

## Short Historical Sketch of Christ Church Parish (1911)

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### Table of Contents

THE PARISH.....	4
HALL MARKS.....	5
RECTORS.....	6
Rev. Solomon Halling.....	6
Rev. J. C. Clay.....	6
Rev. Dr. Mason.....	6
Rev. J. R. Goodman.....	6
Rev. John Burke.....	6
Rev. Cameron F. McRae.....	6
Rev. Fordyce M. Hubbard.....	7
Rev. William N. Hawks.....	7
Rev. Henry Green.....	7
Rev. Thomas Haughton.....	7
Rev. Alfred Augustin Watson.....	7
Rev. William B. Wetmore.....	8
Rev. Edward M. Forbes.....	8
Rev. Charles S. Hale.....	9
Rev. Van Winder Shields.....	9
Rev. Thomas Mordint Nelson George.....	9
Rev. L. G. H. Williams.....	10
Rev. John H. Brown.....	10
Rev. B. F. Huske.....	10

**Short Historical Sketch of Christ Church Parish (1911)**

**Short Historical Sketch**

**of**

**Christ Church Parish**

**New Bern, North Carolina**

**1715-1911**

**By DITA ROBERTS**

**Short Historical Sketch of Christ Church Parish (1911)**

THIS LITTLE BOOKLET I DEDICATE  
TO THE  
MEMORY OF MY FATHER

## Short Historical Sketch of Christ Church Parish (1911)

### THE PARISH

The Parish of Christ Church, New Bern, North Carolina, was organized in 1715, and was one of the earliest parishes in the Colonies. In the year 1723, during the reign of George I of England, a tract of land, the property of Mr. Cullen Pollock, was formally laid out into a township, by the name of New Bern. There were lots provided for a Church, court house, and market place. An act was passed, by the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, in 1766, that the Glebe land, which was formally purchased at the expense of the County of Craven, for a residence of a minister of the Episcopal Church, situated on Middle and Johnson streets, with all the improvements thereon, should be taken from the Church, and the money raised by rent or sale, should be used for erecting a new school house, incorporated and named the New Bern Academy - no Rector or professor should be a trustee. The trustees appointed were Hon. Richard Caswell, Abner Nash, Esq., John Wright Stanly, William Blount, John Sitgreaves, Spyers Singleton, William McClure, William Bryan and Richard Dobb Speight, Esq. The lot provided for a Church was found to be undesirable, and, on the 21st of August, 1740, during the reign of King George II., this lot was sold by the Vestry and the money used in purchase of four lots more convenient and commodious for erecting a Church, for a Church yard and other Parish uses. This colonial Church was built at the corner of Pollock and Middle streets, and, a few years ago, we could still trace, in the Church yard, the foundation of the side walls, chancel and porch. Had our people been less patriotic, this old Church would have been left standing, and, today, we would have in our midst, one of the oldest of the old colonial Churches. Tradition says that an ivy-covered tomb in the Church yard covers the remains of the Rector, Rev. James Reed, who was in charge from 1757 to 1777 - prior to and during the Revolution. The tradition is that his people, being patriots, took means to drown his voice during the prayer for the King, which he persisted in using. But he was permitted to proceed unmolested during the rest of the service. His salary was taken from him, by his Vestry, on account of his politics, although he was highly honored and appreciated. Some of his influential vestrymen, out of respect for his conscientious scruples, did all they could to alleviate his trouble. In 1789 money was raised by donations, bequests and subscriptions, for a new Church, and the following Churchwardens, John Fonviell, Richard Dobb Speight, Richard Nixon, Isaac Guion, Thomas Thomlinson, John Daves, Thomas Haslin, David Witherspoon, and William Good, Esqs., authorized by the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, were elected, and given charge of all the financial affairs of the Church. On the first Monday after Easter, in the succeeding years, there was a meeting held in the Church, and seven Churchwardens were elected to continue in office three years. The building of the new Church must have covered several years, as it was not consecrated until 1825. About this time the old colonial Church was pulled down. In 1832, it was found that the arch of the roof of the Church had begun to flatten, and to thrust the side walls out. The roof was removed, and replaced by one of a different construction. The walls were drawn together with iron rods - these were covered with wood, resting at the ends on corbels, and making a handsome ceiling. The committee selected to examine these repairs, were, B. Flanner, Joseph Mitchell, F. Sparrow, Hardy B. Lane and D. Munford, (colored). Donum Monford contracted to pull down the old colonial Church which stood on the corner of the lot on which the new Church was constructed. He fell and broke his leg. A superstition arose that this, and the dangerous condition of the Church, were a punishment for this act of desecration of Christ Church.

