Soon after the start of the Civil War, 3 full companies of Seneca Falls men volunteered for service in the Union army. Before they departed, they attended services in a body, at the invitation of the Rector, to receive a special blessing.¹⁰

In 1863, a rectory was built on a North Cayuga Street lot donated by Frederick J. Swaby, who was the junior warden.¹¹ The \$2000 that Mrs. Mumford, widow of merchant Silas Dean Mumford, left to the church in her will was used for this project.¹²

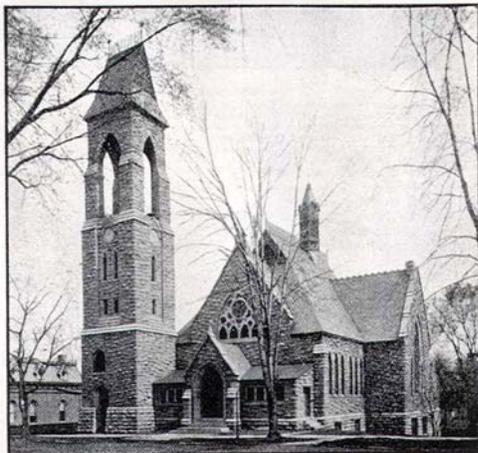
As early as 1870, the rector, Dr. John Marshall Guion, was conducting services at Mason's Hall (Johnson's Hall) for the growing population living in the northwestern portion of the village.

In 1873, a fundraising drive for a new church structure was begun. When only \$14,000 was raised before the onset of the harsh economic conditions engendered by the Panic of 1873, the building project was abandoned.

The idea of building a new church structure was revived in 1883, at least partially because it was the 50th anniversary of the consecration of the church building. In November, Mrs. Adelaide C. (George M.) Guion purchased from H.C. Silsby, and then donated to the church vestry, a suitable lot on East Fall Street on the condition that a new church is erected on it. Several people then began contributing towards a new church structure. The church ladies donated the \$2600 they had accumulated in their "Church Building Fund Society." Miss Annette Hoskins donated \$250, and Miss Jane C. Keller turned over the \$150 she had paid in to the "St. John's Mission Fund." Over \$1,000 came from the proceeds of a fund started several years earlier and invested by Mrs. Mary S. Daniels.¹³

Construction of the Current Church Structure

The donation of a building lot by Mrs. George M. Guion and pledges and donations in a rather short period of time prompted the decision to proceed to build a new church structure on East Fall Street, east of Ovid Street. In May 1884, Messrs. Brown & Dawson, architects of Troy, NY, were employed to prepare plans for the proposed new church. In August, the plans were adopted and a "building committee" was appointed. The contractor was William Crabtree of Syracuse, NY.¹⁴ The Sunday school room was to be located in the basement, which was on the ground floor opening to the east and south.¹⁵



Pruden, Photo. TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

The cornerstone was laid on June 2, 1885. The cornerstone was placed in the northeast corner of the tower and the cornerstone of the old church was placed in the inner wall of the tower on the eastern side. After laying the cornerstone, the work was "pushed vigorously and the building was roofed and closed in long before frost." In October, it was decided to finish the tower, and the last stone was laid on December 19, 1885.¹⁶ The tower cost \$2,000.¹⁷ About the same time the pews were placed, and the first coal fires were kindled on November 28, 1885.¹⁸ Brought from the Bayard Street church for use in the new church were the altar, font, bell and choir window.¹⁹

The new church was opened on Easter Sunday,

April 25, 1886, with impressive services.²⁰ A local newspaper said that the “Easter sun shown brightly without, and within flowers, music, and interested faces made it a time of brilliance and beauty. The interior of the church showed to its best...”²¹ There were 142 participants at the communion service. This included Mrs. Sarah Martin who had been present at the first (1833) and last (Good Friday, 1886) communion at the old church.²² Every church pew was filled, with many people standing behind the pews throughout the entire service. There were actually three different services that Easter Sunday: the usual morning and evening services and a festival service at 3 p.m. Those attending one or more of these services that Easter Sunday were rather generous in their giving, as the Sunday school offering amounted to \$388, and the collections at the morning and evening services amount to \$2,107.²³



