With no Episcopal church in Kingston prior to 1832, services were held at the home of John Adams on the corner of Broadway and Delaware Avenue. Growing attendance forced a move into the Ulster County Court House at Easter in 1832.

On June 24th of that year, a group of twenty-one men met and founded the new church, St. John’s Episcopal. The 100th anniversary book states that the church was named for St. John the Evangelist. However, since the church was founded on St. John the Baptist Day, it has become accepted over the years that both saints will provide our guidance.

The Rev. Reuben Sherwood of Saugerties was called as the first rector, preaching “every other Lord’s Day” at the rate of $300 per year. Erecting a church building was one of his first priorities, so a lot on Wall Street was purchased for $550. The original building was erected on the west side of Wall Street about five buildings from North Front Street. The doors were opened to the new church on Nov 24th, 1835.

In 1860 Colonel George Pratt, commander of the Ulster Guard Militia, was a vestry member at St. John’s. Col. Pratt was the son of Zadock Pratt, for whom Prattsville in Greene County is named. Col. Pratt led the efforts to add a chancel at the front of the church to house the altar and choir. Col. and Mrs. Pratt donated the stained glass windows above the altar, which they shipped in from France. On March 14, 1861, the new chancel was consecrated by Bishop Horatio Potter.

St. John’s was deeply saddened when Col. Pratt, at age 32, was mortally wounded at the Second Battle of Bull Run in Manassas, Virginia on August 30, 1862. New York State Governor Horatio Seymour and other dignitaries attended his funeral in Albany.

Another St. John’s member, Theodore Gates, replaced Pratt as head of the Ulster Guard and rose to the rank of General before bringing the men back from the Civil War. In 1867 Gates became a Warden of St. John’s.

St. John’s bell, weighing 1,500 pounds, was cast in 1878 at Meneely & Kimberly Foundry in Troy, New York. In 1999 the Verdin Company completely rebuilt the bell’s mechanical system. A new electronic controller was added to replace the original rope-pull, which allowed ushers to simply push a button to ring the bell rather than heave the rope.

In 1926 the Wall St. property, originally purchased for $550, was sold to the Up-To-Date clothing company for $110,000. The original church was dismantled and the stones were moved here to Albany Avenue. The stones were numbered and rebuilt to look the same as the original building. Anxious parishioners carted stones in their automobiles to help expedite the rebuilding. For the next year church services were held at the John Temper House at One North Front Street. The Rt. Rev. William Manning, Bishop of New York, dedicated the rebuilt church on October 20, 1927.

The church hall was begun soon after the reopening, and it was completed in a four year effort. The hall is named in memory of the Rector Emeritus, the Rev. Robert Shellenberger, who began the longest tenure of any St. John’s rector in 1943, retiring in 1972.

The organ was purchased from the Estey Organ Company in 1906. A pump in the basement supplied air through tubes to the keyboard. Each key released air to individual organ pipes. The problem with this system was a noticeable delay between the time the key was depressed and the time the pipe sounded. This delay was not the same for each key since the length of the tube from the key to the pipe varied. In 1953 the entire organ was rebuilt into an electrically-operated pipe organ. Replacing the valves and tubes with electrical switches solved the delay problem. Every seat in the church was filled on Oct 7, 1954, when world-renowned organist Fernando Germani performed a recital on the rebuilt organ.
Two significant fundraisers have helped St. John’s meet our financial needs for many years. Each year since 1941 we have served ham dinners to hundreds of our parishioners and neighbors at the end of October. This is as much a social event as it is a moneymaker for the church. Local politicians join us since this event takes place the week before Election Day. Most of the congregation pitches in to help in some way. They bake pies, peel potatoes, chop squash, carve hams, serve dinner and do many more important jobs. At the end of the servings, the church family gathers to break bread together and to share a cold beverage after the final cleanup.

The annual Summer Fair with Chicken Barbeque and Silent Auction occurs in June of each year as our biggest fundraiser. It includes children’s games, arts and crafts, vendors, fried, fish, book and bake sales as well. The atmosphere is almost carnival-like with live music, and the Fair is always well attended. On average we sell over 250 chicken dinners each year.

