

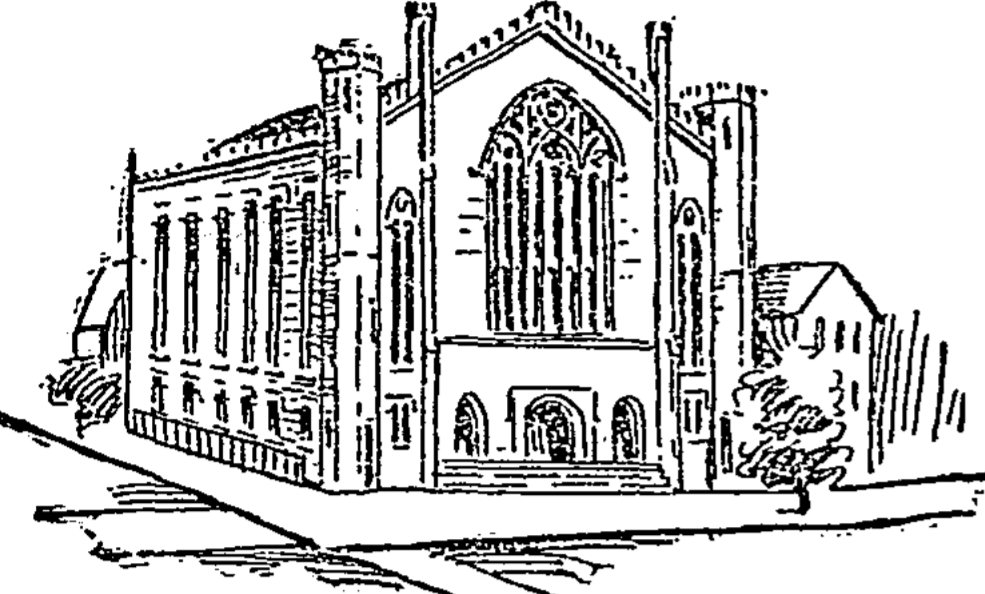
MUST LEAVE ITS OLD CHURCH

OLDEST LUTHERAN CONGREGATION IN THE CITY TO MOVE.

The Consistory of St. Matthew's, at the Corner of Broome and Elizabeth Streets, Decides that It Has Outlived Its Usefulness in Its Present Location—History of a Notable Religious Movement—A Career of Two Hundred and Fifty Years.

The great blue granite edifice which has stood for more than a half a century at the northeast corner of Broome and Elizabeth Streets, within view of the down tracks of the Madison Avenue horse cars as they turn out of the Bowery, is about to be vacated by its present occupants, the oldest Lutheran congregation in the city. The pastor and Trustees, for the second time in a history of 250 years, are face to face with the difficulties of maintaining a family church in a neighborhood deserted by its supporters. These difficulties are pressing closer year by year.

Seven years ago St. Matthew's Sunday school numbered nearly 2,000 children, last Christmas the muster was less than 600. Eighteen years ago fifty pewholders cast their votes south of Broome Street. To-day there are two. The people that are now crowding into the Tenth and Fourteenth Wards care very little for the unfamiliar

