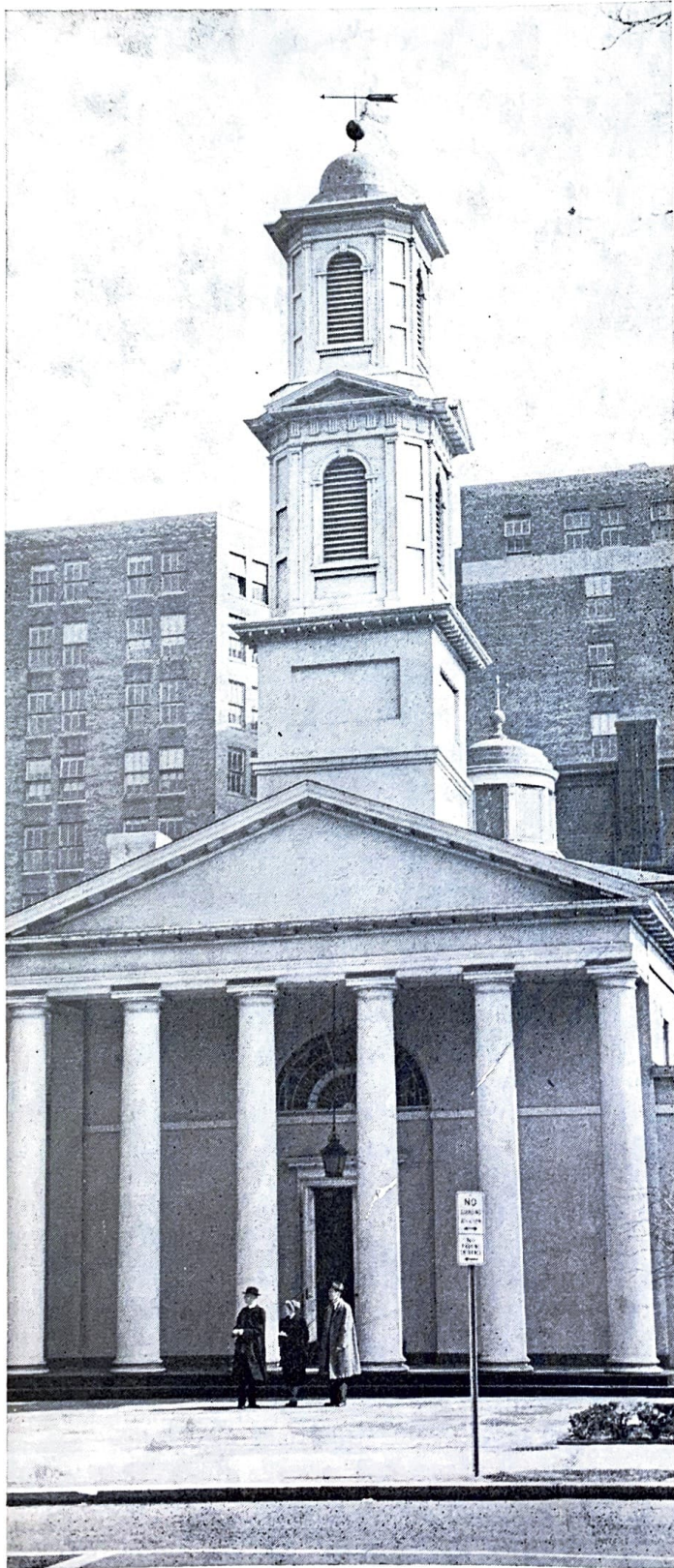




The  *Washington Diocese*

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The Pew Where Lincoln Sat



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Lafayette Square

In the front row of St. John's Church, Lafayette Square, there is an historic pew. George Washington's name is remembered from countless places where he slept. Abraham Lincoln made history by sitting in that particular pew. He also may have slept there but it is not so recorded. The great occasion on which he occupied it was on February 24th, 1861, just a few days prior to his inauguration as the Civil War President. Now, just a century later, on February 26th, there will be a dramatic reenactment at St. John's of the service which he attended unrecognized and unattended except for one companion, New York's then Senator William H. Seward.

