

**REUNITED WITH THE “MOTHER CHURCH”
PLYMOUTH MERGES WITH CHURCH OF THE
PILGRIMS AND ACQUIRES
VALUABLE STAINED GLASS WINDOWS**



On Easter Sunday, April 1, 1934, the former *Church of the Pilgrims*, and *Plymouth Church* celebrated their first Sabbath together as a united congregation since 1847 (BDE, 1934). It was in 1847, that John Tasker Howard, along with a small group of 21 like-minded parishioners, left the *Church of the Pilgrims* to establish a new congregation (*Plymouth Church*) at the former *First Presbyterian Church* building on Cranberry Street.

Curiously, John Tasker Howard had also been among the thirteen founders of *Church of the Pilgrims* when it opened on December 22, 1844. Whether Howard was motivated by a desire to spread Congregationalism or a yearning for a more liberal approach to theology than the traditional, conservative, sermons offered by Rev. Dr. Richard Salter Storrs, is not known. What is known is that the *Pilgrim* separatists established *Plymouth Church* with Dr. Storrs' full blessing and consent.

Richard Salter Storrs (1821-1900)

The *Church of the Pilgrims* called the Rev. Dr. Richard Salter Storrs, of Brookline, Massachusetts to be its founding minister (Chisolm, 1911). In time he would become one of Brooklyn's most prominent citizens being active on the *Brooklyn Parks Commission*, the *Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences*, the *Brooklyn City Mission Society*, and the *Long Island Historical Society* (now the Center for Brooklyn History) of which he was president (Furman, 2015).

Storrs was descended from a long line of celebrated ministers beginning with Richard Mather (1596-1669), a noted British theologian whose descendants would include Cotton Mather (1663-1728) of Salem notoriety (Byington, 1911). Like Beecher, Storrs was a graduate of Amherst (1839) and noted author, scholar, and editor (*The Independent*). Unlike Beecher, his preaching was contemplative, quiet and conservative. Although, he lacked the fire of *Plymouth's* pastor, he was well respected, popular, and his congregation thrived.

As a prominent public figure, he was asked to preside over the opening ceremonies of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883 attended by NY Governor Grover Cleveland and the current US President Chester A. Arthur, and was asked to speak alongside Henry Ward Beecher at the raising of the flag at Fort Sumter at the conclusion of the Civil War (Byington, 1911). Although, not well-known today, in his time Storrs was almost as famous as Henry Ward Beecher with whom he shared a warm friendship and the abhorrence of slavery. In a sermon delivered to the *Church of the Pilgrims* on December 12, 1850, Storrs disclosed how he had become converted to the abolitionist cause, noting that it occurred during a boat voyage in Virginia.

Under charge of a couple of men, came about twenty or thirty colored children, ranging in age for 8 or 10 years to perhaps 16 or 18 years, they were well-fed, healthy-looking children, comfortably clad and at first, I said, why, here comes a colored Sunday School. Behind the children came a colored woman, no darker of skin than many a brunette in the North, and great tears were rolling down her cheeks. A little child was clinging to her dress, in one hand she carried a bundle and with the other led along a sickly-looking boy. As the woman came off the boat, she looked at me full in the face and I saw her grief and then it came to me in a flash what the scene meant. Those children had been picked up by the dealers around Washington and were taken to Richmond, there to be scattered over the South from the auction marts in that city. That woman was on her way to separation from her children. I was hastening home to the bedside of a sick child, and as I stood there I thought "Can anything make it right to sell wife and child? And I thought that I would be burned alive before I would consent to such a thing in my own case, and then I will be burned alive before I will excuse the system which makes such a thing possible (Furman, 2015, p. 282).

With neighboring churches, Storrs aided fugitives to freedom by personally taking them to safe havens in the various Brooklyn sites of the Underground Railroad and paying the expenses.

