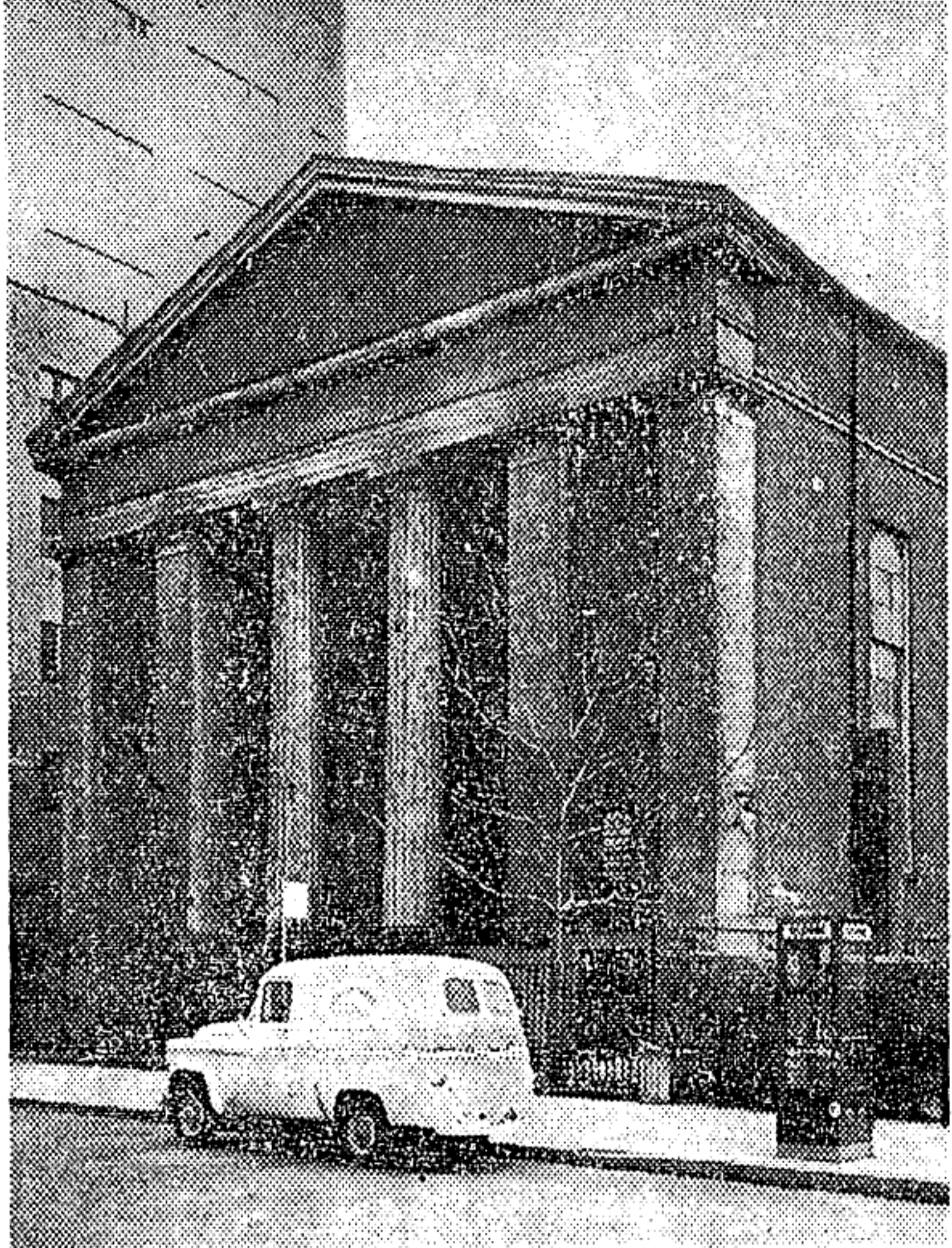


152-Year-Old Spring St. Church Is Being Closed by Presbytery



The New York Times

Spring Street Presbyterian Church, which will be closed

By PAUL L. MONTGOMERY

The historic Spring Street Presbyterian Church, overtaken by old age and a changing neighborhood, will be closed at the end of the month.

Representatives of the Presbytery of the City of New York met Wednesday night with Charles I. Bittner, the only active member of the 152-year-old church's session, to arrange the formal transfer of the property.

The Presbytery, the ruling body for Presbyterian churches in the city, had voted last week to dissolve the congregation of the church.

In the next few days the 49 members of the Spring Street congregation, many of whom are past retirement age, will receive formal notification that the morning worship service on Dec. 29 will be the last.

The Presbytery has made several studies of the declining church in the last few years. In September the church's 83-year-old minister, the Rev. Dr. William Calvin Colby, died. About the same time the church appealed to the Presbytery for a new heating plant.

The Presbytery's Committee on Extension and Development decided that the church's geographical location and the lack of a large population in the neighborhood did not warrant the expense of keeping up the church and trying to expand its ministry.

The Presbytery intends to conduct a study of Lower Manhattan, the object of several redevelopment plans, to determine the role of the church there. There is a slender possibility that if the Spring Street neighborhood acquires more residential housing, the church may be eventually reopened.

However, the church property, believed to be worth about \$400,000, may be sold to further Presbyterian work in another area.

The Spring Street Church, which is near the entrance to the Holland Tunnel, was founded in 1811. Its present building, once in open country but now surrounded by warehouses and factories, was built in 1836.

In 1914 its congregation numbered 667, but its neighborhood was changing from residential to commercial. The next year membership dropped to 531; by 1922 it was 256. After that the erosion to the present 49 was gradual. The Sunday School was discontinued two years ago.

The exterior of the Greek revival edifice is cracked and peeling. The interior, built to seat about 530, is threadbare and musty.

Opposition to the closing has

been expressed by most of the congregation and by some other ministers in the city. But they seem resigned now.

Mr. Bittner, who has a grocery store on West Fourth Street, has almost singlehandedly kept the church open since the death of Dr. Crosby, who was not able to devote much time to his work because of age and the illness of his wife.

Another member, Miss Martha McKenzie, a 58-year-old dressmaker, joined the congregation a year and a half ago. She left one of the city's largest churches and came to Spring Street because she felt it was "more like a church."

"I can't believe they're going to close it down," she said yesterday. "The church has a future, no matter what this Presbytery says."