On that bleak February day as well-dressed worshipers were streaming into the church for the eleven o'clock Morning Prayer, a distinctive angular figure came striding up to the door. He had "black whiskers and well trimmed black hair" and wore somber black and the customary stove-pipe hat of the period. (The sleek descendant of that topper is back in style news this year as required masculine wear, by presidential decree, for formal state occasions.)

This was the nation's President-Elect but there were no bands, no cheering crowds, no secret service agents to guard him. So little was he known that when he had arrived in Washington the night before it took an argument to convince a supercilious desk clerk at

"Willard's Hotel," as it was then known, that this was the A. Lincoln for whom the presidential suite had been reserved.

This Sunday morning no heads were turned as he and Senator Seward were ushered down the front aisle to pew Number 1, the Seward holding. The then-rector, the Rev. Dr. Smith Pyne, conducted the usual service, quite unaware of his distinguished visitor. He noted with satisfaction however that both men followed the service reverentially, especially the rhymed psalm (Ps. 35) which he read from the Prayer Book of 1789:

"Depend on God and Him obey
So thou within the land shall stay,
Secure from danger and from
want;

Make His commands thy chief
delight;

And He, thy duty shall requite,
Shall all thy earnest wishes grant.
In all thy ways, trust thou the
Lord,

And He will needful help afford
To perfect every just design. . "

The impending war already had cast its long shadow across the land and Dr. Pyne made several allusions to the present state of the country and to the change in Administration which was about to take place. He was astonished to learn when the service was over that he had been preaching to the President-Elect but in the coming years he came to hold "in deep and affectionate regard and respect" the neighbor in the White House who had chosen the Sunday before his Inauguration to worship at St. John's.

PRESIDENT ASKED

President John F. Kennedy has been invited to be the guest of honor on February 26th as that historic scene of one hundred years ago is reenacted. Cabinet members and their wives also are invited and two Senators, Paul H. Douglas of Illi-

nois and John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky, will read the lessons of the day. Descendants of the Pyne family and of pew-holders of 1861 will occupy former family sittings.

Reserved for President Kennedy will be the President's Pew, number 54, so designated since the church was completed and attended in 1816 by James Madison. The large worn Prayer Book lettered in gold "President's Pew" and used by many of the nation's leaders will stand in its proper place. The Seward pew, number 1, where Lincoln sat, will remain dramatically empty throughout the service.

This historical occasion has been included in the official calendar of the Civil War Centennial Committee as part of the Centennial celebration. It was deemed fitting to begin the year as and where Abraham Lincoln began his service to the nation with prayer for God's blessing and guidance. Undoubtedly there already was a sense of deep foreboding in his heart for he had left Springfield, Illinois, just a few days previous with these words:

"I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested on Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being, who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I can not fail."

Many other presidents before and after Lincoln have felt that urge to kneel in prayer before taking up their great task and many have attended such pre-inaugural services at St. John's. Built in 1816 the church then looked across an open field at a half burned White House. It had been left that way by British soldiers who occupied the nation's capital briefly during the war

of 1812. The Capitol had been similarly ravaged and the architect who redesigned and rebuilt it also drew the plans for the church. Benjamin Henry Latrobe was one of a group of artists brought from Paris to Washington by Pierre de L'Enfant who planned this city. Latrobe refused any pay for the church plans but gladly accepted a piece of silver-plate which he treasured as a heritage to pass on to his children.

FAMOUS PARISHIONERS

One of St. John's first parishioners was President James Madison who then occupied the White House. He brought with him his beautiful wife, Dolly. That vivacious lady was so impressed that she asked to be baptized and then confirmed in the Episcopal Church. When she died she was buried from St. John's.

Another Washington beauty, Ellen Herndon, who sang in St. John's choir, met and fell in love with Chester Arthur at the church. The couple was married in New York City. Mrs. Arthur died in 1880 about the time Arthur was elected Vice-President. Later he became President succeeding Garfield who was assassinated. As a memorial to her untimely passing President Arthur presented a memorial window to the church which was placed in the south transept overlooking the White House.

John Quincy Adams, General Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison added their distinguished names to St. John's register and Woodrow Wilson frequently crossed Lafayette Square to worship there. His presence was honored by singing of his favorite hymn "Once to Every Man and Nation."

It is part of the Roosevelt saga that an hour before his first in-

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