

The Story of the Parish Buildings

This is a paper read by Mrs. Stoudemire at a meeting of the Chapel of the Cross Episcopal Churchwomen in February 1981. Mrs. Stoudemire was Project Officer of the 1980-81 preservation work done on the old Chapel. Information in the article was gathered from deeds, vestry records and minutes. Mrs. Stoudemire died in July 2000.

When I was elected Junior Warden of the Chapel of the Cross in 1978 I was handed a huge bunch of keys and the responsibility of caring for the Parish's buildings and grounds -- buildings and grounds that had been cared for and nurtured for one hundred thirty two years. For sometime before my election, the Parish Planning Committee, under the guidance of Robert Sullivan, had been working on the physical needs of the Parish buildings. Wesley Egan, my predecessor, had applied for a matching grant from the North Carolina Department of Archives and History. In August of 1978 the grant which was to fund an architectural and engineering survey of the old Chapel arrived. It was for ten thousand dollars and we could begin. An architect was engaged to supervise the project and to coordinate the work of the engineers who had begun the project under Colonel Egan. The Department of Archives and History assigned us preservation specialists whose free services were invaluable.

The engineers, in their exploring, had removed some boards under the balcony to inspect, what, I never knew. I was upset that they did not put the boards back in place. Those bats that our "ECW News Letter" editor referred to in a recent edition moved in and took over, not only the holes left under the balcony but the entire Chapel. They were flying everywhere. Neither our beloved sexton William McCauley, nor his assistant, David White, would even go into the building. The exterminating company men said that they did not deal in bats. Someone suggested Shot. I bought the can of Shot, climbed a ladder and sprayed. I was almost asphyxiated myself, but the mission was accomplished. The bats moved out.

Before we talk more about the present I would like to tell you a few things about some of the people and what they did to give us this fine heritage -- the Chapel of the Cross.

Where the Carolina Inn stands today there was a pre-Revolutionary Anglican Chapel of Ease. This Chapel gave Chapel Hill its name. Some of you know that the Reverend William Mercer Green who came to Chapel Hill to teach at the University decided that there should be an Episcopal Church in Chapel Hill. Later this same Reverend Mr. Green was a co-founder of the University of the South at Sewanee and Bishop of Mississippi. One hundred thirty two years ago this past October (1848) Mr. Green's dream came true when the Chapel was consecrated. Work had begun in 1843. The cost was estimated to be two thousand four hundred dollars. Mr. Green worked and begged to build this Church. He set up kilns on his farm to make the bricks that are still in the walls today. His belief that "Thou shall keep holy the Sabbath" meant just that --no work. The fires in the kilns went out, bricks were damaged and work was delayed. In 1845 the twelve hundred dollars that had been pledged for building was exhausted and there were no more funds. Weeds grew against the walls and pigeons built in the rafters. Thanks to our Associate Rector Bob Duncan, and some University students, the descendants of those pigeons were run away from the tower of the big Church in 1979. More funds trickled in -- much of this money came from people throughout the Diocese who felt that there must be a church for students in Chapel Hill. Finally the Church was completed and Bishop Ives who later converted to Roman

Catholicism, consecrated the church. Two days later the deed for the land was signed and Ann S. Hillard had conveyed to the Bishop and two Trustees of the Diocese the two-thirds of an acre of land where the Chapel sits for one hundred twenty-five dollars. The next year there were twenty-two communicants. Ten years later the number of communicants had increased to fifty-nine. There was always the problem of scant funds and with that the problem of securing a rector. Many were called but few came. Parishioners gave all that they could, as did the Diocese and friends.

One most loyal, generous and devout parishioner was Mary Ruffin Smith who lived in a large white house that still stands on Smith Level Road. In describing the hard times that churches of the Village were having in 1884, Cornelia Phillips Spencer wrote, "Only the Malletts and Mary Ruffin Smith were at the Episcopal Church". Miss Smith died the next year at age seventy-one. Her slaves sat in the balcony and were baptized and confirmed here. If you have not read Pauli Murrays' "Proud Shoes", do so. Pauli Murray, the first black woman ordained Priest and the first woman to celebrate the Holy Eucharist in this Parish, is a descendant of one of those slaves who came to church every Sunday with Mary Ruffin Smith. When the Reverend Doctor Murray preached in the Chapel that Sunday afternoon in 1977 she noted that her Grandmother, who was a slave, had been baptized in the Chapel and had sat in the balcony. Whenever there was a need, Miss Smith gave. A new roof was needed in 1884. Miss Smith gave one hundred dollars which paid for the slate roof, the same roof that is there today. She gave a new organ and bought the lot across the street from the Church when money was needed and no buyers could be found. This is the same lot occupied today by the new parish house of the Lutheran Church and the ATO Fraternity house. When Miss Smith died she willed the lot to the Chapel of the Cross. In 1891 the Vestry sold the lot for two hundred and fifty dollars. It had been bought from the Swain estate for three hundred dollars. I wonder what the value is today?

According to the terms of Miss Smith's will, the larger part of her land holdings in Orange County was willed to The Diocese of North Carolina and the larger part of her acreage in Chatham County was left to the University. The Diocese bought the Eagle Lectern for one hundred dollars and gave it to the Parish as a memorial to Miss Smith. The University used some of its legacy to build a power plant making electricity possible on the campus and in the town for the first time. Our Chapel was wired for electricity in 1917.

September of that same year the ladies of Saint Hilda's Guild wanted to "tint" the walls of the Church and needed funds. They asked the Vestry for permission to hold a bridge party in the Parish House. The Vestry voted "yes" only to have Bishop Cheshire overrule that decision two months later. The ladies withdrew their request.

