

Lecture Room

The congregation had a lecture room that served multiple uses from the early 1830s to the 1860s. It was located in a one-story structure on the southeast corner of Duke and Royal streets that extended 19.5 feet east-west and 53 feet north-south. The structure was subsequently incorporated into the current larger one on the same lot, which is today the residence of Fred and Susan Morhart, members of our congregation.

Lecture rooms — church facilities bearing that name — were fairly common in the nineteenth century among congregations whose places of worship, like our Meeting House, were free-standing single-room structures. The lecture room provided a multi-purpose space that was used for classrooms, prayer services, meetings and gatherings of all sorts that demanded less space than the Meeting House. Congregation records indicate that among the many events that took place in our Lecture Room were weekday prayer meetings, meetings of Presbytery, regular meetings of Alexandria's Union Benevolent Society, our own Monthly Concert (an informal worship service), and prayer services conducted throughout the week, probably for Union soldiers, during the Civil War. Alexandria's St. Paul's Episcopal Church utilized a similar one-story, one-room Lecture Room during the nineteenth century. It was located at the northeast corner of South Pitt and Duke Streets, site of that congregation's current Wilmer Memorial building.

Throughout the 1850s and early 1860s, the congregation sought a lot closer to the Meeting House on which to build a new Lecture Room, but a suitable property was never purchased.¹ The Lecture Room at Duke and Royal streets was sold to Thomas Dwyer in October of 1864, but still used for congregational activities throughout the end of the decade. When the congregation's post-Civil War communicant membership size diminished to about half its pre-war numbers, the demand for such a facility declined and did not re-emerge until the middle of the twentieth century with the reestablished congregation.

FOOTNOTES

¹The search for that suitable property was completed, in a manner of speaking, in 1957, when the residence immediately across the street from the Meeting House, at 322 (now incorporated in 320) South Fairfax Street, was purchased by forty members of the congregation for such use as the congregation might decide was appropriate. An appropriate use was never found, and the property was sold in 1968.