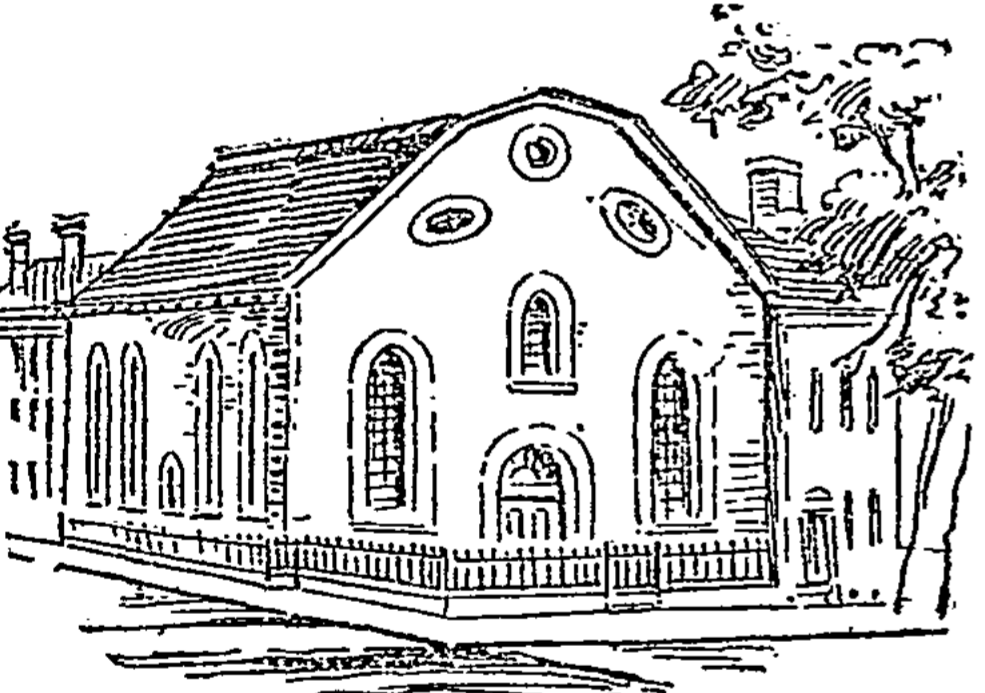


Broome Street Baptist.

practices of evangelical churches. They may be attracted by devices of modern city mission houses, or they may pass these by and devote their Sunday leisure to trades unions, or to pleasure. The former resources of this church are dwindling, and there are no new reinforcements. The Trustees are persuaded that the time has come to move, else the church, which has a record of the longest line of unbroken services among all the city churches, stands in danger of dissolution.

When this edifice was built, in 1840, it was in the centre of the chosen ground of churches. On each side of the Bowery, from river to river, and between Canal and Houston Streets, the blocks were marked by the rising spires of many prosperous churches. It was regarded as an auspicious event in the history of the First Baptist Church when the venerable Dr. Parkinson led his congregation from its ancient seat on Golden Hill, in the Second Ward, to this magnificent building in the new quarter. Among its nearest neighbors were several of the most important city churches. All of them and many others of less note have been forced to leave this quarter on account of the shifting of the city's population. The Baptists surrendered their building in 1868 to St. Matthew's Church, receiving for the property \$85,000. The Lutherans improved it, enlarged it, and added extensive schools and a parsonage. But now its time has come, and the building which for so long been one of the most interesting Protestant Church monuments of the city must be given over to mammon.

St. Matthew's Lutheran Church has had a checkered career. It was born in persecution and nourished by a century of ceaseless adversity. It was the first church to resist the intolerant Stuyvesant and his determined Dutch dominies. Quakers, Baptists, and Presbyterians made efforts to gain a footing on Manhattan Island during the sway of the Dutch. They succumbed, but the Lutherans persisted, and to such good purpose that their congregation was organized and in charge of an orthodox clergyman of the Augsburg faith for several years before Gov. Stuyvesant's Government



The Swamp Church.

came to an end. Previous efforts to uncover the story of Lutheranism on Manhattan Island have revealed a period of uncertainty prior to 1700. Contradictory and unsatisfactory references only could be found in the papers and records relating to the early history of the colony. It has always been supposed that the books and registers of the congregation were destroyed in the fire of 1776, which burned the church and parsonage in Lower Broadway. But they are now in the safes of St. Matthew's Church. Recently the old Dutch, German, and Latin entries were deciphered and transcribed for the use of the Missouri Synod. No knowledge of these records has as yet reached the English public. The standard history of New-York churches, long out of print, makes scanty mention of this denomination. Through the medium of The New-York Times the facts are now for the first time set forth.

Among the Hollanders who founded the colony of New-Netherlands were many families who could not accept the theological standards which were set up in the new country. They were Lutheran, while the colonial Church was Calvinistic. While the colony was still young, these distinctions were not drawn, as the Lutherans were content to worship quietly with their Calvinistic neighbors. But in time the Lutherans increased in numbers, and the Dutch dominies put on an overbearing preciseness in the forms and ceremonies of their worship. Then the more influential Lutherans undertook to establish an Augsburg Church on Manhattan Island. They formed a compact to that end, and in 1653 petitioned Gov. Stuyvesant for permission to "worship publicly in a church by themselves."

Two years later they sent a formal notice that they expected in the Spring the arrival of a minister of their faith, and that thereafter there was to be no further interruption to their meetings. The Governor and his Council, the two Calvinistic dominies, the Classis of Amsterdam, and the West India Company made efforts to check this Lutheran schism, but without effect. They ordered Pastor Johann Ernestus Gutwasser, who arrived April 7, 1657, to return to Holland, and they fined pastor and people with grievous fines, but the conventicles continued in private houses, secretly, perhaps, but with regularity. Gutwasser refused to return to Holland. He was reinforced in 1662 by another Augsburg preacher, Abelius Zetskoorn. The Lutheran families settled along the Hudson Valley from Albany to the Battery were strengthened and encouraged by the fortitude of these pioneers, so that when the English rule brought religious liberty, in 1664, there were organized congregations in several of the colonies.

