

CHRIST CHURCH ✠ WASHINGTON PARISH

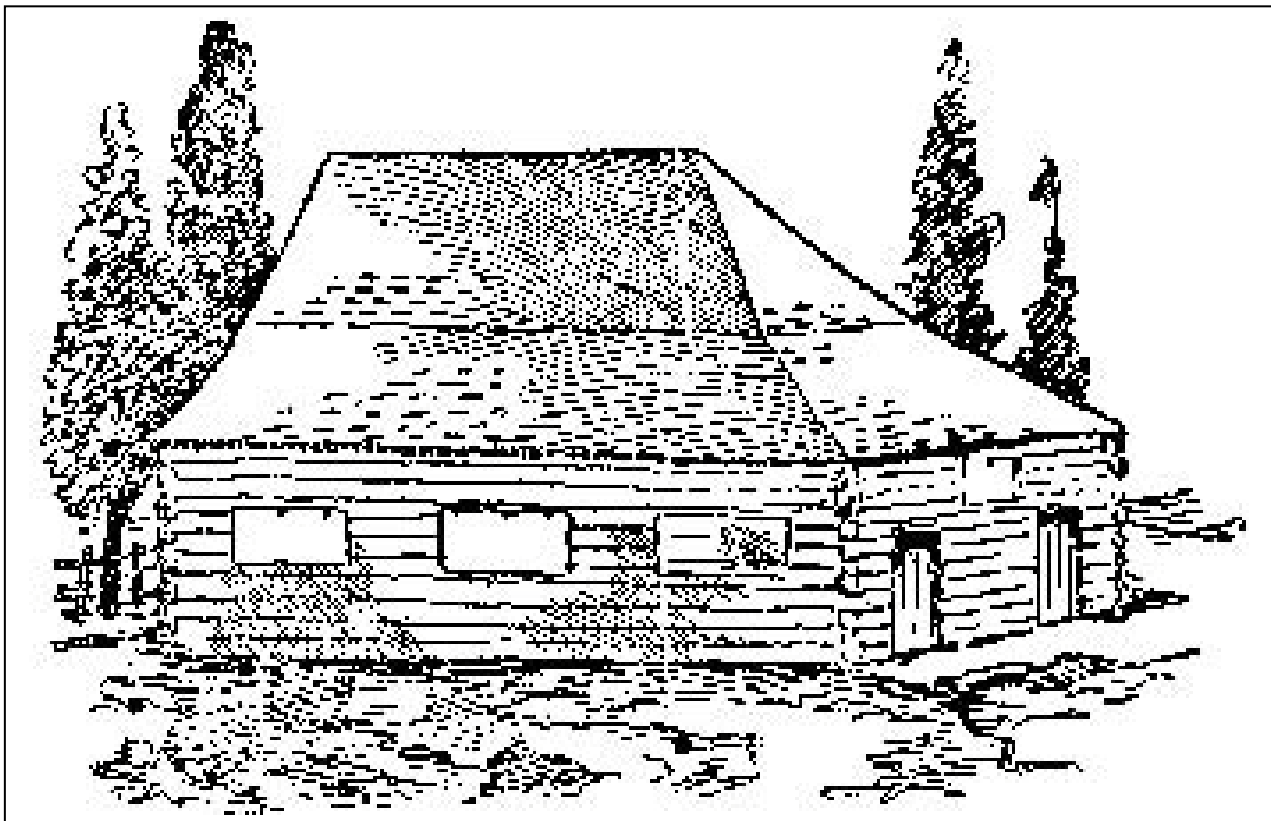


Christ Episcopal Church is almost as old as the city of Washington, nearly as old as the nation itself. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, this charming, tidy building, later remodeled to look like an English country church in Gothic Revival style, has crowned a little knoll on Capitol Hill, the bell tower soaring above the neighborhood's

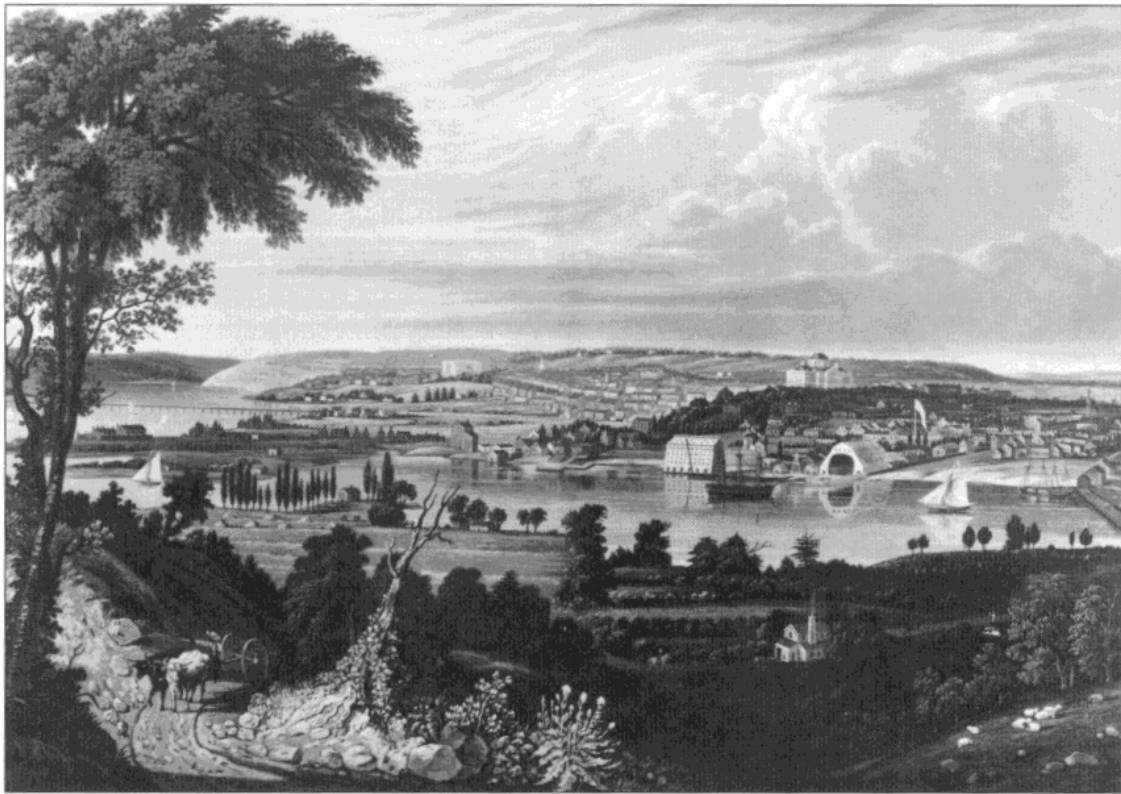
Federal and Victorian row houses. In 1993, the Society of Architectural Historians, in its book *Buildings of the District of Columbia*, cited the 1807 church unequivocally as "the earliest structure in the city built to serve an ecclesiastical purpose."