The entire cost of the building, site, and foundation was \$40,000. At the time of its completion, the congregation had a debt of \$13,000 from this construction expense.²⁴

The new church was consecrated on September 10, 1890, by the Rt. Rev. F.D. Huntington, Bishop of the Diocese.²⁵ The consecration did not take place until the debt for its construction had been fully paid off. “It was a time of rejoicing for the large congregation of prominent Seneca Falls families.”²⁶

Information about the Church Structure

The *Manual of the Churches of Seneca County with Sketches of Their Pastors, 1895-96*, stated that the “church edifice is architecturally the finest in the county.” Its style is of the mixed Gothic and early English. This combination was considered a little novel at the time, but it soon gained popularity.²⁷

The church was literally built upon a rock as blasting excavations had to be made for its foundation.²⁸ The exterior walls were constructed of blue limestone quarried²⁹ in the town of Fayette,³⁰ with trimmings of Onondaga limestone.³¹

The building has a length of 105 feet with a width of 73 feet and a height of 44 feet. The tower originally rose 105 feet. There were 3 public entrances to the main vestibule. The *Manual of the Churches of Seneca County with Sketches of Their Pastors, 1895-96* described the building as follows:

There are three public entrances to the main vestibule. This is floored with stone and lined with white brick, and from it the entrance to the nave is through three arched doorways with swinging panels of quartered oak. The roof is supported by arched trusses resting on cut stone corbels. The ceiling is of white pine with timbers and supports of Georgia pine. The wainscoting of the nave and the pews are of ash. The chancel is wainscoted with quartered oak, the pulpit is a magnificent piece of carved oak, and the communion rail is of polished oak, supported by brass standards. All the interior woodwork is in natural wood. The memorial windows are rich and costly, representing in stained glass various Scripture scenes. The vestry is a pleasant room of octagonal shape with pointed roof. The Sunday school room, with fitting appointments, is in the basement, which is a ground floor from the south and east. The furniture of the church is in harmony with its architecture and finishings.³²

The Stained Glass Windows

There are several beautiful stained glass windows in the Trinity Episcopal Church. Most of these windows are tall and narrow—called “lancet” windows—that suitably match the Gothic influence in the building design.³³ One example of a lancet window is the “Archbishop Cranmer” window that is the first window on the east wall of the nave as one enters from the vestibule. The lower left portion of the window depicts the burning of Archbishop Cranmer at the stake in 1556 over his theological differences with the Catholic Queen Mary. The upper part of the window shows his coat-of-arms except that it has three pelicans rather than cranes. The window was designed by J. Weppell and Co. of Great Britain and was installed in 1966. The window was given in memory of Charles Cutler Inshaw and his wife Arlene Lewis Inshaw.³⁴

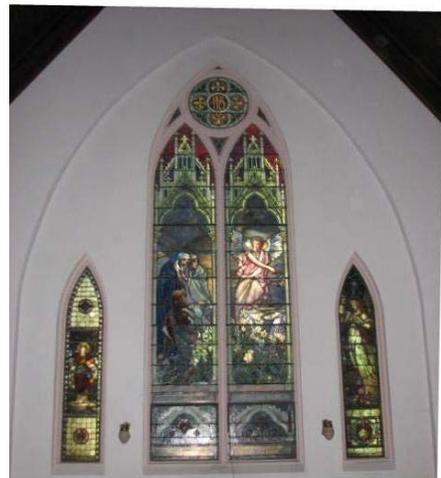


Three of the stained glass windows were executed by Louis Comfort Tiffany. Before discussing these windows, it would be good to first have a little understanding of this person. Lewis Comfort Tiffany was the son of Charles Lewis Tiffany who had founded Tiffany Company that still makes and sells jewelry and silverware in its New York City store. Lewis was an interior designer who in 1878 focused his energies on the creation of stained glass. His inventiveness both as a designer of windows and as a producer of the material with which to create them was to become renowned. Because he wanted the glass itself to transmit texture and rich colors, he developed a type of glass he called “Favrile.” He opened a glassmaking factory in Queens, NY in 1878. In 1885, he formed his own company, Tiffany Glass Company, which became the largest stained glass studio in the nation, “riding the church construction boom of the 1880s.” In 1902 the company name was changed to Tiffany Studios. The company closed in 1932.³⁵