## Short Historical Sketch of Christ Church Parish (1911)

Our old colonial Parish was the recipient of three very valuable gifts - the Communion Service, Bible and Book of Common Prayer - all gifts of Royalty.

The late Major Graham Daves, secretary of Christ Church, during a visit to London, England, in 1896, investigated these gifts to Christ Church, New Bern, and on his return wrote the following report:

"Much of the history of silver plate, especially that manufactured in the last century, may be learned from what are called 'Hall Marks.' These are stamped in the metal and are usually monograms - single letters, heraldic animals and other devices. They all have a certain signification which is easily interpreted by most silversmiths, or any one who will consult a dictionary of Hall Marks. The Church plate of Christ Church Parish, New Bern, N. C., has on it besides the Royal Arms of Great Britain, four Hall Marks all in a shield, viz: the initials 'M. F.' the letter 'R', a Lion 'passant gardant' and a Leopard's head crowned."

### HALL MARKS

The initials "M. F." in a shield show the plate to have been the work of Mordecai Fox. The letter "R" in a shield indicates that the plate was "hall marked," and without doubt made in 1752 (George II). The Lion "passant-gardant" is a guarantee that the silver was of the standard purity required by law. The Leopard's head crowned is evidence that the plate was hall marked at London government office.

All the records of the Parish were destroyed in 1818 when the home of Mr. Lucas Benners, the then Secretary of the Vestry, was burned. But the well preserved traditions of the Parish prove that the plate was a gift of Royalty as is indicated by the Coat of Arms of Great Britain engraved thereon. It was presented to the Parish in the latter part of the reign of George II, and doubtless in the year in which it was made, as it is said to have been made for the Parish, through Mr. John Council Brown, then a Warden of the Parish. The legend "Dien et Mon Doit" and also the "Supporters" are omitted from the Coat of Arms for some reason.

A Bible and Book of Common Prayer were given at the same time as the plate, as was then the custom in such presentations. The Bible was printed in 1717 (Geo. 1). Rev. James Reed was the incumbent at the time of the presentation.

A Communion Service, made by Mordecai Fox, was presented to Trinity Church, Boston, in 1742, with an accompaniment of books, vestments and linen for the altar, and an alms-basin of his make, of date 1760, is owned by Trinity Church, New York. The Boston Service is similar to our own. There is no authority whatever for a claim sometimes made that our Communion plate was brought by Gov. Tryon from St. Phillip's, Brunswick, N. C. Craven Parish is very much older than St. Phillip's, having been founded in 1715, and was established as "Christ Church" long before Tryon was Governor of North Carolina at all; nor would Tryon have had any authority, nor have been allowed, to bring away property of the Parishes of St. Phillip's or St. James' to Christ Church, when he transferred his residence to the "Palace" at New Bern about 1769. It is said Governor Josiah Martin attempted to take away with him the Church plate when he fled from New Bern, in 1775 but was prevented. The Book of Common Prayer, presented with the silver, is of the date 1752. It was printed at Cambridge, England, by Joseph Bentham, and bears on its covers in gilt, the full Coat of Arms of Great Britain. Upon the back in monogram

## Short Historical Sketch of Christ Church Parish (1911)

are the letters "G. R. E." surmounted by a crown." (The Bible is now in Raleigh and the Prayer Book misplaced or lost.)