The founding of the church parish dates back even earlier, to 1794. It was created by an act of the Maryland legislature. In 1994, Christ Church, Washington Parish, celebrated its bicentennial as the "mother parish" of all Episcopal parishes in the original Federal city. The Interior Department put the building on its National Register of Historic Places in 1969.

Thomas John Claggett, the first Episcopal bishop to be ordained on American soil, consecrated Christ Church in 1809, two years after its completion. Of it he wrote: "It is not large, but sufficiently elegant, and is the first building that hath been erected by the Protestant Episcopalians, for public worship, at the seat of government."



Drawing by E.P. Cranach



City of Washington from Beyond the Navy Yard. William James Bennett. Colored aquatint. 1834

Famous men attended services at Christ Church and events that shook a nation took place nearby. But in all eras across the centuries, ordinary citizens carried on its mission of worship and witness on Capitol Hill. And always, the little church, its history, its parishioners and even its appearance have reflected changes in the greater society.

Thomas Jefferson came to the log tobacco barn that was Christ Church's first house of prayer; it was located on New Jersey Avenue near D Street Southeast, not far from what is now the Capitol South metro station. For several years, Jefferson contributed \$50 annually to the church coffers.

In 1806, when the cornerstone was laid for the church's second and only formal structure at 620 G Street Southeast, and the next year, when it was finished, the surrounding lands were meadows, woods and fields of hops and corn dotted with farmhouses. The Capitol building was slowly rising a mile to the northwest. The population of the city was only 14,000.



For many years, the celebrated architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe was believed to have been the designer of Christ Church. In fact, the still-standing original central section was designed by Robert Alexander, a vestry member, a builder, Latrobe's friend and chief contractor for the Washington Navy Yard.

In 1814, Christ Church's members saw invading British troops occupying the U.S. Marine commandant's superb brick mansion less than two blocks east at Eighth and G Streets. More troops were bivouacked at its adjoining barracks.

The British set fire to both the Capitol and the White House. Meanwhile the Navy Yard to the south of Christ Church was going up in flames, put to the torch by its fleeing commandant, Thomas Tingey, so that it would not fall into enemy hands. Captain Tingey was a devoted and dynamic church vestryman for decades. The British spared Christ Church, the only other prominent public structure in the immediate vicinity.

John Quincy Adams was a Congregationalist, not an Episcopalian, but decided while Secretary of State to go to Christ Church anyway. The reason, he wrote in his diary in 1819, was that its rector, Andrew McCormick, was the only preacher in town worth hearing. "I have at last given the preference to Mr. McCormick, of the Episcopal Church," Adams noted in the entry for October 24, "and spoke to him last week for a pew." McCormick had served earlier as Chaplain of the U.S. Senate and had officiated at the wedding of Lydia, Benjamin Latrobe's daughter.

John Philip Sousa, America's "March King" composer and great Marine band-master, was born in 1854 three doors east of the church on G Street. He became a member following his mother, a faithful parishioner for 50 years. Sousa and many family members are buried in Congressional Cemetery, the church's graveyard.



Christ Church's tower was a lookout post for Union soldiers during the Civil War. From it they watched Confederate armies maneuvering across the Potomac River. At various times during the conflict, the threat to Washington of yet another invasion seemed imminent.

Joshua Morsell, rector during all but the final months of the war, preached fiery anti-slavery sermons; his parishioners were heavily pro-Union in a city that had its share of Confederate sympathizers. Mark Olds, Morsell's successor, eschewed all politics, North and South. His letter of acceptance as Christ Church's rector was read at a vestry meeting on April 13, 1865.

The following night, in the midst of rejoicing over the end of the war, John Wilkes Booth shot and fatally wounded Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theater. Joy turned to grief. By order of the vestry, Christ Church was draped in swags of black "for the space of Thirty days in Commemoration of President Lincoln the magistrate of the nation." On April 20, 1865, the parishioners could hear the guns fired at the Navy Yard every half hour from sunrise until the funeral service for Lincoln was over.

One of those parishioners was David Herold, whom some thought to be a slow-witted boy. He was accused of helping the assassin Booth to make his escape on horseback from Washington into the countryside. Another member of Christ Church's congregation, Dr. Samuel McKim, testified in Herold's defense at the trial that he might not have understood fully what he had done. But all the plotters were found guilty. David Herold, aged 23, was the youngest.

