



Out of the Shoebox

The fifth rector of St. Mark's, the Rev. Walter R. Richardson, arrived in 1868 a week before one of San Antonio's worst weather disasters. "Every windowpane and sash in the town" was shattered, he remembered, and one person died, in a storm of hailstones weighing as much as a pound. The city's first Protestant church structure, where St. Mark's members had briefly met, collapsed.

The event signaled a new beginning, both for the city and for St. Mark's. Richardson launched his memorable rectorship of 38 years by getting the church building finished, in 1875, when the new Missionary District of West Texas was wanting a cathedral church. St. Mark's was the logical choice. The rector served as its dean until the designation ended in 1889, as much over the unwillingness of St. Mark's members to give up their rented pews to Episcopalians happening in from elsewhere as over other issues of independence.

When the beloved Dean Richardson, as he continued to be known, retired, a successor became the Rev. Philip Cook, 36, later Bishop of Delaware. Cook came in 1911 to find St. Mark's operating as "a village church," his distinguished predecessor having been willing to forgo his salary as needed to make ends meet. Cook established pledging to project income and instituted annual budgets, tracked by regular financial statements.

In scarcely a year he got a new parish hall built, complete with auditorium and a gymnasium for a church basketball team. He hired a parish visitor to visit the sick. He strengthened the music ministry

with a children's choir of girls and hired a choir director and organist, who organized a series of oratorios by massed choirs performing in the old Empire Theater. Communicants rose to 1,200.

It can be said with little exaggeration that St. Mark's has never looked back.