

Alton Firefighters, Other Area Departments, Valiantly Fight Heavy Blaze/Smoke At St. Paul's Episcopal Church

by Chris Rhodes, Reporter
June 23 2020 11:20 AM







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ALTON - Multiple fire departments, led by the Alton Fire Department, battled an intense blaze and smoke at St. Paul Episcopal Church at 10 E. Third St. in Alton on Tuesday morning.

Heavy smoke billowed out of a doorway at the church as firefighters arrived on the scene. Alton Fire Department was on the scene first, followed by East Alton, Edwardsville, Godfrey, Wood River, Blackjack, MO., and Florissant Valley, MO., firefighters. It is not yet known if other fire departments were possibly involved. Alton Police directed traffic, closed the road, and kept bystanders out of harm's way for the firefighters.

The heavy smoke was dangerous for the firefighters who fought valiantly to extinguish the fire inside the historic church. The Illinois State Fire Marshal was requested at the scene.

The Episcopal Parish of Alton is a historic 179-year-old parish located north of the St. Louis metropolitan area along the Mississippi River in Illinois.

St. Paul's, the larger worship site, boasts a history nearly as old as that of the state of Illinois. Bishop Kemper of Missouri noted that a gathering of Episcopalians convened in Alton in early 1836 to elect a vestry and organize as St. Paul's Church. Captain Benjamin Godfrey, a retired steamboat captain, and businessman who had established his residence in nearby Godfrey noticed the thriving town of Alton had no church buildings. Using his own funds, he constructed a building in 1834 and offered its use to all organized religious groups until selling it to the Episcopalians in 1845 for \$1,800 when it became St. Paul's property.

Over the years, St. Paul's has undergone several restorations and in the mid-1970s, the congregation made a conscious decision to remain in its urban setting. Some of the original foundation walls of the 1834 structure and an 1856 renovation still support the neo-gothic, limestone building today. In 1913, the parish built an addition for offices and meeting rooms, razed an existing rectory during the 1950s which is now the site of a beautiful garden, and erected the present-day Parish Hall and Education building in 1960.

At the entrance to the main worship space, St. Paul's includes a narthex and two small chapels; a tiny chapel for private meditation and a baptistery now housing a columbarium of 24 niches.

MORE DETAILS TO COME...





[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)