Gov. Richard Nicholls issued a permit, under date of Dec. 6, 1664, to the Manhattan Lutherans to call a minister of their faith and to maintain an Augsburg church in his domain. This writing is still preserved by the Trustees of St. Matthew's Church. An edifice was built at once, close to the fort at the foot of Broadway. If the exact site of this building were known, it would

doubtless be found within the iron railing surrounding Bowling Green. It was the fourth church building erected on the island. The Lutheran Church flourished undisturbed until the restoration of the Dutch, a constant source of mortification to the Calvinistic dominies. Gov. Colve, under the Dutch régime, issued an edict, dated Oct. 16, 1673, to the effect that all the buildings before the fort should be leveled to the ground. The reason assigned for this order was that the houses on the Broadway side of the fort might interfere with the work of the garrison if suddenly called upon to repel an attack from the Indians.

The edict included the Lutheran Church. Gov. Colve's Council allowed the congregation \$80 guilders for the property. Of this, 450 guilders was the value of the building, the balance being the assessed value of the lot. As a new site for the church, there was assigned a plot "4 rods in extent, at No. 5 Broadway, on the west side, between the property of George Corbett and the wall of the city, in the garden of the West India Company." Modern New-Yorkers will find this on the southwest corner of Rector Street and Broadway, and opposite Trinity Churchyard. Here the Trustees in 1674 caused the erection of a church and a parsonage. In the rear of the church plot, on the south side of Rector Street, and extending to the Hudson River, was the first public graveyard of the city.

In the meantime, the congregation was seeking for a pastor. The Rev. Arnold Lenderick was called in 1666. He set out from Utrecht in that year in response to the call, but death cut short his journey. The Rev. Jacobus Fabricius, a discredited minister from Albany, was accepted for a time by the New-York congregation, but on Aug. 22, 1670, the Rev. Bernhardus Arnzius, the fifth pastor, was called. He remained until 1691. In 1701 Andreas Rudman was installed. He found the field, which at that time included the whole Hudson Valley, entirely too large for his strength, and he resigned it to a younger man.

The Rev. Justus Falckner was called Oct. 25, 1703, and was installed in the following December. He kept the church book in German, Latin, and English. It is still preserved, with its entries of births, marriages, and deaths. Many of the names would be recognized as belonging to the most important families of that day. The book is distinguished by the fervent prayer which the dominie wrote in after each entry for the personal welfare of each subject. The last entry is under date of Sept. 16, 1721. At that time, Dr. Falckner undertook a tour of the colonies, and visited the churches along the Hudson. He died within a year or two. After him came Wilhelm Christoph Berckenmeyer, during whose pastorate the church entered upon a fierce quarrel between the Dutch and German elements, which ended in the disruption of the congregation.

Dr. Berckenmeyer arrived from Amsterdam Sept. 22, 1725. He lodged with the family of Charles Beekman, and was there introduced to the Consistory and Deacons, twelve of the most important personages in the congregation. He was installed as pastor. The new dominie made entry in the church book of his library of Lutheran books, which he had procured with money contributed by the Lutherans of the Fatherland and which he had brought across the sea for the edification of the colony. This was the first Lutheran library in America. It consisted of 20 folios, 52 quartos, 23 octavos, and 6 duodecimos. He assisted the congregation in the erection of a new church on the site of the old, a stone building 46 by 30 feet. At this time it was discovered that the church grant made by Gov. Colve included much more land than had been fenced in when the church was built, in 1674. The deed had been mislaid, and, it was supposed, lost. Efforts had been made to secure a duplicate grant, but in time the original copy was found. A committee of the Trustees, headed by the elder Beekman, carefully examined the grant, and made out to the satisfaction of all what was meant by the terms, "4 rods of land." The fences were then moved to wider borders. The new church was built and dedicated as the Trinity Lutheran Church on June 29, 1729. Berckenmeyer took a rural charge in 1731, and in the following year Michael Christian Knoll, the ninth pastor, was installed.