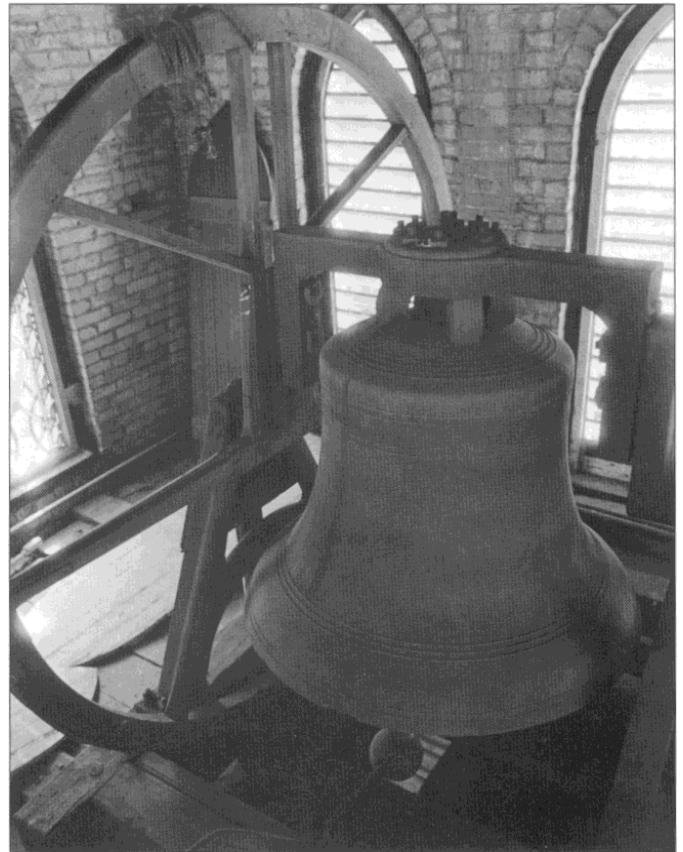
On July 7, 1865, the Reverend Olds stood on the scaffold with Herold as he and three other conspirators were hanged. The execution took place at 1:30 PM.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Olds comforted Herold's mother at home on Capitol Hill. The Olds' daughter-in-law recounted later in her memoirs that the rector's wife had stopped all the clocks in the house so that the

mother would not know the moment of her son's death. David Herold is buried, along with the other Lincoln conspirators except Mary Surratt and John Wilkes Booth, in Congressional Cemetery. Christ Church has owned the cemetery, also listed in the National Register of Historic Places, since 1812. It is located at 18th and E streets Southeast.



Bandmaster John Philip Sousa (1854-1932) in a 1930 photograph



Original bell believed to have hung in Christ Church belfry since 1849 (By Andrea Harles)

Congressional Cemetery is a microcosm of Washington history. It was once the semiofficial burial ground for Congress and was called the "American Westminster Abbey." "The gloomiest monuments in an otherwise attractive and historically fascinating graveyard are a clutch of dark sandstone cenotaphs designed by Latrobe. Being interred beneath them, a 19th century Senator from Massachusetts said, "would add a new terror to death."

Congressional has the remains of 19 U.S. Senators and 68 members of the House of Representatives, war heroes, Cabinet officers, a Vice President of the United States, a Supreme Court justice, three mayors of Washington, the great Civil War photographer Matthew Brady, virtually every Native American who came to negotiate treaties in the capital in the 19th century and a little girl with sausage curls who was the first automobile victim in the District of Columbia in the 20th. More than half of the 70,000 people buried there are children. The reason is the appallingly high infant mortality rate of the 19th century.

Side by side are Confederate and Union soldiers, as well as those who died in the Knickerbocker Theater disaster and the women killed by an explosion at the Navy Yard. J. Edgar Hoover, the dreaded chief of

the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was buried in 1972. Hoover's longtime companion, Clyde Tolson, died three years later and lies a dozen graves away.



Tombstone of Myra Summers (1893-1910), Congressional Cemetery, Washington, D.C. owned by Christ Church since 1812 (By Abby Johnson)

Christ Church's vestry minutes and other contemporary documents, faithfully kept throughout most of two centuries, evoke lesser known persons and events as well as architectural details. Through the archives, we know that the original building at 620 G Street Southeast was a plain box structure made of brick. It was two stories tall, measured 45 by 36 feet and was entered through two doors at the front leading to two aisles. It had clear windows at the sides and a peaked roof. The interior went from the back wall of today's sanctuary to about the third row of pews from the front. A thrust platform at the front contained a pulpit and "holy table" from which the minister read the service and gave Communion.

A wood-burning stove in back heated the structure. Above this were balconies around the rear and sides, occupied in later years by the choir, slaves and Marines -- who were regularly marched to church on Sundays from their barracks only a block and a half away. The central cove ceiling, with its wide, shallow vault, was plastered and "plainly ornamented" by William Thackara, Latrobe's favorite plasterer at the Capitol.

Vestry minutes from 1824 show that the rector, Ethan Allen, was given leave to build a dwelling on the site of the present rectory. It cost \$1,500; the vestry reimbursed him. His salary was raised to \$750 per annum. Five years later Allen resigned: the rector and his family could not live on his pittance.

In 1842 all boys were banned from the balcony unless their parents took responsibility for their conduct, which had become fractious. The same problem cropped up in later years.



Boys Choir of Christ Church ca. 1900

The vestry minutes also record scrupulously the various building expansions and remodelings that have changed the appearance of Christ Church. In 1848, Rector William Hodges suggested "the expediency of having a bell to assemble the congregation." The cost was \$456.84.

This decision led to the most important alteration ever of the church's exterior. It was the erection in 1848-49 of a square, four-story bell tower with four mini-steeple on top at each corner, tipped with fleurs-de-lis. Crenellated roof edges and pointed- arch, stained-glass windows around the front and sides gave Christ Church's facade the cozy "rustic Gothic" look it has kept to this day. The Society of Architectural Historians says it is the oldest still standing and "probably the first" Gothic Revival structure in Washington.

The parish hall at the back and to the right was built in 1874. Three years later the interior of the church began to be utterly transmogrified into florid Victorian. The pristine simplicity of the original was obscured by "discreet ornamentation." This included gilt stars on a pale blue ceiling that drifted loose during humid weather.

In later years the interior was painted in somber browns, tans and violets, and there were frescoes and friezes of the Lamb of God, vines and grapes on the walls and ceilings, the whole highlighted with gold. The side balconies were removed. The brick facade in front was covered with gray, pebble-dash stucco.



Believed to be 1891 photograph of workmen who erected fifth and final story of bell tower and projecting vestibule in front of Christ Church

In 1891 a fifth and last story was added to the bell tower and a projecting front vestibule was built. The church's facade on G Street now appears exactly as it did a century ago.

The interior was again redone in 1921. The frescoes were stripped away, the walls painted to resemble big blocks of stone. The chancel was deepened so that the choir could sing within; it was framed by a yawning Gothic arch that made the altar space look for all the world like a darkened grotto.