Let's return to 1890. The Reverend E.M. Gushee of Cambridge, Massachusetts, became rector. He served only one month, but returned the next year for another month. Many changes were made in the Church at Mr. Gushee's own expense and with money he had "presumably raised in the North." He arranged to have three aisles in the nave of the Church where there had been only two before. The stoves were placed at the end of the Church instead of on the sides. The chancel arch was cut incorporating the rector's study on the back into the Church, creating the present recessed altar space. Mr. Gushee had the little Vestry room built on the right of the Church at the back, using the original doors and decorative door frames. The walls of the Church and the Vestry room were painted a deep Indian red. In the preservation work done last year we found the Indian red of the Vestry room. Some of experts jokingly told me that they were recommending that the walls be painted with the red color.

In 1913 the Vestry had a phone installed in the Parish House, paid the organist fifty dollars a year, and began plans for a new Rectory and Parish House. The Parish House was to cost between five and six thousand dollars and was to be named for two devoted parishioners, University President Kemp Plummer Battle and his wife Pattie. Soon after the Parish House was completed, Dr. Battle died. His sons, sons-in-law and a grandson paid the remaining indebtedness.

The Vestry authorized the Junior Warden to have a platform with seats arranged on it in the front of the Church for the Choir. This was April 2, 1916. On Sunday, April 9, 1916 the Choir appeared in vestments for the first time. Irene Rains [who died in June 2000] would tell you that some of those same vestments are upstairs in the Choir room today. A couple of years later the Vestry proclaimed that they had spent a total of thirteen thousand two hundred dollars on the entire Parish property in the last ten years. In 1920 students asked permission of the Vestry to have a dance in the Parish House. There is no record of the verdict.

Next, the Parish spurred on by Bishop Cheshire began planning for a new church. In May of 1921 the Diocesan Convention met in Durham. The Bishop thought it would be wise to have the one hundred or so delegates visit the Chapel of the Cross and learn for themselves how desperately a new church and parish house were needed. The Vestry authorized Sally Manning Venable, wife of the University President, to spend between twenty-five and thirty dollars to serve lunch to the hundred or more delegates. She did, and was thanked by the Vestry. This is the same lady whose memory has recently been honored by her daughter, Louise Venable Coker, with her gift of our magnificent Kleuker organ for the large Church.

In 1922 Mr. William Erwin of Durham told the Vestry that he would buy the lot on the west side of the Chapel from Mary J. Barbee for a new church building. This is the area of our present driveway and parking lot. A couple of months later Mr. Erwin presented the Vestry a gift of fifty thousand dollars which was to be matched by the Parish for a new church and a parish house addition. Mr. Erwin became upset when he learned that the Vestry had changed the plans to build on the Barbee lot. Instead the church would be built on the sixty-five feet of land which they had recently purchased from the University for three thousand four hundred eighty-six dollars. Mr. Erwin insisted that this recent purchase be considered his gift as he wanted to give the land for the church. The University's deed stipulates that any changes or additions to any of the Parish buildings must be approved by the University. When the Yates wing was planned, the University vetoed the proposed flat roof. Horace Peasley, the University's architect from Washington, solved the problem with the design of the present entrance and roof.

The new church and addition to the Parish House was to cost one hundred nine thousand eighty-eight dollars and forty cents. The cloister to connect the old and new churches was to cost an extra amount. William Meade Prince, who had pumped the organ as a boy and who later wrote "The Southern Part of Heaven," gave five hundred dollars as a memorial to his grandfather, the Reverend William Meade, a former rector of the Parish, for completion of the cloister.

This year we have completed another building stage in our Parish's life.

The actual preservation work on the old Chapel began on a cold day in February in 1980, and was more or less completed six months later. The slate roof which had been put on in 1884 was repaired, some of the handmade brick was replaced, some repointing was done, and new mortar applied, insulation was put in the attic, gutters were repaired and the windows were caulked. In the interior the plaster was patched, the walls were painted and all woodwork and floors were refinished. Nothing was changed except the color of the exterior walls. The Preservation experts from the Department of Archives and History scraped until they found the original colors. The

original color of the wash is on the exterior walls and the original color of paint is on the windows and trim. This color turned out to be as shocking to me when it was applied as it was to some of you. However, the wash (the formula is like white wash) was necessary to protect the brick and mortar from the elements. Until 1925 this wash was applied now and then. The last coat had been pink, a color chosen to match the beautiful pink granite of the new Church. Unfortunately, after that ivy was allowed once more to cover the walls. Perhaps you have noticed that Old East, Old West and South Building on the University have had this protective wash applied.

Have you wondered about the history of the beautiful church adornments? There is an altar candlestick given in thanksgiving for a marriage, a processional cross given in thanksgiving for the safe return from war of a family's soldier, and on it goes. The Diocese gave the Eagle Lectern in memory of Mary Ruffin Smith. Mr. E.L. Yelverton, a student here in 1908 who later served in the foreign service, brought the brass alms basin to us from Europe. In Church records there is a letter from Mr. Yelverton written in 1919. He remarked on how beautiful the Chapel looked. He mentioned the finial over the Vestry room door and said that he was told that it had been found in the balcony. Have you ever really looked at the white superfrontal and pulpit fall often used in the Chapel? The beautiful embroidery was done by Mrs. Palmer Cobb who set up frames in her attic for the project. She presented this superfrontal with matching Bible markers and pulpit fall to the Parish in 1917.

These are only a few of our treasures. Most of our treasures have been and still are people -- people that have served and people that continue to serve this Parish for the Glory of God. We have just completed another building stage in our life. There are no longer twenty-two communicants. There are over one thousand.