In 1861 the Rector, Rev. A. A. Watson, afterwards Bishop of East Carolina, carried this Communion Service to Wilmington for safe keeping. Afterwards it was removed to Fayetteville, and placed in the care of Rev. Dr. Huske - the grandfather of our present Rector, Rev. B. F. Huske. There it remained until the close of the war, when it was returned to Christ Church, New Bern. It is told that when a search was made in Fayetteville for valuables, this box of silver plate was in a closet among old rubbish, and was overlooked.

### RECTORS

#### **Rev. Solomon Halling**

In 1790 Rev. Solomon Halling was Rector of Christ Church. The earliest conventions of the Church were held in Tarborough, owing largely to his earnest efforts, in the years 1790-1794. At the Convention held in Tarborough, 1794, Rev. Charles Pettigrew was selected as the first Bishop of North Carolina. The state of his health seemed absolutely to forbid his acceptance, but the Church was in such a depressed state, the ministers, so few and scattered, his acceptance was deemed a duty, and he yielded. The quarantine against Philadelphia, on account of yellow fever, cut off all communication during certain seasons of the year. This prevented him from meeting the General Convention for several years. In the latter years of his life his health was too feeble for the exertion of such a fatiguing journey. So he was never consecrated. He died at his home in Tyrrell County, April 8th, 1807.

#### **Rev. J. C. Clay**

Rev. J. C. Clay was Rector one year, 1817-1818.

#### **Rev. Dr. Mason**

Rev. Dr. Mason was Rector of Christ Church from 1818 until 1827. After leaving here he went to Raleigh, and was Rector of Christ Church, Raleigh, until his death. It is told of him that he was very absent-minded - and once in planting peas in his garden, he put the peas in his pocket and his spectacles in the ground.

#### **Rev. J. R. Goodman**

Rev. J. R. Goodman was Rector from 1828 to 1835.

#### **Rev. John Burke**

Rev. John Burke from 1835 to 1837.

#### **Rev. Cameron F. McRae**

Following Mr. Burke came Rev. Cameron F. McRae, 1838 to 1841. He was a man of great benevolence, and did not confine himself to his own Parish. As an evidence of this, he, with two ladies, not of his Parish, but devoted members of another Church, organized the Benevolent Society, which has continued its work among the poor and needy up to the present time.

## Short Historical Sketch of Christ Church Parish (1911)

### Rev. Fordyce M. Hubbard

Rev. Fordyce M. Hubbard was a lawyer before entering the ministry. He came from New England, and was Rector of Christ Church from 1841 to 1847. He taught Latin in the New Bern Academy. He went from New Bern to Chapel Hill, and was Professor in the University up to the time of his death. He was the first minister to lay aside the black gown, and preach in the surplice. It had always been the custom to change the surplice for an academic gown just before the sermon. He also removed the Communion table, substituting the altar, and made other changes in the chancel.

### Rev. William N. Hawks

Rev. William N. Hawks, had charge of "Griffin School," a school for poor orphan girls, until 1847, when he gave it up to become Rector of Christ Church. Mr. Hawks was a man greatly beloved by his people, of a bright and cheerful temperament, and ever ready, with words of comfort and encouragement. He was born in New Bern, and all of his life, except the last few years, were spent in his native town. He died in Columbus, Ga.

### Rev. Henry Green

Rev. Henry Green succeeded Mr. Hawks, and was Rector of Christ Church from 1854 to 1857. He was an eminently pious man, but not physically strong. He resigned, on account of his health, went to Morganton, and then to Raleigh, where he died about 1860. It was during his administration that the "ragged school" was inaugurated and taught by the young ladies of his Parish, which under Rev. A. A. Watson, became the Parish school.

### Rev. Thomas Haughton

Rev. Thomas Haughton succeeded Mr. Green. He was Rector but one year - 1857 to 1858. He went to Salisbury, N. C., from New Bern.