The glowing stained-glass window above the high altar, in which Mary gazes at Christ on the cross, was made in England and installed in 1927. It is in honor of the mothers of the parish.

Finally, the restoration of 1954 was an attempt to bring the interior back to its clean, uncluttered beginnings. The architect, Horace Peeslea, who took part in the restoration of Williamsburg, Va., removed the last vestiges of Victorian and Gothic pretention. The walls, ceilings and columns were painted white. Peaslee's memory is kept green by his parting gift: two magnificent magnolia grandiflora trees rising high on either side of the raised front lawn. The inside of the church has changed hardly at all since that time.

In 1969, three sparkling jewel-like windows by Rowan LeCompte, the preeminent stained glass artist at the Washington National Cathedral, were added to the front wall of Christ Church.

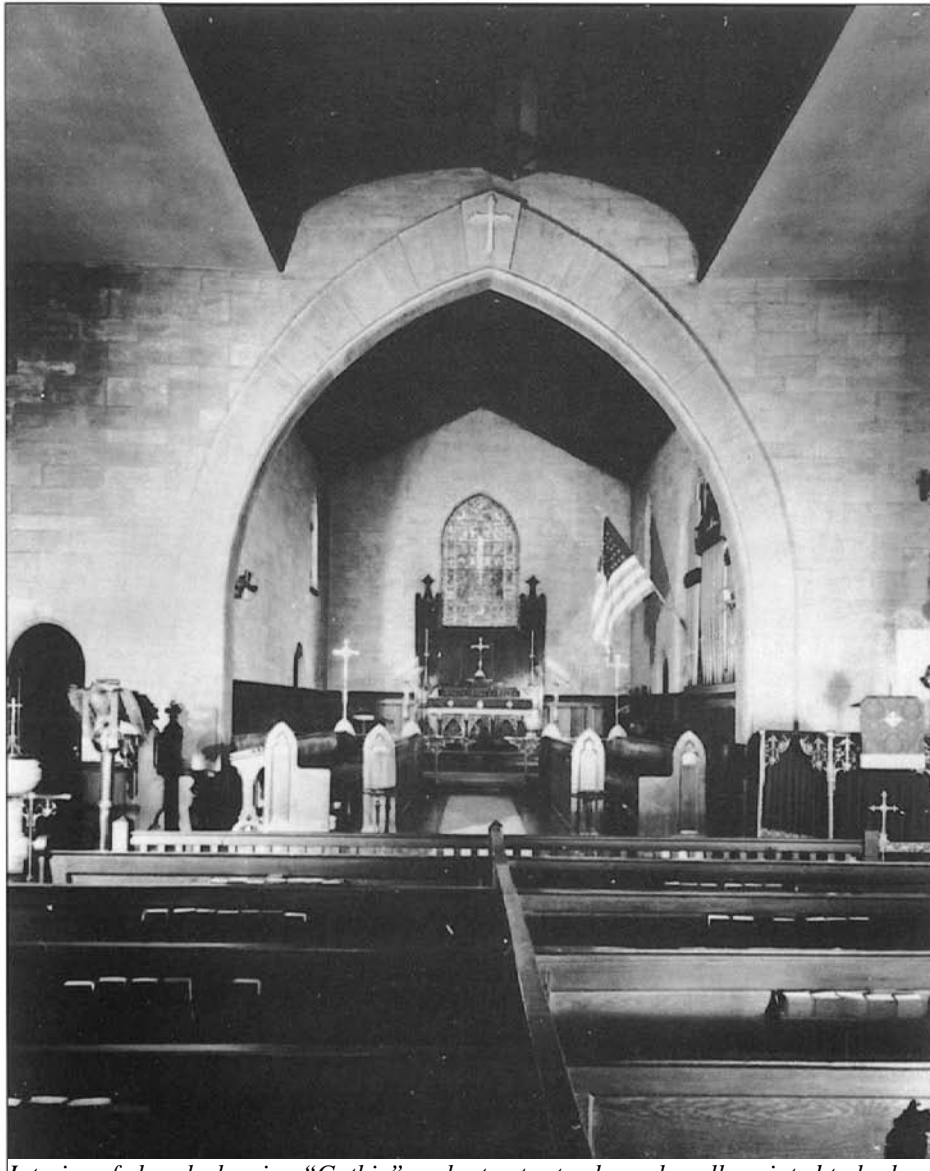
In the period between the two world wars, Christ Church reached its peak in well attended services, ministering to Capitol Hill's white, middle-class community. Rector Edward Gabler presided for 18 years over a thriving parish.



Christ Church and its congregation ca. 1918

Despite the Great Depression and World War II, the recollections of the vestry and the congregation during the 1930's and 1940's give an impression of a happy, stable church. The parish was big enough to support three services on Sunday, with an overall attendance of 400. There was a senior choir for 11 o'clock services and a junior choir for the family service at 9:30. Gabler, a jovial, gregarious bachelor, loved to roller skate, dance and bowl with the children. He occasionally played the organ -- "loudly," it

was said. Every year the Sunday school went by boat to a picnic and church dinners were held two or three times a year, as well as an annual, all-day excursion by train to Chesapeake Beach.



Interior of church showing "Gothic" arch at entry to chancel, walls painted to look like stone blocks. These details from renovation of 1921.

A streetcar line ran down the center of G Street, which otherwise looked like part of a sleepy Southern (and segregated) town. In the early 1940's, public housing projects occupied mainly by poor white families replaced the slum to the south known as Navy Yard Alley, where crime and prostitution were said to flourish. The church literally cleaned up its own back yard to the north in 1954. The sordid, tumbledown shacks without plumbing where the poorest of all dwelt, beginning right at the rear of the rectory, were torn down. A parking lot and a playground for the neighborhood children were built on the site.



The 1950's ushered in a period of turbulence and change on Capitol Hill. As usual, Christ Church mirrored the larger society. The parish began to shrink as blacks moved in and more and more white families left for the suburbs. The Supreme Court decision of 1954 desegregating public schools accelerated the "White flight" out of the city. Older people dominated the congregation, often driving to the Hill from Maryland and Virginia only on Sunday mornings. The vestry granted the request of the pastor, James Greene, for a rectory in the suburbs at Camp Springs. The family service and Sunday school were dropped.



