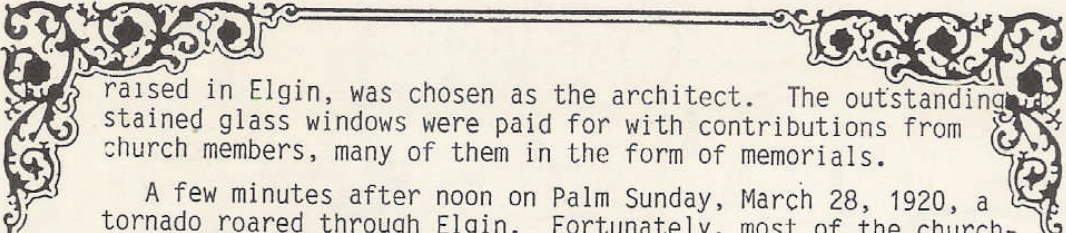


James T. Gifford and his brother, Hezekiah, left central New York about February 1, 1835; James to establish a town, and his brother, a farm. They arrived here on April 3 of that year and their families arrived in September. On May 12, 1836, in James Gifford's cabin, Elgin's first church was organized. Eleven members entered into a Congregational covenant.

James T. Gifford, the founder of Elgin, and his wife Laura, were also, then, original founders of this, Elgin's first church. Counting the log cabin, the present structure is the fourth church building for the Congregationalists.

This is also the church of the Lord's. Mary Edwards Carpenter Lord became a member in November 1878 and George P. Lord became a member shortly after their marriage, in 1889. Church records indicate various bequests from the Lord's.

Although having seen some changes over the years, this church remains one of the most beautiful in Elgin. The church was built in 1888-89 by Andrew Magnus, whose home was at 18 North Chapel Street. Chicagoan Clarence Stiles, who was born and



raised in Elgin, was chosen as the architect. The outstanding stained glass windows were paid for with contributions from church members, many of them in the form of memorials.

A few minutes after noon on Palm Sunday, March 28, 1920, a tornado roared through Elgin. Fortunately, most of the churchgoers had gone home after hearing the minister preach, "We must always be prepared since we know not when our time is coming." The church sustained serious damage when the upper portion of the tower and west gable crashed through the ceiling. The main floor sank to the basement and bricks and glass were hurled through the auditorium. Of the seven deaths in Elgin that day, three were in the Congregational Church when two women and a girl were killed by falling debris. The cost to construct the church was \$35,000; the cost of repairing the tornado damage was \$20,000. The different color bricks in the upper portion of the tower is a reminder of that dreadful day so long ago.

The church was constructed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style as seen in the articulated brick and rusticated stone facade, the massive carved stone window hoods, window sills, and keystones. Note the heavy sculpted stone trim at the base of each side of the gable roof and the raised rusticated stone foundation wall. Look way up and notice the stained glass in the lantern-skylight atop the roof.

Don't miss the downstairs library (new section) where reproductions of portraits of Elgin's and the church's founders, Laura and James T. Gifford are on display along with many other items of interest.