One of these three Tiffany windows is “The Savior Knocking at the Door” window on the east wall. It was installed in 1931 in memory of Caroline Garnsey Wade and Cyrus Garnsey III by their mother, Carrie Dobbys (Mrs. Cyrus) Garnsey. It is an allegorical representation of Christ knocking at the door of the human soul. It is similar to William Holman Hunt’s painting “Light of the World.”³⁶

The largest Tiffany window, “The Easter Window,” (“Three Women at the Tomb”) in the west transept was placed in memory of Mrs. Fanny m. Morris by her daughter, Mrs. Marion Ellen Partridge. The work of placing the window was under the supervision of Mr. E.B. Shaw who was sent from New York City by Mr. Louis Tiffany for this purpose in 1902. The name of the Tiffany Studios appears at the lower right of the window.³⁷ The design for this Resurrection window is from Bernhard Plockhurst’s celebrated painting “Holy Women at the Tomb,” illustrating the first 8 verses of the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Mark. Three figures are grouped together at the left. The woman in the light blue robe nearest the angel is Salome, wife of Zebedee and



mother of St. James and St. John. The one beside her in deeper blue is Mary, mother of 2 other disciples, St. James and St. Jose. The third in vibrant red is Mary Magdalene in the foreground with her left hand resting on a jar of unguents to anoint the body of Jesus. Faintly visible in the dawning light on Mount Calvary stand 3 crosses in the upper left corner and the mockery crown of thorns and linen garments on the edge of the tomb at lower right. In the picture we see the court within the sepulcher and the resting place for the bier with the crown of thorns laid upon it, the pink-robed angel sitting at the right side of the empty niche in the



rock where the body of Jesus had lain, pointing to the grave and saying to the terror-stricken women, “Come see the place where the Lord lay. He is risen. He is not here” and pointing to the recess hewn in the rock, “Behold the place where they laid Him.” The window is particularly brilliant in the afternoon sunlight or when illuminated from outside for an evening service.³⁸

The third Tiffany window is on the west wall of the main part of the nave. This “Christ Blessing the Little Child,” window was installed between 1905 and 1910. It was donated by Mary Rebecca (Mrs. Horace) Silsby in memory of her grandson, Jack Silsby Feek,³⁹ who had died at the age of 12 of rheumatic heart disease. The window shows the figure of Christ blessing the child and is based on the Lord’s command in Matthew 19:14: “Suffer little children and forbid them not to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”⁴⁰

The “Ascension Window” is over the altar. It was given in memory of the Rev. John Marshall Guion by his son General George William Murray Guion. It was installed in 1886 when the church opened for worship. It was designed by James Baker and Sons of New York.⁴¹ The window is in the Anglo-French style. Figures are in groups of 3 on each side of the ascending Christ. The Parish Record of May 1886 described it as follows: “The central figure is the person of Christ, his hands, in which are seen marks of his crucifixion, outstretched in blessing.



A marked feature of this picture...is the rich coloring displayed in the brightness of the glory which radiates from the person of our Blessed Savior and falls upon the uplifted faces of the Apostles grouped in the shadow below. Of these, the 3 always nearest him in the great events of his early life—St. James. St. John and St. Peter—are chiefly noticeable, while a little in the background and more in the shadow St. Thomas is discerned with bowed head and hands crossed in prayer.” At the base of the window is the memorial statement. On a clear morning, sunlight reflects on the chancel floor the colors of rich blue, green and plum in the garments of the figures, with bright pink flowers in the foreground. The border repeats the color scheme of the center. When back-lit, the opalescent glass of this window exhibits an inner “fire” and shows swirls of several colors.⁴²