### Rev. Alfred Augustin Watson

Rev. Alfred Augustin Watson, Rector of Christ Church 1859 to 1861, was born in New York City in 1818, of Presbyterian parents, and was brought up in that faith. When quite a youth, he was graduated from the University of the City of New York. Afterwards he studied law in the office of Chancellor Kent, and was admitted to the bar in 1841. He came South, to Eastern Carolina, to be tutor in the family of the late Josiah Collins. Mr. Collins was a devoted Churchman, and, it was while a member of his household, that Mr. Watson was brought under the influence of the Church. He was baptized and confirmed, and after special preparation at the General Seminary, he was ordained Deacon by Bishop Ives, Nov. 3, 1844. On May 25th of the following year, he was ordained Priest, by the same Bishop, in St. John's Church, Fayetteville. His first Parish was Plymouth, with missionary work in adjacent counties. He served this Parish fourteen years, and in 1858 was removed to Christ Church, New Bern, by the Bishop. In this new field he found more scope for his great energy and zeal. He was particularly interested in Parish schools. The late Rev. T. M. N. George, writes in his beautiful sermon, a tribute to the memory of our once Rector and honored and beloved Bishop: "Mr. Watson remained in charge of Christ Church, New Bern, until the war, when, with a number of young men from his congregation, and for their sakes, he entered the Confederate Army, as Chaplain of the Second Regiment of North Carolina troops. His heroic work, on the battlefield and in the hospitals, is a familiar story to the men of regiment. Officers and

## Short Historical Sketch of Christ Church Parish (1911)

soldiers all have borne grateful and admiring testimony to his unwearied exertions for the welfare, both spiritual and temporal, of his men. Side by side with them, he shared their privations, their hardships, their marches. With an exalted sense of duty, he ventured himself far to the front, on the field of battle, and was often seen going, from soldier to soldier, as they lay wounded and dying, while the cloud of battle and the rain of bullets still fell. He knew no such word as fear. While men were fighting for their country, he was fighting, with equal bravery, as a good soldier of Christ. It was a deserved and fitting tribute, that when his body was borne to the burial, the soldiers of his regiment should have sent, as they did, a wreath of roses, red and white, to lay on his grave. It was a tribute of soldier to soldier." In 1863 Doctor Watson was called, as assistant Rector to St. James', Wilmington. The following year he, was made Rector, and remained there until 1883. At the Primary Council of the new Diocese, held in New Bern, Dec. 13, 1883, Dr. Watson was unanimously elected Bishop. He was consecrated at St. James', Wilmington, April 17, 1884. It was not until he had reached the age of eighty-three, and felt he was growing too weak to continue his work alone, that he consented, to the election of a Coadjutor. There was a special Council of East Carolina, that met in St. Stephen's Church, Goldsboro, October, 1903, by order of the Bishop, to elect a Bishop Coadjutor - but there was no election. At the annual Council, in May, 1904, St. James' Church, Wilmington, N. C., Dr. Strange, of Richmond, Va., was elected Bishop Coadjutor. Bishop Watson had a stroke of paralysis in January, 1903, but kept in active service until a few months before he had his summons from on high. The sixty-one years of his ministry were spent in the Eastern part of North Carolina, as Deacon, Priest and Bishop. "Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

### Rev. William B. Wetmore

In the latter part of September, 1861, the Rev. William B. Wetmore took charge of the Parish as assistant minister in the absence of the Rector, Dr. A. A. Watson, and remained in charge until the fall of New Bern, March 15, 1862.