Pastor Knoll found his congregation chiefly composed of German and English Lutherans. The use of the Dutch language was declining. It seemed no longer desirable to continue its use in the pulpit, as it was not understood by the newest arrivals at the colony. But the prestige and wealth enjoyed by the few older Dutch families enabled them to continue the use of the language both in the Church and the State. Efforts were made to have each alternate sermon delivered in German. These efforts were resisted with intensity by the Dutch Deacons. The Consistory stood 3 to 3 on the question, and Pastor Knoll sided with the Germans. Several times the Germans offered to withdraw and leave the Dutch in possession of the church and property. The three Dutch Trustees made no objection to this settlement of the difficulty, and when Deacon Wolff, on the side of the Germans, threw the key of the church on the consistory table preparatory to their departure, Elder Beekman took it up eagerly and buried it in his pocket.

Pastor Knoll begged the Germans not to go, and he remonstrated with the Dutchmen. With the former he was successful, but the latter were immovable. So the Germans remained, and the quarrel progressed. Dr. Berckenmeyer's intercession was sought, but he advised the congregation to live together in peace. A second time the key of the church figured in the quarrel, but this time Dominie Knoll took possession of it. He sought to end the dead-lock in the Consistory by giving the desired sermons in German, but the opposition informed him that this was a violation of his contract, which specified that he was to speak in the Dutch language. He was warned that if he persisted the Trustees would put "his chair before the door," which is the polite Dutch idiom employed to express the idea that the pastor's resignation would be required. The dominie responded that the Consistory had already broken the contract in neglecting to pay him his stipend of £80 a year, and that if they were not more careful of their conduct of the affairs of the Lord's house on earth they would find their own chairs placed before the door of heaven.

On Sept. 23, 1750, Knoll preached his last sermon in Trinity Church. Before that event he saw the trouble in the church quieted by the withdrawal of many of the German families. The split occurred in 1749. Johann Friederich Ries had been for a time an assistant to Pastor Knoll, who, the record says, soon found cause to distrust him, and he was not permitted to preach in Trinity Church. Ries then organized some of the disaffected families into a German and English Lutheran Church. The old Robert Benson Brewery, which stood at the northern end of Skinner Street, or Cliff Street, as it is now called, was purchased and remodeled as a church, and here the congregation worshipped until 1767.

Dr. Knoll's successor was Albert Weygand, who remained in charge of Trinity Church until 1769. During a part of this time the congregation had the benefit of Dr. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg's presence, who as the chief Lutheran preacher, made efforts to heal the troubles in the Manhattan congregation. It was Dr. Muhlenberg's grandson who founded St. Johnland, on Long Island; St. Luke's Hospital, at Fifty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue, and the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Holy Comforter, at Twentieth Street and Sixth Avenue. Weygand's influence was to foment the troubles among the Lutherans. His pastorate came to an unhappy end in 1769, when his name was scratched from the Synod's rolls. He was followed in the Trinity pulpit by Bernard Michael Havsihl, who continued preaching uninterrupted through the Revolutionary War until the evacuation of New-York by the British. For two years of this period, from 1770 to 1772, he enjoyed the assistance of the Rev. Conrad Roller. But the growing political discontent warned both of them of the danger of remaining in the city, and each made efforts to secure churches in the country. Roller went to New-Jersey, but fate decreed that Havsihl should remain at New-York and play his part in the events of the Revolutionary War.

At the new German church affairs were in an unhappy state. Pastor Ries conceived it to be his duty to canvass the city energetically on behalf of his church. It is reported in the records that he adopted the tactics of the press gang in recruiting communicants, and that he would seize christening parties on their way to Trinity Church and bring them into his own church in order to secure additional names on his register. These pastors succeeded Mr. Reist Philip Heinrich Rapp, until 1756; Johann George Wiesner, 1757; Johann Martin Schaeffer, after two years' vacancy, until 1762; Johann George Berger, until 1767; and Johann Siegfried Gerock, until 1773. Dominie Gerock had been one of a commission sent by the Synod of Pennsylvania a few years before on an errand of peace to the disrupted Manhattan congregation. In accepting a call to the church at this time, he

evidently carried with him the hope of the Synod that the reunion of the congregations would be the fruit of his ministry. But the record shows that he was soon engaged in a hot war of pens with Pastor Weygand.