The chancel window, “St. Cecilia,” was designed by J. and R. Lamb Studios of New York and was installed in 1890. It was given in memory of Emily Brown Daniels by her daughters, Blanche and Nora Daniels, and Alice Daniels Pollard.⁴³ St. Cecelia, though a member of a noble Roman family, was beheaded for her firm refusal to sacrifice to idols in the 3rd century A.D. Because she is regarded as the patron saint of musicians, she is a favored subject for a window in the choir gallery.⁴⁴

A great favorite of Trinity parishioners is this richly glowing double window in the East Transept, the “Sermon on the Mount” window. Like a piece of vitreous tapestry, it contains 9 life-size figures, 4 with auras. It pictures our Lord seated beneath a group of palm trees with his

followers around him. Their absorbing interest is reflected on their faces. The figures of James, John and Peter with the other disciples may represent the 8 Beatitudes. Opalescent glass produces a velvety appearance in the drapery and fine gradations of clouds and sky. The upper portion is occupied by an elaborate, ornate design known as a “canopy” in coral with blue and gold mosaic. Mosaic glass with trefoil and entwined triangles denoting the Trinity is enclosed in a circle ornamented with small pieces of red and blue glass. This is a modern adaptation of English Goth 15th-century glass found in medieval windows.⁴⁵ The window was designed by James Baker and Sons of New York City. It was placed in the church in 1886 in memory of Delancey E. Partridge by his wife, Marion Ellen Partridge.⁴⁶

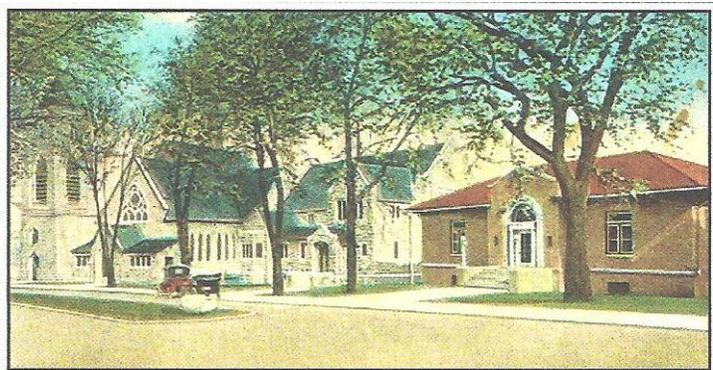
Opposite the chancel—in the rear of the church—is the “Angel” window or the Rose window that was installed in 1886. The center figure is an angel bearing the symbolic palm and wreath of victory. This is a copy of the angel in Raphael’s “Martyrdom of St. Felicitas.” This window was given in memory of Elizabeth Ives Guion and Elizabeth Wheaton Guion, wife and daughter of the Rev. John Marshall Guion.⁴⁷

Twentieth Century History

The rebuilding of the Seneca-Cayuga Canal by New York State in the 1910s impacted the Trinity Episcopal Church. The State’s choice to construct two consecutive locks within the village of Seneca Falls necessitated the creation of an artificial water body—that would later be named Van Cleef Lake. This lake would raise the water level approximately 49 feet. Interestingly, numerous newspapers throughout the state in mid-May 1915 printed an article like what appeared in the *Lowville Journal and Republican* on May 18, 1915: “Trinity Episcopal church at Seneca Falls is to be razed to make room for barge canal work.” The *Seneca Falls Reveille* reported that the State of New York had taken possession of the property “by the reason of the construction of the barge canal. This arbitrary action on the part of the State leaves the parish without a church in which to worship, and there seems to be no immediate remedy. It might have been otherwise had wise councils prevailed. The church itself is a model structure and its loss will be keenly felt. It was built with great care and is regarded as one of the most attractive houses of worship in the diocese, with its elaborate and expensive memorial windows, its fine altar equipments and its general architectural appearance. It seems like sacrilege and profanation to destroy such a structure with all of its tender and sacred associations.”