### Rev. Edward M. Forbes

The first Rector after the war was Rev. Edward M. Forbes, from January 1st, 1866, to January 1st, 1877. He was a native of New Bern, and was never married. He was a student and a great theologian, and was Senior Presbyter of the Diocese. He was Rector of Christ Church, Elizabeth City, in 1849, when the first Convocation of the Diocese was organized, and was its first presiding officer. He was the author of an oral catechism, which was found, not only useful on the plantations before the war, but afterwards, among the whites. In 1871 Christ Church was burned. When the steeple fell, the bell tolled, as it fell and was buried in its burning tomb. A little child about three years old looking on, said to her mother, "Mama I've dot free cents, and I'm going to dive it to you to buy some nails to build a new church." This three cents was the first donation towards a new church, for the mother gave it to the Rector, with the request that it should be used as the little one desired. The walls of our present Church are the same, but the interior is very different. The choir loft was at the rear of the Church, with a gallery on each side, one for white and one for colored. There were enough communicants among the latter to fill the chancel rail - which enclosed the whole chancel. There were high, old fashioned pews, with doors and only two aisles. The Church was rebuilt in 1873, and the first service was held in the Church, April 12, 1873, on Easter Eve. Until the rebuilding of the Church, the services and the Sunday School were held in Memorial Chapel, on George street, formerly the "Palace Stable," now a private residence. The Relief Society was organized by Mr. Forbes in 1868, and in his will



## Short Historical Sketch of Christ Church Parish (1911)

he left to the trustees of East Carolina, \$25.00 to be paid annually to the president of the Relief Society of Christ Church, for the support of a hospital, or to be distributed among the poor of Christ Church Parish. He also left to the Relief Society \$5.00 annually towards a dinner for the poor on Thanksgiving, and \$5.00, annually, for the poor on Christmas or Holy Innocents.' The last sixteen years of Mr. Forbes' life was spent at Beaufort, as Rector of St. Paul's Church. He entered into his rest September 25, 1893, and was buried in his native town, New Bern, September 26, at the age of eighty-three. "Come ye blessed of my Father inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

### Rev. Charles S. Hale

Rev. Charles S. Hale, Rector of Christ Church 1877 to 1879. He was born in New England, but came to New Bern from Buffalo, N. Y. It was he who organized the Altar Guild, which has continued its work, of caring for God's house, ever since. The first white altar hangings were a memorial to his wife, who died in Asheville, the summer before he resigned his charge.

### Rev. Van Winder Shields

Rev. Van Winder Shields was Rector of Christ Church from 1880 to 1889. While he was here the Church steeple was built, and the bell placed in it. Both were gifts to the Church. The porch was erected in 1884, a bequest of another devoted member of Christ Church. The resignation of Mr. Shields was received by his congregation with much regret and sorrow. By his sympathy and unselfishness, in time of sickness and trouble, he had won the love and admiration of his people. Anyone in "sorrow, need, sickness or any other adversity" found in him a true friend. He prepared the way for his successor, by sowing good seed, which, later, brought forth abundant fruit. He went to Jacksonville, Fla., from New Bern, as Rector of St. John's Church, and is still there. In December, 1889, the Rectory, on George street, was sold, and later the new Rectory was built, on Middle street.

### Rev. Thomas Mordint Nelson George

Rev. Thomas Mordint Nelson George was Rector of Christ Church sixteen years, 1889 to 1905. He resigned on account of his health, and accepted a call to St. James', Marietta, Ga. He was born in Marietta, March 25, 1858, and was ordained in St. James' Church, when a young man. His father was a clergyman, and he had two brothers in the ministry. Mr. George was greatly beloved by all, high, low, rich and poor, and not only by his own Church people, but those of other creeds. He was a man of a quiet, retiring disposition, but with marked personality. It was while he was Rector of Christ Church, the Chapel on George street was sold by the Relief Society. The project of turning it into a hospital, was abandoned, and it was sold for \$1,900. One thousand of this was for a Parish House, \$400.00 for a Mission on Pollock street, \$500.00 to a City Hospital, should one be opened. The Parish House on Middle street was commenced, but not completed, until later. The new Chapel on Pollock street was built, a memorial Chapel, and the gift of one of his parishioners. There were regular weekly services, on Thursday nights, at "All Saints' Chapel." Sunday School, Sunday mornings, and back of the Chapel, in the school house, a day school for the poor children, taught by the late Mrs. Harrison, a "Griffin Girl," and a woman of sterling worth. Her place has never been filled. The Girls Friendly Society was organized by Mr. George, May 1st, 1904. He was deeply interested in the work. There were also changes in Christ Church. The organ was removed from the gallery to the side of the chancel. The seats for the choir, stalls and desk for the chancel, new Bishop's chair and Priests chair for the