Shanties, without plumbing, in alleyway just back of rectory and parish hall. Photo from 1952. Shanties were razed in 1954. Playground and parking lot built later in their place.

In the 1960's, social turmoil did not leave the church untouched. The civil rights revolution, the rebellion of the young against tradition, the Vietnam War, the rise of black separatism, all had their impact. In 1968, parts of Washington were again put to the torch, 154 years after the British invasion. This time the black community rioted in grief and rage following the assassination of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. From the church and nearby houses, flames could be seen leaping above looted stores along 8th Street Southeast. The supermarket on 7th Street was trashed. Armed Marines on many corners enforced the curfew, brandishing their rifles and yelling at the occasional stroller, "Get back! Get back! Go home!" In the days that followed, many blacks and whites passing on the sidewalks of Capitol Hill said to each other: "I'm so sorry."

Donald Seaton was the rector. He had been called to Christ Church in 1964. A passionate preacher and activist, he championed and attracted the young, particularly the "flower children" of that era, and alienated many of the older traditionalists. Separated from his wife, he lived in the rectory next to the

church -- which fast became known as the "hippie church." The bitter antagonisms split the congregation and are powerfully recalled in archival documents from that time.

Seaton's informal family at the rectory openly smoked dope and sometimes wandered barefoot and stoned into church during services. A parishioner polishing the brass altar rail was said to have discovered a stash of marijuana inside the hollow tube. Seaton was asked to resign. But during his tenure, he had also gained admirers for his sermons and counseling and had made one of the most useful contributions to the community by helping to start the Capitol Hill Day School.

His successor, David Dunning, was a healer and an organizer of great warmth and enthusiasm. His charge from the diocese was either to put Christ Church back on its financial feet or to be its last rector. Meantime, Capitol Hill was reviving as an attractive, historic and neighborly place to live, drawing many families with young children. Dunning and his wife, Donna, helped to put the battered parish back together so that it could function both as a unified congregation and part of the larger community. It became once again a true neighborhood church, with about 95 percent of its congregation living on the Hill.

In 1969, the Dunnings presided over the church's 175th anniversary celebration. It was a fresh, sparkling May day, the world-famous U.S. Marine Band played on the front lawn, G Street was closed to traffic, an Interior Department official added Christ Church to the National Register of Historic Places, Dunning greeted visitors in a wig, women parishioners strolled in Federal-era costumes and the whole neighborhood took on the air of a joyous party.



On the occasion of the 175th anniversary of the founding of Christ Church, May 25, 1969, the Rev. David Dunning, Rector, receives a certificate showing the enrollment of Christ Church on the National Register of Historic Places. Signed by Ernest Allen Connolly, Chief, Federal Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation.

It being 1969, there were pickets, of course. They stood just outside the church fence with their signs held high, protesting the presence of General William Westmoreland, a commander of American forces in Vietnam. One sign was a paraphrase of: "In order to save the village, we had to destroy it," a remark of an American officer in Vietnam quoted in the *New Yorker* magazine. It had become the most famous-and infamous-quote of the war.



May 25, 1969, following U.S. Marine Band concert and festivities on the front lawn of Christ Church, General William Westmoreland leaves Christ Church to be confronted by an anti-Vietnam War protester on G Street. Westmoreland was a commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam.



Once again in 1994, its bicentennial year, Christ Church is celebrating its past and looking toward its future. Under the leadership of an energetic and imaginative young rector, Robert Tate, the congregation began in the mid-1980's to plan the restoration, repair and expansion of the church and parish hall, the first major renovation project in 40 years. For decades, its members had grown weary of patching ancient heating systems, sweltering in Washington's brutal summers, painting over crumbling plaster, and squeezing growing parish and community programs into every available space. The fund-raising effort, appropriately, has been named the "Third Century Campaign."

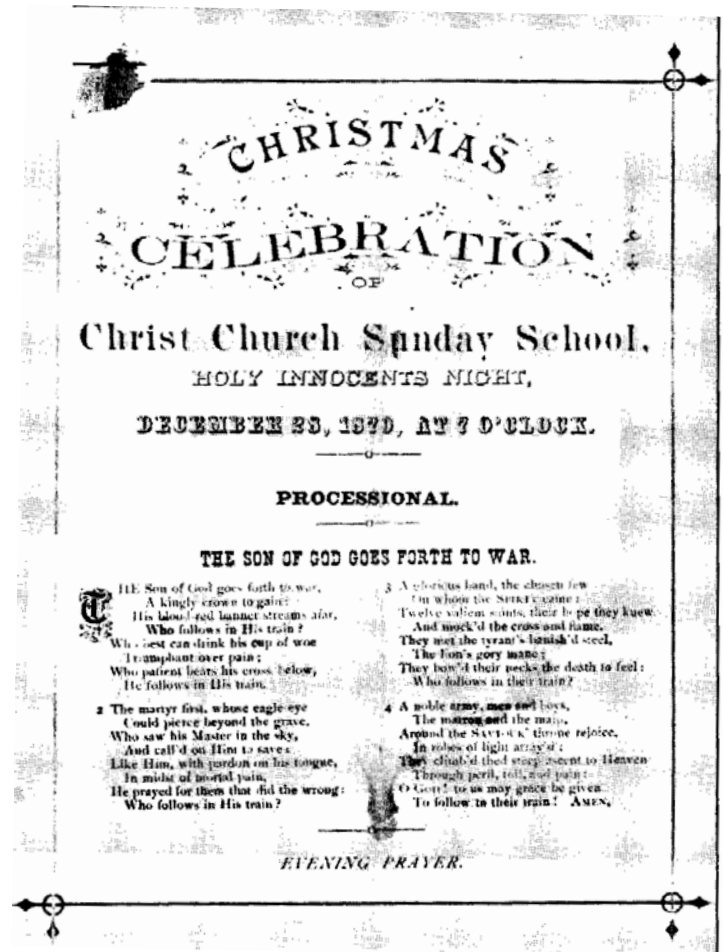
On April 23, 1994, marvelous weather ushered in the opening bicentennial ceremonies. Temperatures were in the low 70's, the air was crystalline, the sky the keenest blue. The mood, one neighbor said, was magical. It was Capitol Hill epitomized: black and white, old and young, every community group represented, from the Restoration Society to Washington's most venerable settlement house. Toddlers danced in the street as the Marine Band in scarlet tunics and gold braid thumped through an all-Sousa concert. Balloons bobbed everywhere.

