

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
IN DELAWARE

1785 - 1954

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CHAPTER FIVE

Financial Problems

MEANWHILE, back in Brandywine Hundred near Wilmington, some of the local residents, such as Dr. Abner Prince, Valentine Forwood, James A. B. Smith, J. B. Lewis, and others held a meeting in December 1835 at Talley's Schoolhouse to discuss plans for starting an Episcopal Church. The following February they bought the schoolhouse from Eli B. Talley, in whose family it had been for many years, and fitted it up for church services. Four months later—June 11—it was consecrated as Grace Church by Bishop Onderdonk. In 1838, the first delegate to a Diocesan Convention was Isaac Smith.

Neighboring clergy in Pennsylvania, as well as the rectors of St. Andrew's Church, Wilmington, helped out here for several years, but it was never really open for continuous services under any rector until 1861 when the Reverend Dr. John B. Clemson and the Reverend Samuel F. Hotchkin of the Church of the Ascension, Claymont, took it under their wing and built it up during the 1860s.¹

The early church in Delaware had many financial problems. The clergy were underpaid, if they were paid at all, and the various parishes were always behind in their payments to the convention fund. Repairs on church buildings and property were seldom completed without incurring a debt which weighed down the congregation for years to come. Clergy stipends, however, were the biggest problem.

The applicant was the Reverend Kensey Johns Stewart, a native of New Castle, Delaware, who had served a great deal of his ministry in other states. Ordained by Bishop Richard Channing Moore of Virginia in 1839, he served in Delaware during the 1840s, but left in 1846, not to return until October 1871.

During the intervening twenty-five years he spent some time supporting the southern cause during the Civil War. As a nephew of Bishop John Johns, he was reported to have been employed by a Richmond, Virginia bookseller to travel to London to have the London printer of the American Prayer Book print copies of a Confederate Prayer Book with the only change being the substitution of "Confederate" for "United"—as in the United States of America—wherever it appeared in the book. Since very few copies were reported to have reached the South, the enterprise was not too successful.²

His return to Delaware in 1871 at the age of about fifty-five was noted by the Bishop with the pleasure of one welcoming back an old friend. Unfortunately it did not turn out happily for the Bishop; but no one could have then guessed what problems Dr. Stewart (he obtained his doctor of divinity degree in 1880) would cause Bishop Lee.

The Bishop, in his annual address of 1872, noted Dr. Stewart's return:

The Rev. Kensey Johns Stewart has been officiating in St. Peter's Church, Lewes, since October last, and since February has rendered services at St. George's, Indian River. . . . Mr. Stewart was formerly a laborer in this Diocese and will be cordially welcomed on his return. His renewed residence among us, I grieve to say, has been saddened by a very severe domestic bereavement.³

Bishop Lee did not say what he meant by the "severe domestic bereavement" that Dr. Stewart had experienced, but it could have meant the loss of his wife or someone in his family. Anyway, about two years later Dr. Stewart resigned his parishes in Sussex County and in July 1875, when he was about fifty-nine years old, he appealed for aid from the clergy relief fund, saying that he had lost the use of one eye and was threatened with the loss of the other:

For nearly a year past I have contemplated retiring from the active duties of the ministry, for reasons of infirm health, explained in a

paper herewith submitted to you, but was compelled to continue until the present time, by the condition of the parish. . . .

After a ministry of thirty-five years, during most of which I have officiated in this Diocese [he had been absent for twenty-five years], and which has afforded me many occasions of *near and dear association with yourself* [italics added], beginning with the first years of your residence in Delaware, I have little to regret save the shade occasionally thrown over my own work by infirmities which have annoyed me.

I can, at the close of my active ministry, assure you that there is no estate in human life that rewards a man for his labors, at all comparable with the service of our Lord and His Church.

The Bishop asked the Standing Committee "whether, in the absence of any legislation by the Convention, relief [could] be granted from the income of the Diocesan Fund." The committee replied that he had "full discretionary power to dispose of the income" through the treasurer of the Trustees "for the purposes for which it was created." Dr. Stewart received \$100 in 1875 and the same plus additional small amounts as they were donated in the following years. In 1879, for example, he received \$138.25.⁴

Shortly after that, the fund was also used to aid wives and dependents of clergymen who had died while in Delaware. The first one so aided was Mrs. Callaway, wife of the Reverend Charles M. Callaway, who had been rector of Grace Church, Brandywine Hundred, for only eighteen months. He died April 11, 1877, following an illness of twenty-four hours. Within seven days his wife received \$100 from the fund. In future years many other widows and dependents were also aided.⁵

Dr. Stewart moved to Wilmington from Lewes in 1880 when he was reported to have had a wife and a daughter of about two years of age to support. The amount of money he was receiving from the Diocese, therefore, was not sufficient and his wife opened a small store to help out. That summer unexpected aid came to him from a new source.

The Reverend William J. Frost, D.D., the energetic rector of Trinity Church, Wilmington, since 1870, and known for his liberal ideas, heard of his predicament and rushed to his defense. He later wrote:

establishment of missions in such places as Delmar, Bridgeville, Clayton, Edgemoor and Wilmington.

Some of the hard working lay readers of those days were: John C. Lewis of St. John's, Wilmington, who helped to organize the Edgemoor mission; Dr. Edward Fowler, a physician of Laurel; Henry Draper Speakman, of whom we have already spoken in connection with St. Matthew's; and Stephen T. Ralph of St. Mark's, Little Creek Hundred.¹⁶

George Graff Miller was another. He was the son of the Reverend Jacob Miller, rector of Grace Church, Brandywine Hundred, near Talleyville from 1891 to 1897. When the father died suddenly at the age of seventy-one, young George immediately took over and although he was working in Philadelphia, devoted his Saturdays and Sundays to helping out at the church.

Archdeacon George C. Hall of St. John's Church, Wilmington, in pointing out in 1898 what could be accomplished when the "priesthood of the laity" was active, said:

The congregations [of Grace Church] are growing, the Sunday school is increasing, the finances are in a healthy condition. I mention these things because they have been accomplished chiefly through a layman, Mr. George [G.] Miller, the son of a former rector, now deceased. . . . The people are scattered, and he usually makes his visits "afoot." He by his walk, conversation and disinterested devotion has won the entire confidence of the people, and the results of his ministry are so large that it is a question with the bishop whether it would be wise to supplant him with a priest, even if one could be commanded.¹⁷

Mr. Miller became a candidate for Holy Orders in 1899 and was ordained at Grace Church in 1902 by Bishop Coleman, who also married him to a Philadelphia girl at Bishopstead that summer following the death of his mother, and just prior to his ordination in September.¹⁸ But then, as unfortunately too many promising members of the clergy did, he discovered he could make a better living in secular employment, thus he remained in Philadelphia, where he became engaged in some nonclerical occupation. He did not want to give up his ministry, however, so with the apparent approval of Bishop Coleman, and the later concurrence of Bishop Kinsman, he continued to be canonically connected with Delaware for many years.¹⁹