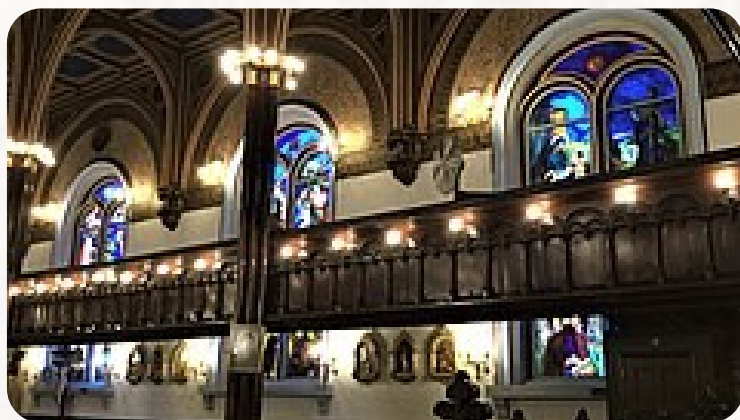
Church of the Pilgrims

The *Church of the Pilgrims* was established as the first Congregational Church in Brooklyn Heights by a small group of New England Congregationalists. On December 22, 1844, the 224th anniversary of the

landing of the Pilgrims, the original congregants laid the corner stone and were recognized as an official *Church of Christ*. Howard and the other founding members of the *Church of the Pilgrims* had purchased an empty lot at the corner of Remsen and Hicks Streets and hired the renowned British born-American architect, Richard Upjohn (1802-1878) to draft the architectural design.

Upjohn, who would become known for his ecclesiastical Gothic architecture for High Church Episcopalian congregations such as Grace Church, Brooklyn (1847) and Trinity Church, Wall Street (1846), designed the *Church of the Pilgrims* in the Romanesque style based on Medieval European models.

The sanctuary building of the former *Church of the Pilgrims* was the first Romanesque Revival style church in the United States. It opened for worship on May 12, 1846 and was designated as a National Landmark in 1966. The original building was expanded in 1869 with high Victorian additions by Upjohn's assistant, Eidlitz. Leopold Eidlitz, a renowned architect in his own right, would go on to design the magnificent NYS capital completed in 1899.



Interior and Bronze Doors of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, courtesy of User:Fordmadoxfraud, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

After the *Plymouth/Pilgrims* merger of 1934, the Upjohn building was purchased by the *Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church* celebrating its first service in 1944. In 1945, the congregation purchased the magnificent bronze doors that once served as the portal to the dining hall on the French luxury liner *SS Normandie* replacing the simple wooden panels of the earlier structure. Pictured in the roundels are the various regions of Normandy, which brilliantly complement the Norman-inspired Romanesque facade.

On June 27, 1977, *Our Lady of Lebanon* was designated as the Cathedral of the Diocese of St. Macron when the Eparchial See was transferred from Detroit, Michigan to Brooklyn (*Our Lady of Lebanon* website). Since the combined members of *Church of the Pilgrims* and *Plymouth Church* unanimously voted to retain the rights to the valuable stained glass windows of the *Pilgrims'* sanctuary, the members of the Maronite Rite Catholic Church (*Our Lady of Lebanon*) engaged the French painter, Jean Crotti (1870-1958) to design replacements. A set of 10 windows was ordered in the artist's original Gemmaux stained glass technique. Gemmaux, literally "enameled jewels," is a method of producing stained glass using pieces of colored glass held together by colorless enamel.

Plymouth Memorial Chapel and The Stained Glass Windows of Hillis Hall

When the new combined congregation of *Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims* met to discuss their future together, they began planning for the transfer of the valuable stained glass windows that had graced the nave of *Church of the Pilgrims* since the turn of the century. Recognizing the aesthetic, cultural, and historical significance of the windows they agreed to build a memorial chapel worthy of housing them. The new building was planned for Cranberry Street in place of the playground we see today.

It was to be named *Plymouth Memorial Hall*. In anticipation of the centennial celebration of the founding of *Plymouth Church* a capital campaign was launched with the slogan “100,000 for 100” or \$100,000 for 100 years. This amount plus the \$70,000 raised by the sale of the Pilgrims’ sanctuary, would provide the requisite funding.

On the night of the centennial celebratory dinner at the *Towers Hotel* the Rev. Dr. L. Wendell Fifield proudly announced that \$100,000 had been raised and the building program could proceed. For some, undocumented reason, the campaign funds were not faithfully used for the original purpose. Instead, the windows were placed in Hillis Hall and a small chapel accommodated on the mezzanine level above Hillis where the furniture of the *Church of the Pilgrims* was placed. A memorial organ was pledged by Dr. and Mrs. Fifield in honor of their son Sgt. Robert E. Fifield who had been killed in action over Kyushu in 1945. One can only guess what the funds were used for and lament the lack of responsibility shown by the stewards of the dedicated funds (BDE, 1946).