The Aspinwall Painting

"Our Saviour at Emmaus"

A large painting hangs in the cloister at St. Stephen's Church, one that is often ignored by passers-by but is of some significance to our parish history. The painting, "Our Saviour at Emmaus," was done in Germany in 1860 by Karl Müller. It shows the scene described in Luke 24:13-35, when Jesus appears to two disciples on the day of his resurrection. He appears to them as they are walking along the road to the nearby town of Emmaus and listens as they describe the events of the day, but they don't recognize him until he joins them for dinner; when he breaks bread, they immediately know him and he just as immediately disappears.

The painting was purchased from the artist's studio by William Henry Aspinwall for his private art gallery, one of the first in the city of New York. Mr. Aspinwall was an American businessman, president of the merchant firm of Howland & Aspinwall. He later founded the Pacific Mail Steamship Company to provide service to California and the Panama Railway. After his retirement, he was active as a philanthropist; he became one of the founders of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and was also a founder of the ASPCA.

After William's death, his collection of over 90 paintings was sold. This particular painting was purchased by his son, the Rev. John Abel Aspinwall, the first Rector

and later Rector Emeritus of St. Thomas's Episcopal Church in Washington, DC, where it was hung in his study. The painting later passed to John's son Louis Minturn Aspinwall, and then to Louis's son Henry.

Henry Titus Aspinwall was born in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, in 1895. He married Winifred Cramp in 1923 and settled in West Virginia, but as early as 1926 the family were living in the Port Washington area.

Henry was a well-known local architect in the 1930s through the 1960s. He lived with his family at 17 North Washington Street and had his offices (at least in later years) at 937 Port Washington Boulevard. He and his firm were involved with the design of buildings for the 1939 and 1964 New York World's Fairs, and locally with the design of the Sousa Band Shell – and the expansion of the St. Stephen's church building (where he and his family were members) in 1955.

Henry and Winifred had a son, Peter Grosvenor Aspinwall, born in West Virginia in 1924, and a daughter Mary, born in New York two years later.

Peter attended Port Washington High School, where he played trombone in the band (well enough to play solos in state competition). He graduated from high school in 1942, and later that year enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Forces. He graduated from Aviation Cadet School at Bruce Field, Ballinger, Texas, and was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant. He was assigned as a bombardier in a B-24 "Liberator", flying out of Italy with the US 15th Air Force. He was seriously injured on July 22, 1944, while on a bombing mission and died three days later.

Peter G. Aspinwall
L – 1942 Port Light yearbook
R – In flight gear

When the church expansion was complete, Henry and Winifred Aspinwall donated the painting to St. Stephen's in Peter's memory. It hung for many years behind the altar in the downstairs chapel in the church building, but when the chapel was converted to the St. Cecilia Room in the early 1990s it was relocated to its present position.

Alan E. Dinn, Parish Historian