



MEREDITH L. KAISER/GAZETTE PHOTOGRAPHER

The cast iron fence fronting St. George's Episcopal Church in Schenectady's Stockade neighborhood is undergoing restoration after many years of deterioration.

SCHENECTADY

Historic fence is being restored

Cast iron style once popular, now called unusual, valuable

BY KATHLEEN MOORE
Gazette Reporter

An antique fence that has been deteriorating for more than a decade in front of the city's oldest church is being restored.

The cast iron fence fronts St. George's Church on North Ferry Street in the Stockade neighborhood. The fence style was popular in the Victorian Era, but cast iron proved to be a less than hardy building material and few such

fences still exist.

That makes St. George's fence, which is about 120 years old, nearly as valuable to historians as the church, which held its first service just five years after the 1690 massacre and still uses the sanctuary that was built in 1759.

"I couldn't believe it when I first heard it," said David Kennison, senior warden of the church. "I said, 'This is just a rusty old fence,' but I was told the fence

alone is suitable for being placed on the National Register of Historic Places. There are few surviving examples of cast iron fences because they have fallen into disrepair and been removed or just fallen apart."

St. George's fence nearly shared that fate. For decades, Stockade residents watched as it grew rusty and brittle, with broken pieces dangling until they fell off. Church members welded some back on, but the repairs did not blend in with the rest of the fence. So they began collecting the pieces and storing them, leaving gaps, in hopes of eventually raising the money to fix it up

properly. Kennison said the church has had the fence on its list of things to do for years, but the \$25,000 repair bill was an insurmountable barrier amid all of the other work that needed to be done to maintain the historic church.

Now, the restoration will finally occur through a donation from congregant Fred Krings in memory of his wife, Virginia Krings. According to church officials, the Krings designated their donation for the fence because they cared about it and wanted to see it repaired.

Restorers have removed the
See FENCE, page B3

Fence: Stockade cast iron being restored

Continued from page B1

broken, rusty and poorly-welded vertical bars from the fence and have repaired most that were in storage. The rest will be recast using the surviving pieces as a model. The fence posts will also be removed so that their rusty anchors can be replaced. The entire job should be done by fall, Kennison said.

Administrative assistant Donna Vrooman added that the work needed to be done quickly to halt the deterioration and thus save the fence.

"If you let it keep going to disrepair, you're going to lose it," she said. "We can't replace it — it's historic."

Stockade Association President Joseph Fava agreed. He had planned to meet with church officials this spring and ask them

what the association could do to help raise money for the work.

"It's just that it's an antique fence," he said. "It's been there for a hundred years."

The church was named for England's patron saint by the Colonial governor of the province in 1759, when the congregants were still members of the Church of England. After the Revolutionary War, the church became Episcopal, as did many others in the United States.

The church was used primarily by the Anglicans, but Presbyterians were allowed to enter through a different door to hold services when the Anglicans had finished theirs. That door was later bricked up when the two congregations disagreed and the Presbyterians left to form their own church, but the doorway arch can still be seen from the walk-

way on the south side of the church.

The most noticeable change at the church is the steeple, which is not original. (A bell used to hang within the chapel instead.) But the steeple was restored with everything else when members hired an architectural firm to highlight the historic nature of the church in 1952, two decades before the rest of the neighborhood began to focus on historic restoration.

Even with the changes, the church has been described by historians as one of the finest examples of 18th century Colonial architecture still standing in the Mohawk Valley. It is also the oldest Anglican church in the valley.

Reach Gazette reporter Kathleen Moore at 395-3120 or moore@dailygazette.com.