“It is the fragile yet enduring power of memory that we harness when we celebrate the Holy Eucharist. Through that remembering, empowered by the Holy Spirit, the past is made present, and the present is carried into the past: past and present become one, and for a moment we are transported into timeless union with God. That is the Divine Promise: the Promise of union with God. That is God’s Promise to us in Jesus. That is the Advent hope towards which our worship today points. This is the remembered and future Promise that is ours today, tomorrow, and unto the ages of ages. AMEN.”

Music has always been an important ingredient of St. John's worship services. In the 1920s under the leadership of Mr. Robert Williams, a Boy's Choir was formed. Most of the boys were St. John's parishioners, but some were interested neighbors. They performed on Sundays and for all special events. They were paid from 15 to 40 cents a week, except for the one who kept the books. He received 50 cents. The Boy's Choir remained active until the 1950s.

Beginning in 1937 and well into the 1940s George Huber, a stone worker from Roundville, beautified the chancel of the church with a meticulously carved wooden choir and altar setting with extremely fine detail. Mr. Huber also carved the seven foot Rood that hangs in the front of the chancel. The Rood contains a statue of the Crucifixion, with a weeping Mother Mary, and St. John with clenched fists. Above the screens of the organ pipes is St. Cecelia, patron saint of music. Behind the altar are statues from left to right of St. John the Evangelist, Moses, Elijah and St. John the Baptist. Huber signed his work below and to the right of St. Cecelia. He believed only Christ was perfect, so there is one tiny flaw in his work. Can you find it?

Hint: It is on the rear of the panel behind the organist.

The first woman elected to the vestry was Mrs. Elizabeth Chilson in 1959.

In 1973 the Rev. Mark S. Sisk became rector of St. John's and remained here until 1977. From 1977 to 1984 he was the Archdeacon of three suburban counties under the Bishop of New York, Paul Moore. From 1994 to 1998 Sisk was President and Dean of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in New Haven, Connecticut. Sisk was elected and consecrated Bishop Coadjutor of the Episcopal Diocese of New York in 1998. He was installed as the Bishop of New York at a ceremony on September 29, 2001, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Bishop Sisk retired on February 2, 2013. Of his 200 parishes in the diocese, he chose St. John's (the only parish he served as rector) for his final church visit on Dec 23, 2012.

The Rev. Janet Vincent was the first woman to be called as rector of St. John's in 1988. She left St. John's in 1997, moving on to Grace Church in White Plains. She was instrumental in developing the Capital and Endowment Campaign, which has become extremely important for the financial stability of the church.

In 1999 and 2000 we dedicated the new memorial garden and columbarium. The columbarium was doubled in size in 2011. The garden continues to be a place of peaceful reflection for the congregation and the neighborhood as well.

In 2002 many of the stained glass windows, originally commissioned from J&R Lamb Studios in New York City in 1899, showed signs of deterioration and the need for restoration. A consultant was hired to conduct a complete conditions survey, which revealed the cost of replacing the lead in all of the windows to be nearly $300,000. The window conditions were prioritized and plans for the first phase of restoration was embarked. The original commissioning of the windows was done with memorial gifts, and much of the planned restoration was accomplished through new memorials. In 2006 St. John's entered into a contract with J&R Lamb Studios, now located in New Jersey, to restore the highest priority windows for just under $75,000. During that summer those windows were removed from the openings and taken back to Lamb's studios for the meticulous task of restoring each piece of glass with new lead.

In 2011 the overhead lighting fixtures in the church were sent to a vendor in New Jersey to be reworked and restored, providing greatly improved lighting for the congregation.

In September 2006 Godly Play was incorporated in the Sunday School curriculum. Godly Play is a beautiful Christian philosophy which is based upon the recognition that children have an innate sense of the presence of God. All they need is the appropriate language to help them identify and express it so it can be explored and strengthened. The Godly Play approach includes rich thematic materials for storytelling, wondering, and discussion, and it serves to enhance the child's authentic experience of God. St. John's supported the training of teachers and the purchase of curriculum material. The children, teachers, and families see an immediate and positive reaction to this new style of Christian education. As a result, attendance increased considerably and helped to attract new families to the church.
“The world needs more people to stand up and say they care what happens to their brothers and sisters, how they feel, and what they go through, and to be there for them. It’s the gospel message”...