Mr. Gerock was permitted in the first year of his pastorate to lead his congregation out of the Benson Brewery and install it in a new church at the northeast corner of Frankfort and William Streets. This was the old Swamp Church, whose queer oval windows and gable roof were familiar to New-Yorkers of the first half of the present century. At the time it disappeared in 1850, and for many years before, it was pointed out as the oldest ecclesiastical building in New-York City. St. Paul's Chapel, now standing, was dedicated in the Winter following the dedication of this church. This old building was consecrated as Christ's Evangelical Lutheran Church Sunday, May 3, 1767. Dr. Muhlenberg preached the dedicatory sermon in the presence of a number of the leading Lutheran divines of the Colonies. The city made the day an occasion for public rejoicing. Public contributions were made to the building fund and £100 was credited to the Episcopallians. A public lottery was permitted for the benefit of the church.

Pastor Gerock's successor was Frederick Muhlenberg, a brother of the Pennsylvania patriot and a son of the founder of the American Lutheran Church. He was called to the pulpit in the Winter of 1773. His service was cut short in 1776 by the reported threats of the Tory element in the city, and he was obliged to flee to Pennsylvania in fear of his life. His church remained closed until after the war. The popular impression that services were held here under the patronage of the Hessian officers during the occupancy of the city by King George's forces seems to be incorrect. The church records show that the Swamp Church was used as barracks for the soldiers, and that the Hessians attended the services at the Trinity Lutheran Church.

Pastor Hausahl, or Houséal, as he then wrote his name in the church register, preached in the Trinity Lutheran Church until the fire of 1776. That memorable disaster left him without a church and a parsonage, and according to the record books of the church Commander Robertson assigned to his use the Scotch Presbyterian Church in Little Queen Street. This building had been erected nine years before on the south side of what is now Cedar Street, half way between Nassau and Broadway, a site now covered by the Equitable Building. Services had been suspended here, as was the case in all the churches except the Episcopallian, as the congregations had gone to swell the patriot forces. Houséal preached his first sermon Oct. 27, 1776. He ministered to the Hessian soldiery here until the re-entry of Washington in November, 1783. On the same day of the evacuation of the city, Houséal, together with a considerable part of his resident congregation, went on his Majesty's retiring transports to Nova Scotia, where he ended his days as a Bishop under the protection of the English garrison. During the stay of the British in New-York Houséal opened the vaults of the Swamp Church for the reception of the bodies of Hessian officers and soldiers who died in the garrison. These bodies were found when the church was demolished.

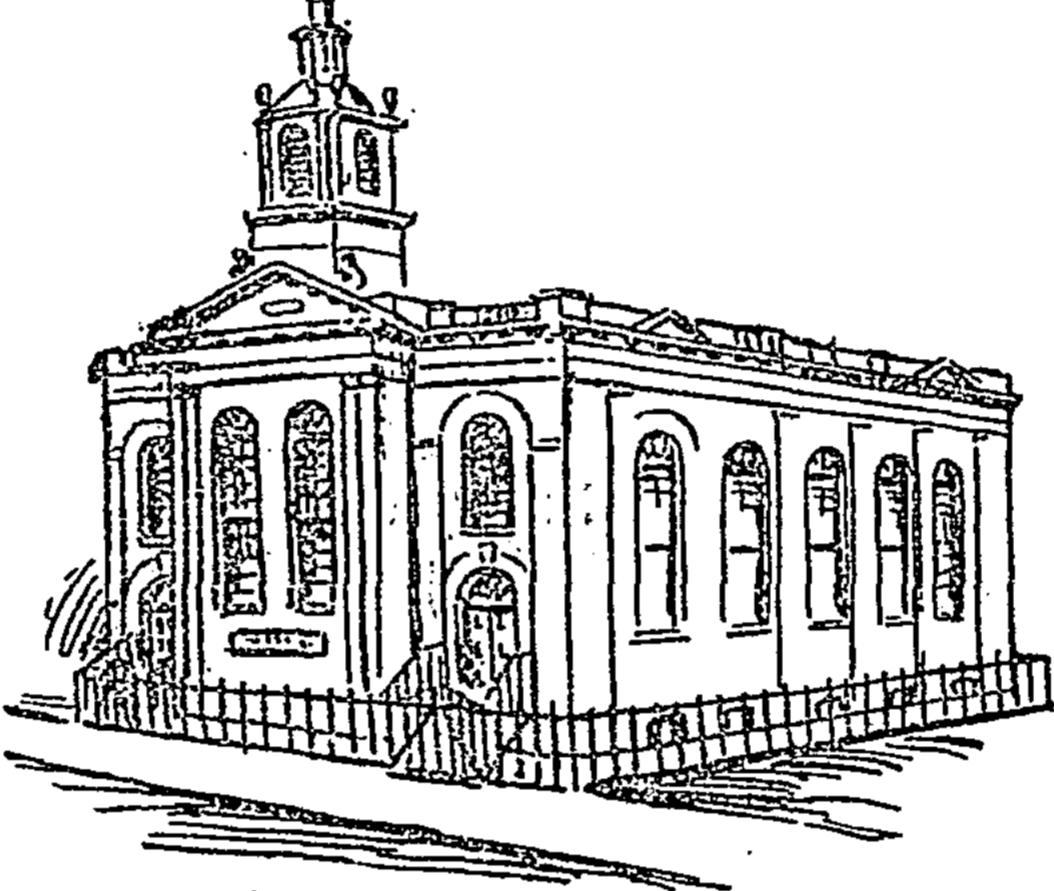
On the restoration of peace the Lutherans found their affairs in a sad plight. The Swamp Church was without a pastor and Trinity Church was in ruins. The years that followed were crowded with interesting details. Dr. Johann Christoph Kunze, many of whose descendants are now living in the city, was installed as pastor of the reunited church. He ministered to them with rich results until his death, July 24, 1807. So prosperous was his ministry that the congregation long weighed the project of rebuilding the ruined Trinity Church. This plan was finally abandoned and the property sold in 1808 to Grace Protestant Episcopal Church and used as the site for their first building. This famous congregation remained on the old Lutheran site until 1846, when its splendid marble edifices at Broadway and Eleventh Street were occupied. At the time of the sale of the Rector Street corner the Lutherans acquired the burial plot in Carmine Street, originally a part of the Trinity Episcopallian Cemetery, and there for many years they buried their dead.