Fortunately, these articles were wrong. The congregation fought the state takeover of this property. It took a while, but the beautiful church was spared to the extent possible. The Church basement was filled with dredged rock. The State paid the Church \$25,000 (plus \$800 interest) to help compensate for the impact. This money was used to build a new heating plant, and Sunday school rooms on the west side of the church.⁴⁸ The 1918 postcard (see right) shows the new parish hall addition.

The new parish hall proved to be a timely addition as a base of operations of area churches providing food for many sick families in the great Influenza Epidemic of 1918.



This picture postcard from about 1918 shows the then-new Mynderse Library (right) and the Trinity Episcopal Church (left).

According to Liza Merriam, this interchurch effort was the basis of the formation of the Seneca County Chapter of the American Red Cross.

The lawn of the Trinity Church was the location for an elaborate pageant that was part of the village's 1923 75th anniversary celebration of the 1848 woman's rights convention. A cast of 500—including Elizabeth Delavan and her sister Gertrude Garnsey—performed in this pageant that was directed by Clare Booth. (This 20-year-old woman later married Henry R. Luce and became a playwright and still later the American ambassador to Italy during the Eisenhower administration.) The village hosted a reception for 500 visitors on the church lawn. This was perhaps the largest anniversary celebration of the 1848 convention that has ever been held.⁴⁹

The present organ was installed in 1924.⁵⁰ It was made by the M.P. Moller Company. It has two manuals, 35 registers and 9 ranks.⁵¹

In 1954-55, the parish house was renovated. The stage was removed, Sunday school rooms were enclosed, and a second floor was put in.⁵²

A few years ago, a new concern arose about the erosion of the bank by the Seneca-Cayuga Canal. Where there had been as much as 30 feet of lawn separating the church from the water, the continued erosion had reduced the distance to about 5 feet. Because of the pledge that the State had made at the time the canal was rebuilt (see earlier paragraph), the church was successful in getting state and federal funding to build a new retaining wall along the canal bank to prevent any further loss of church land to the flowing water.⁵³

On June 14, 1981, the Trinity Episcopal Church celebrated its 150th anniversary at a festival service of the Holy Eucharist. Three former rectors of the parish—the Rev. Frederick W. Kates, the Rev. Charles Sykes, and the Rev. Robert Shackles—were present. Also attending were the Rev. Leo Dyson and the Rev. Jeffrey Knox, both of whom were “raised” in the Trinity Church.⁵⁴

In 1993, the present rectory was purchased. It is located at 45 E. Bayard Street. This is the 15th different location at which rectors of this church have lived. The first rectory was at 70 Cayuga Street and was built in 1863.⁵⁵

The church is currently making use of a grant funded through the Environmental Protection Agency 1996 Clean Water/Clean Air program. It is a program with a cost of over one million dollars. It has included repairs to the tower and some of the stained glass windows.

Twenty-First Century History

In winter 2006-07, the Seneca Museum of Waterways and Industry used the Trinity Episcopal Church as the subject of its 2nd Annual Winter Painting Contest. Kate Hathaway was winner of the 1st Prize. Reflecting on her award, she said, “Painting makes me happy and gives me peace.”

The Church is currently working on a major restoration project. A total of \$481,000 in grants from the Clean Water Clean Air Bond Act and the New York State Historic Preservation Office, which require a 50% match from the church, were awarded in 1999 and 2007. The church has also received a \$25,000 grant from the Sacred Sites program of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The restoration project work will address needed work to the Rose Window (releading and repair to the tracery that holds it in place), the tower (structural reinforcement and masonry work, and a new copper roof), and the Chancel arch (jack up the floor under the arch to correct plaster cracks caused by settling of the arch's supports). Former Village Planner Fran Caraccilo is the grant administrator for this work. The actual work,

projected to cost about \$1 million, started in spring 2010 and will continue through the summer and fall.⁵⁶

Certainly gazing at the beautiful Trinity Episcopal Church on the bank of Van Cleef Lake is one of the most picturesque views in all of upstate New York, giving peace and joy to many. A view of Van Cleef Lake with the Trinity Episcopal Church in the background is one of the most photographed tourist scenes in Upstate New York.