There were arts and crafts booths, characters in 19th century costumes, hamburgers sizzling on the grill. An historian from the Library of Congress gave a lecture on Sousa. The Bishop of Washington blessed the church. The commanding officer of the Marine Barracks recalled the Corps's historic relationship with its ecclesiastical neighbor. The throng applauded tumblers, a baton twirler, the choirs of Christ Church and its Capitol Hill partner, St. Monica's. The residents of G Street smiled and clapped from their front stoops.

It was a perfect day.

Christ Church on its 200th birthday is the sum total of generations of witnesses. They admired babies at baptisms, smiled at weddings, wept at funerals, sang joyfully, listened to preachers rousing and boring, asked God for help and forgiveness, reached out to neighbors and supported one another in crisis and thanksgiving. Some day the people who celebrate this bicentennial will become part of Christ Church's history themselves.

-Nan Robertson April 1994



Christ Church--An Enduring Community

Christ Church+Washington Parish celebrated its 1994 bicentennial by, among other things, publishing a 20-page history of the church from 1794 through the early 1970s. Renowned journalist Nan Robertson, a parishioner, spent three and a half years reviewing the parish archives, described by librarians in the Washington Division of the District of Columbia Public Library as a resource for the city. The original parish minute books, starting in 1795, are among the oldest continuous records in the city. This addendum updates Christ Church's history through 2015 and changes some of the pictures and layout of Nan Robertson's original history.

Christ Church has remained a community in the best and most expansive sense of the word. In addition to an active and tangible corporate presence on Capitol Hill with a robust outreach agenda and facilities available to others, individual parishioners have built, grown, and sustained an enduring community that has supported many.



In the wake of the 1968 riots, Christ Church deepened its commitment to the neighborhood through ministry and preservation of its historic property as a resource and a sacred space. Early post-riot outreach included a reading tutorial set up by parishioners at the nearby Lenox School, where most children came from the Ellen Wilson public housing project. One night a week, church members read with the children and then walked them home. Parishioners were assured that they would be safe, because the kids' grandmothers were watching out for the CCWP tutors' safety. Christ Church worked with Capitol Hill Group Ministry, begun by several dozen neighborhood churches in 1967, to serve the poor in the area. For several years in the 1970s, the parish held summer programming for neighborhood children. As of the late 1970s, such efforts appeared to have drawn a group of neighborhood children, who came regularly to Sunday services in their Sunday best, even without their parents. Neighborhood and parish children could occasionally be disruptive, but Christ Church was a welcoming place for children.

The rector during the early 1970s was David Dunning, who did much to revive the parish with an entrepreneurial spirit and talent for going out into the community, inviting people to church, and recruiting them to ministries. One congregant recounted that Dunning would invite you to a gathering and you would leave in charge of some ministry. After his departure, Lynn McCallum became rector, serving until 1977. McCallum was known as a great preacher but was often in conflict with the vestry and parish administrator, and it was a period of financial trouble.

In the 1970s, Christ Church benefited from significant investments in the property made during the 1960s. The two story addition to the parish hall, given by Jack King in 1966, provided office and meeting space and connected the parish hall to the sanctuary. It also allowed the church to support the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop and to help found a day school. CHAW began a long relationship with Christ Church in 1972, holding many classes and staging shows in the parish hall until it secured dedicated space at 7th and G Streets in the early 1980s. The day school, begun in partnership with Lutheran Church of the Reformation in the early 1960s, eventually became Capitol Hill Day School, led by Bessie Wood Cramer, the parish's first female vestry member, who had been responsible for managing DC public school desegregation in the fifties. In 1979, a growing CHDS asked the vestry for financial assistance to renovate the Dent School near Garfield Park, and Christ Church agreed to guarantee \$40,000 of a renovation loan.



Plays that CHAW performed in the parish hall throughout the 1980s drew the neighborhood in and gave many parishioners, from youth running the sound board to adults acting on center stage, places to shine.

Another historic property that took up much congregational attention was the parish burial ground, Congressional Cemetery. While managing the cemetery had always occupied a great deal of vestry attention, neither the cemetery nor the church were in good financial shape in the 1970s making matters more difficult. In 1970, the vestry grappled with the pension for the Superintendent of the Cemetery, who was retiring after 26 years. The 1973 parish annual report said the Cemetery was in crisis and that the vestry saw no alternative to its acquisition by the federal government. Nevertheless, the tireless efforts of Rector Lynn McCallum and members, particularly Gerry Connolly, Peter Jones, and John Maxim, led to a solution in the creation of the Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery in 1976. The Association made the cemetery eligible for grants and federal money that have been significant in the past few decades; the cemetery remains under Christ Church ownership and is rented to and managed by the Association. The parish's efforts to ensure the Cemetery's survival -- managing America's first national cemetery for 164 years, from 1812 to 1976 -- have been called "one of the most extended volunteer efforts of national significance in the United States." (*In the Shadow of the United States Capitol: Congressional Cemetery and The Memory of the Nation*, Johnson and Johnson, 2012, p. 308)

Two notable acquisitions also occurred at this time. In 1972, Christ Church acquired a Hook and Hastings pipe organ -- for \$500 -- when St. Cyprian's Roman Catholic Church on Capitol Hill was merged with another parish. It was reassembled along with pipes from St. James Episcopal Church on 8th Street NE. This Herculean effort was undertaken by Jim Ackwright and Dan Meyer, the Christ Church music minister. The parish also bought two warehouses across the alley to the east in 1973, continuing a pattern set in the 1960s, when it bought the three houses west of the church property. Rental of the houses continues to provide substantial income to the operating budget. The warehouses were rented until they were sold in the 1990s to provide seed money for the church's endowment.