Friederich Wilhelm Geissenhainer succeeded Dr. Kunze in 1807, preaching in the German language entirely. Seven years after a demand arose for English preaching in the Swamp Church, and Dr. Geissenhainer gave place to F. C. Schaeffer, who preached both in German and English. The English contingent built a church in Walker Street, at the southeast corner of Cortlandt Alley, in 1821, and there they established the first English Lutheran Church, with Dr. Schaeffer as its pastor. In the course of time St. James's Church occupied a fine brick building, 166 Mulberry Street, and after another move took possession of its Madison Avenue edifice. It is to-day, under Dr. Remen Snyder, one of the most influential and prosperous of city churches.

The German element recalled Dr. Geissenhainer to the pulpit of the Swamp Church, where he remained until his death in 1838. The church in Walker Street was purchased at foreclosure sale by a member of the Swamp Church. By him it was held for the future use of the denomination. When the old Swamp Church was abandoned the congregation moved into the Walker Street Church and reorganized as St. Matthew's Church. The Swamp Church was occupied by a colored congregation of Presbyterians, and in the course of time gave place to the Globe Hotel. Dr. Berckenmeyer's library, which had been kept in this church by the congregation, was stolen during the Revolution by the Hessian soldiers, and no traces of it have ever been found.

Dr. C. F. E. Stohman served St. Matthew's Church from 1838 until the day of his death, 1868. On that same day the present building having been acquired by purchase from the Baptists, was reconsecrated as a Lutheran church. During his pastorate in 1842 his assistant, F. W. Geissenhainer, Jr., organized the English part of the congregation into St. Paul's Church, which he established in its present edifice at the southeast corner of Sixth Avenue and Fifteenth Street. The Rev. George Vorberg occupied the pulpit from 1868 until his death four years after. The Rev. Justus Ruperti remained four years, from 1872 to 1876, when the present pastor, I. H. Sieker, the seventeenth in unbroken line since 1657, was installed.

Many Lutheran churches trace their origin to St. Matthew's Church. St. Markus Church, on the north side of Sixth Street, half way between First and Second Avenues, was built entirely by money raised in St. Matthew's Church. Other Churches to which St. Matthew's has been a parent are St. Matthew's English Church, South Brooklyn; St. Matthew's Church, Jersey City; St. Matthew's Church, Morrisania, and St. Peter's Church, at the southwest corner of Lexington Avenue and Forty-sixth Street. St. Matthew's Academy, which has been conducted in the school building in Elizabeth Street for many years, will be progressed to a full-course college, and removed to Westchester County, where it will be maintained in the future by the Missouri Synod.



Walker Street Church.