

A Memorial to William Rainey Holt by Archibald Henderson, Parish Histiographer, 1925

The new Chapel of the Cross is a memorial, dedicated by William Allen Erwin, to his maternal grandfather, Dr. William Rainey Holt. Dr. Holt (October 30, 1798 - October 3, 1868), after a long life of seventy years, left behind him the memory of a distinguished and high-minded character. As an agriculturist, he was a leader, succeeding Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin, the first president of the North Carolina Agricultural Society, and holding that office until his death. In his own plantation, he furnished a striking object in practical farming of the best type. North Carolina, then a backward state, owes much to the intelligent and vigorous propaganda in behalf of efficient farming conducted for many years by Dr. Holt. In active cooperation with Governor Morehead, Dr. Holt did much to lay broad and deep the industrial and economic foundations of North Carolina.

It is eminently fitting that this church should be founded here as a memorial to Dr. Holt, who was graduated from the University of North Carolina in the class of 1817. Throughout his life, Dr. Holt was a deep student of literature in the broadest sense, a cultured scholar, and the owner of an extensive library, to which he was constantly adding. It is an interesting circumstance that William Mercer Green and William Rainey Holt, graduates of the University of North Carolina of the classes of 1818 and 1817 respectively, were present at the Church Convention in Salisbury, when the first Bishop of North Carolina was chosen. It was through the efforts of Green, supported by Holt, that the happy selection of the Rev. Mr. Ravenscroft as Bishop was made by the Convention.

Dr. Holt was a devout Churchman, a constant attendant upon church services. One of his great pleasures was to sing in the choir with his loving and accomplished daughter, Julia. Dr. Holt was a true lover of his kind. As a physician, he performed humanitarian service of a high order. As a citizen, he contributed substantially to the upbuilding of community and commonwealth. As a man, he lived a noble life of consecrated Christian service.

In response to my request for the underlying reasons for erecting this memorial, Mr. Erwin stated that he wished to build a noble church foundation at the University, the strategic center of Church work in the state, for the prime purpose of affording the youth of North Carolina:

"better opportunity to hear the word of God 'truly preached,' and the beautiful services of our church enjoyed with the hope that these services would be so charmingly rendered and the church's doctrines so well and faithfully preached by strong and sane ministers, as to establish in the minds and hearts of many worshipping in this church the true faith 'once delivered to the saints'."