The 1970s also saw several forward moves for Christ Church, including its embrace of more inclusive language and women in the priesthood. In the 1970s, it tested the various trial liturgies authorized by the national church. After General Convention approved the ordination of women to the priesthood in 1976, Carole Crumley, ordained at Washington Cathedral in January, 1977, became an assistant to the rector. She was the first woman to serve in any ordained capacity in the Diocese of Washington and provided continuity and cohesion as priest-in-charge following Lynn McCallum's departure. At the same time, Marian Connolly became the first woman elected senior warden at Christ Church in 1977.

After several years of an electronic organ, Christ Church eagerly welcomed the pipe organ crafted of organ parts from St. Cyprian's and St. James. The congregation has been well served by a number of wonderful organists and music directors, who enlivened worship and guided the choir in strengthening the music program. Far beyond providing the music for worship for the congregation, the choir has been a community of deep connections and support within the parish.



Carole Crumley started a clown ministry, communicating the gospel with a whimsical touch that encouraged people to open up to the good news. This picture is of a clown service at Congressional Cemetery, with Jack Jacobs and Hastings Wyman.

Rectors of Christ Church

George Ralph	1795
Andrew T McCormick	1806-1821
Ethan Allen	1823-1830
F.W Hatch	1830-1835
Henry H. Bean	1836-1848
William Hodges	1848-1855
Joshua Morsell	1855-1864
M L Olds	1865-1868
William McGuire	1869-1873
Charles D. Andrews	1873-1887
Gilbert F. Williams	1887-1896
Arthur S. Johns	1897-1917
William Curtis White	1919-1924
Calvert E. Buck	1924-1928
Edward A. Gabler	1928-1946
Carter Gillis	1946-1951
John H. Stipe	1951-1953
Ivan Merrick	1953-1956
James J. Greene	1956-1965
Donald Seaton	1965-1968
David Dunning	1968-1972
Lynn McCallum	1973-1977
Henry Hobart Myers (Hank)	1978-1983
Robert Tate	1984-1995
Judith A Davis	1996-2008
Cara Spaccarelli	2010-

Rector Hank Myers was called in 1978 and served until 1983, and Christ Church deepened its community involvement in a number of ways under his leadership. Myers, a recovering alcoholic, was principal coordinator of the new National Episcopal Coalition on Alcoholism. "Word got out" that Christ Church was a welcoming place for those struggling with addiction. In 1982, the vestry unanimously passed a resolution on civil rights that addressed a "summary of anti-gay legislation and violent crime against homosexual persons."

In the mid-1980s the parish was active in the AIDS crisis, hosting educational sessions for the parish and the community. Madrigal dinners at the church raised funds to aid the afflicted; the church helped establish the diocesan response, Episcopal Caring Response to AIDS (ECRA), and with 14 other diocesan churches it sponsored a group home for AIDS victims, staffed by the Whitman Walker clinic. Christ Church became known as a place where those struggling with the disease could come and be cared for. The parish was holding funerals for AIDS victims when many churches were not.

Finances remained a major stress. At the annual meeting in 1980, a vestry member read from the 1950 annual report to show that the current problems were not unique. The February 1982 vestry minutes note that, despite having lived within its budget, Christ Church was "in significant financial trouble." A 1982 report on "Maximizing Parish Life on a Minimum Budget" recommended reconstituting the St. Patrick's Day fundraiser, which has continued ever since. By the mid-1980s, there were improvements, as Richard Emery's efforts as treasurer were recognized for producing a year-end surplus for the "first time in human memory" in 1984.

Robert Tate served the parish as rector from 1984 to 1995. Bob strengthened the ministry of the liturgists, a group of congregants begun in the early 70s by David Dunning and strengthened by Hank Myers that tended to planning and preparing worship. Under Tate, the liturgists became preachers, worship planners, and liturgical educators. Jean Kling, Gerry Connolly, and Gary Abrecht were integral in this ministry, serving as liturgists for decades. Witnessing the strong connection between liturgy and theology in the Episcopal tradition, the group also became integral to the Monday night theology group, which ran for many years.

Growth posed challenges and opportunities for Christ Church in the mid-1980s. After Hank Myers declared Sunday School “dead” from the pulpit early in the decade, a core group of parish moms joined forces to revitalize the program. Lay leadership of the program continued, and it had grown substantially to 20-30 youth by the mid-80s. In 1986, there was a one-week children’s summer program and a large corps of acolytes. In 1990, the church called an assistant priest, Noreen Seiler-Dubay, to support this growth; at the time, the parish had 169 voting members (adults).



In 1984, the Christ Church + Capitol Quilters Extraordinaire, led by Adrienne Boniface, made a silk, velvet, and red taffeta Victorian crazy quilt (using silk from their husbands’ old neckties). Since then, they have gathered weekly to make a quilt or two to raffle at the annual St. Nicholas Day fundraiser in early December. Some quilts have been based on traditional designs, others designed by principal quilters Adrienne Boniface, Linda Mellgren, Marian Tebben, and Andrea Harles. Several have been based on tiles in the narthex; another on tiles at Congressional Cemetery. Since 2013, they also have made quilts for the Linus Project, a national effort to make comfort blankets for sick and vulnerable children and youth.



Christmas Pageant (1975) While the number of children active at the church has fluctuated, its children’s ministry has always been lively, engaging children in traditions like the Christmas pageant.

In 1998, the vestry retreat found a major building renovation was needed, and the parish began an extended period of discernment to imagine its future needs and potential. The effort envisioned changes to almost every part of the Christ Church complex, but a \$1.7 million campaign launched in 1993 raised only \$430,000. With several hundreds of thousands already been spent in planning, mainly on architect fees, the vestry scaled back the projects to necessary repairs (plumbing, heating, electric) and undertook a \$600,000 loan; the operating budget was \$280,000. The campaign generated discontent; some members were frustrated that the church hadn't aimed higher, others that it had dreamed for so long beyond its budget. The vestry started the Third Century Campaign to pay off the loan, and succeeded in doing so early. Parishioner Neil Strawser faithfully championed this cause for the next decade, donating one of his homes as seed money for the campaign and reminding the congregation week after week to contribute.