¹ *Trinity Church: Century of Service*, 1937 publication of the church, p 12.

² Status Report made by William Ottemiller, April 15, 1975

³ *Trinity Church: Century of Service*, 1937 publication of the church, p 12.

⁴ “Grip’s” *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 50.

⁵ Status Report made by William Ottemiller, April 15, 1975

⁶ *Trinity Church: Century of Service*, p 15.

⁷ “Grip’s” *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, p 50.

⁸ *Trinity Church: Century of Service*, p 22.

⁹ *Ibid*, p 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 22.

¹¹ Gen. G.M Guion, “History of Trinity Church,” 1906 Volume of *Historical Papers Read Before the Seneca Falls Historical Society*, pp 27-33

¹² *Trinity Church: Century of Service*, p 23.

¹³ Gen. G.M Guion, “History of Trinity Church,” pp 27-33

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp 33-34

¹⁵ *Trinity Church: Century of Service*, p 27.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p 27.

¹⁷ *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, September 16, 1885.

¹⁸ *Trinity Church: Century of Service*, p 27.

¹⁹ “Historic Trinity Church,” document given as a handout when people in recent years are touring the church.

²⁰ *Manual of the Churches of Seneca County with Sketches of Their Pastors, 1895-96*, Seneca Falls, NY: Courier Printing Company, 1896, p 166

²¹ “Opening of the New Trinity Church,” *The Seneca Falls Reveille*.

²² *Trinity Church: Century of Service*, p 29.

²³ “Opening of the New Trinity Church,”

²⁴ *Manual of the Churches of Seneca County*, p 166

²⁵ Gen. G.M Guion, “History of Trinity Church,” pp 33-34

²⁶ Edith Delavan, *Landmarks of Seneca County: A Photographic Exploration of Historical Styles*, Ithaca, NY: Cayuga Press, 2004, p. 65.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 65.

²⁸ *Manual of the Churches of Seneca County*, p 166

²⁹ *Landmarks of Seneca County*, p. 65.

³⁰ Status Report made by William Ottemiller, April 15, 1975

³¹ *Manual of the Churches of Seneca County*, p 166

³² *Ibid*

³³ Jessie B. Watkins, *The Windows of Trinity*, written in 1981 for the sesquicentennial of the church, p 1

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp 5-6

³⁵ <http://www.buffaloah.com/a/DCTNRY/stained/tiff.html>

³⁶ *The Windows of Trinity*, pp 11-12

³⁷ “Historic Trinity Church”

³⁸ *The Windows of Trinity*, pp 24-25

³⁹ “Historic Trinity Church”

⁴⁰ *The Windows of Trinity*, p 27.

⁴¹ “Historic Trinity Church”

⁴² *The Windows of Trinity*, pp 17-18

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- ⁴³ “Historic Trinity Church”
- ⁴⁴ *The Windows of Trinity*, pp 19-20.
- ⁴⁵ *The Windows of Trinity*, p 15.
- ⁴⁶ “Historic Trinity Church”
- ⁴⁷ *Trinity Church: Century of Service*, p 51.
- ⁴⁸ Walter Gable, “The Cayuga and Seneca Canal”
- ⁴⁹ Walter Gable, “History of Convention Days”
- ⁵⁰ *125th Anniversary Fund* brochure of the Trinity Church, 1955
- ⁵¹ information supplied in an April 26, 2010, email from Lisa Compton Bellocchio to Dr. Susan Avery, current organist
- ⁵² Status report prepared by William Ottemiller, April 15, 1975
- ⁵³ http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WM4GTH-Trinity-Episcopal_Church_Seneca_Falls_NY_USA
- ⁵⁴ Warren Jones column in the Auburn *Citizen*, June 7, 1981.
- ⁵⁵ Status report prepared by William Ottemiller, April 15, 1975
- ⁵⁶ “Trinity’s \$1 M facelift will mark 125 years,” *Finger Lakes Times*, November 22, 2009, p. 3C