## Short Historical Sketch of Christ Church Parish (1911)

sanctuary, also the Litany desk of brass, the ewer for the font, cross, vases and candelabra for the altar, new service books for the use of the minister, the altar rail of brass and walnut, the brass pulpit, processional cross, and pulpit light. All the articles are of beautiful and churchly design, and all gifts to the Church. Like the re-re-dos and other appointments of the Church, these are memorials to saints and loved ones now in Paradise. Our Church might well be called Christ Church Memorial, for almost everything in it has been given to the memory of some loved one, or ones, "gone before." The Church was put in thorough repair, the lot bought and the Rectory built., the entire property costing about \$5,800. Mr. George was taken ill while attending the General Convention in Boston, and was seriously ill, in a hospital, for eight weeks. It was during his absence, the vested choir was organized, and all arrangements made to surprise him on his return home. But he was too ill to attend the service. Mr. George was candidate for the high office of Bishop at the time Bishop Strange was elected. It was he who nominated Bishop Strange. They were devoted friends. Mr. George died in Marietta, Ga., February, 1908. A memorial service was held during the Wilmington Convocation at New Bern, and many still remember the beautiful remarks, tribute to his memory, made by Rev. J. H. Brown, Rector of Christ Church at that time. "Mark the perfect and behold the upright man, for the end of that man is peace."

### Rev. L. G. H. Williams

Rev. L. G. H. Williams was Rector of Christ Church from 1905 to 1907. While here, by his energy and determination, the Parish House was completed. It was used for the first time for the Sunday School Christmas tree. The windows were not finished, but were made air tight by the use of cloth instead of glass. Mr. Williams was a great worker among the poor, not confining himself to the poor of his own Parish. It was enough for him that they were poor and needed help.

### Rev. John H. Brown

The next Rector of Christ Church was Rev. John H. Brown. He too only stayed a little over two years, from March, 1908 to July 1910. It has been such a short time since he was with us, his fine sermons and beautiful manner of conducting the service, must be fresh in the minds of many of us. A committee, appointed by the Diocese of North Carolina, and the District of Asheville, met in Charlotte, on the 6th of August, 1909, with reference to a Church paper. At this conference, it was unanimously decided, to merge the Mission Herald and the Messenger of Hope into one paper, and call it the "Carolina Churchman." Mr. Brown was assistant editor, and a most able one. He was trustee of the University of the South, and was Chairman and Field Secretary of the Sunday School Commission of East Carolina. He went from Christ Church, New Bern, to Christ Church, Pensacola, Fla.

### Rev. B. F. Huske

It was only a few months before the vacancy, left by Mr. Brown, was filled by our present Rector, Rev. B. F. Huske, who came to us from Greenville, N. C., September, 1910. We all know the good work he is doing in the Parish - at Christ Church and All Saints' Chapel. The Thursday night services, and the Sunday School have been reorganized, with an afternoon service on the 3rd Sunday in each month. He has organized a Woman's Auxiliary and a Junior Auxiliary among the members of All Saints' Chapel, with the help of a few members of Christ Church; also a Sewing and Cooking School. Already our Rector, by his cordial manner and ready sympathy, has endeared himself to his people.

### **Short Historical Sketch of Christ Church Parish (1911)**

It is impossible to study the history of our great Colonial Parish without a feeling of love, reverence and pride. We hope that this feeling will grow, year by year, so deeply down into the heart of our Rector, that he can call no other place home, and that his life's work must be in Christ Church Parish, carrying on the noble work begun and continued, by God's servants in Christ now reaping their reward in their Heavenly home, or in other fields of usefulness here on earth.

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Owen G. Dunn, Printer  
New Bern, N. C. - 1911  
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Brent R. Brian  
Martha M. Brian  
[BrianMitchellGenealogy@gmail.com](mailto:BrianMitchellGenealogy@gmail.com)