The 1995 profile used in the search for Bob Tate's successor described Christ Church as a truly neighborhood parish that has "always welcomed women in parish leadership, in the liturgy, and in the pulpit." It also noted that the church maintained an active partnership with St. Monica's, "a predominantly African-American church also on Capitol Hill." In the 1990s, the parish continued its efforts to connect with and serve the neighborhood, providing space for Capitol Hill Group Ministry staff and providing brown bag lunches for the homeless one Sunday a month, as it still does 20 years later.



***Shrinemont Retreat (@1998)** Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Christ Church took an annual parish retreat, first to the Addy Sea house on the Maryland seashore and in later years to Shrinemont Episcopal Retreat Center in Virginia. These gatherings are remembered as a time of great fellowship and relaxation during which congregants of all ages came to know each other better.*

In 1996, the parish called Judith Davis, its first female rector. Her tenure is remembered particularly for strength in hospital ministry and pastoral care. By the late 1990s, pledges were up and so was congregational morale. Judith customarily sang the Eucharistic prayer and modified liturgical language to reflect the historic role of women in the development of the Hebrew faith. In 2000, the church called Bill Doggett as a half-time associate rector. Although it was not central to their service, both Bill and Judith were gay, living in committed relationships, indicative of Christ Church's place on inclusion in the Episcopal Church.



Sis Allen and Judith Davis (1999). For more than eight decades, Mildred “Sis” Allen sat in a pew on Sunday mornings. Her family had moved in across G Street when she was 11, and she remained in the home until her death at 95 in 2015. She is remembered for her deep love of children, her welcoming smile for everyone, and her dedication to the rummage sales and the costume jewelry table at the Christmas bazaar. Generations of Christ Church children grew up knowing that Sis had M&Ms and a stash of toys for them to play with at her house. She and her brother, Jack Hageman, started the Sunday morning breakfast that ran for many years after the early service. One elderly couple whom Sis invited to church, the Lius, eventually chose to be baptized, and she became their godmother. Many people came to know God more deeply through their interactions with the always loving and joyful Sis.

In the early 2000s, services were held in the parish hall during the summer, as the sanctuary lacked air conditioning. Parishioners remember these services as having a summer camp feel, featuring such liturgical novelties as folk dancing, which was appreciated by some more than others. Eventually, an air conditioning system for the sanctuary was bought, but in advance of fundraising; the week that the \$100,000 bill came, an unexpected bequest for that amount arrived. The bequest came from the mother of David Barton, a former senior warden who had come to the church in the 1980s. The mother gave the money in her estate in appreciation of the parish's care and welcome for her son, who had died from AIDS. Although the unexpected funds were used to pay for the air conditioning, the parish also undertook to repay the money to the endowment fund over 10 years, and did so several years early.

Martha Wallace came as interim rector in late 2008 after Judith Davis left and led the church in a period of reinvigoration. In addition to normal interim work, she announced a \$200,000 campaign to fund much-needed improvements before calling a new rector. The country was in a great recession, the church was in transition, and the congregation thought she was crazy but raised the funds through pledges and a special dinner featuring former Secretary of State Madeline Albright as guest speaker. Most of the funds went to renovating the rectory, which had not had significant repairs in 60 years.

In its 2009 search profile, Christ Church described itself as a neighborhood parish church. It highlighted that "[i]f there is one thing Christ Church does well, it is food-centered fellowship." Christ Church has a long history of celebrating life together with food. In 1961, parishioners enjoyed a crab feast, an oyster and ham dinner, the Shrove Tuesday pancake supper, and a fried chicken dinner. Thanksgiving dinner and St. Patrick's dinner became traditions during the 1980s. The St. Nick's dinner started in the early 2000s. For several decades, there was a weekly Sunday breakfast after the early service. Whether around the altar in the sanctuary or the folding tables in the parish hall, food is central to the church's life.



St Patrick's Dinner and Auction (2013). "If there is one thing that Christ Church does well, it is food-centered fellowship." For more than three decades, the St Patrick's Dinner and Auction has gathered congregants and neighbors to share the joy of being a community together.

In 2010, the parish called Cara Spaccarelli as rector. The neighborhood was undergoing a revival, with many families now staying as their children reached school age rather than leaving for the suburbs. The rapid development of residences and offices south of the freeway—the nominal parish boundaries extend to the Navy Yard and to Nationals Park—combined with Cara's gifts of organizing and preaching to boost the church's growth. Average Sunday attendance grew from 100 in 2009 to 170 in 2015. Twenty-one baptisms occurred in 2015. Outreach also grew and in 2014, Christ Church began monthly participation in the national outreach ministry Laundry Love to support the poor in using laundromats. The church also partnered with Capitol Hill Group Ministry, Habitat for Humanity, DC Central Kitchen, and the Heifer Project.

The 2012 annual report found Christ Church to be financially sound, having achieved a substantial surplus for the second year. Fifteen years earlier, the parish had no endowment and substantial debt remaining on the renovation. In 2012, Christ Church had no debt, an endowment of \$750,000, and more than \$150,000 on hand. This financial stability encouraged the congregation once again to plan for

investments in the building, particularly for a capital campaign launched in 2015 to replace the organ and renovate the parish hall to expand the space available for church and community programming.



There are few mentions of God in Christ Church's history. Yet the story of Christ Church bears the marks of divine fingerprints at work. The compassionate care shown to those suffering from AIDS in the 1980s connected to the purchase of the sanctuary's air conditioning. The care of the building made it a place for God's work, whether in Sunday school or making bag lunches or being a gathering place for AA. God was at work inspiring people to reconcile when mistakes were made, to work towards a common vision with many varying opinions, and above all to reach out to those in need of a community, a hot cup of coffee, and a place to experience the divine. At its heart, Christ Church is a place of relationships: with each other, with God, with our neighborhood, and with the city. May God continue to guide our life together.

- A team of Christ Church members, November 2015



Christ Church interior, 1994 (By Bruce Robey)



Christ Church Bicentennial celebration (Bruce Robey)

Cover Photo: Christ Church 1994 (Bruce Robey)