

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH
IN DELAWARE



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By

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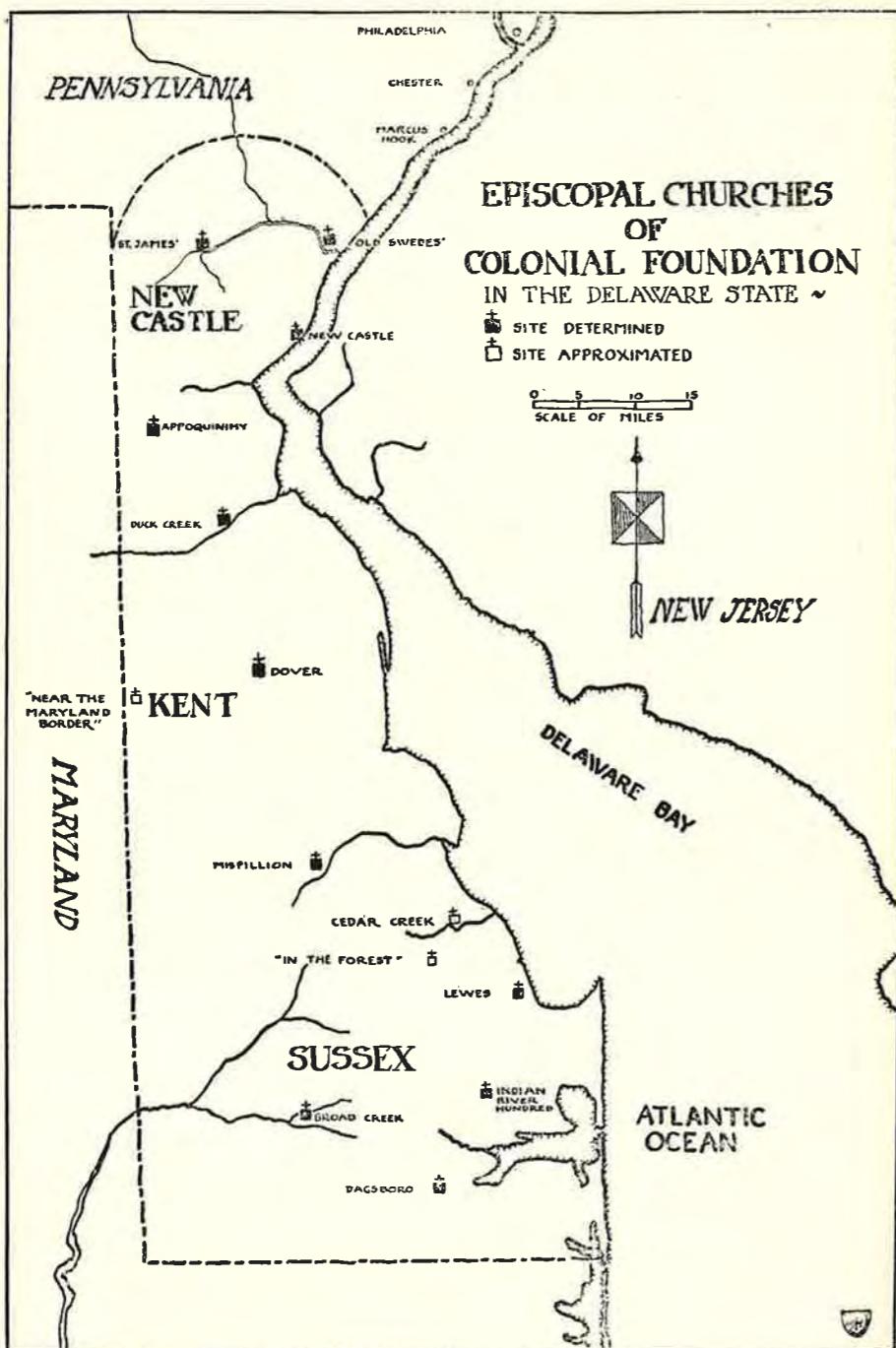
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ably St. Matthew's, Cedar Creek. Of the second place I am not so sure. Scharf thinks it was Prince George's, Dagsboro, but the fact that this parish was in Maryland at the time rather casts some doubt on this. Ross merely said that it was a small frame building sixteen miles from Lewes. During the week he spent in Sussex he baptised 102 children and adults. The next April he went back to Lewes where he says he opened a new church. The minutes of the Society for February 15, 1722, record that two churches were built and men were appointed to read prayers.¹⁷ William Becket also recorded that the Rev. Mr. Adams came over ninety miles from Maryland more than once to hold services in Lewes and the other churches.¹⁸

THE FRUITFUL MINISTRY OF WILLIAM BECKET

It is to the Rev. William Becket, A. M. that the Sussex Mission owes its permanence, for he came to Lewes on September 1, 1721, and remained until his death in 1743. William Becket was the son of John and Mary Becket, and was born at Over Peover in Cheshire, England, April 25, 1697.¹⁹ He left London on June 11, 1721, and arrived at Lewes with the usual grant for books and an annual salary of £60. Three years later he could report that his work was so successful that his three churches²⁰ had subscribed sufficient sums for the support of the minister and his family, and that he could lay aside the Society's allowance.²¹

By 1725 he asked permission to remove to Chester in the place of the Rev. John Humphries,²² who had gone to Annapolis. This permission was not granted, but it did not deter him from the work he had set out to do, for he said in 1726 that St. John the Baptist church had been built "in the Forest."

At this time the heirs of Penn and Lord Baltimore were disputing about the ownership of Delaware, and Becket made one of the most ingenious suggestions as to the settlement of the dispute. Since many

¹⁷Minutes of the S. P. G.

¹⁸Becket, William, *Notices and Letters*, MSS.

¹⁹Except where otherwise noted all the references to Becket may be found in his manuscript *Journal* in the Pennsylvania Historical Society. His appointment probably came as a result of a petition of Lewistowners, 1718, in which they state that many Church people were going to a recently built Presbyterian meeting house served by ministers under the jurisdiction of the synod of Glasgow. *Vide: Perry, op. cit.*, II, 116.

²⁰Lewes, Indian River, and St. Matthew's, Cedar Creek.

²¹Collections of the P. E. Church (1851) p. 123. Quoting the Fulham MSS.

²²John Humphrey or Humphries (c. 1684-July 8, 1739) was a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, was a schoolmaster in New York, 1706-1710, and was ordained by the bishop of London about 1710. He served as S. P. G. missionary in Oxford, Pa., 1711-1713, and Chester, Pa., 1714-1726. (Pascoe, *op. cit.*, p. 852).

people were of the opinion that the land belonged to neither of the contesting parties but to the king, he suggested that the king give the land in question to the Venerable Society as an endowment for the establishment of the episcopate, even if only a suffragan to the bishop of London. Needless to say, the suggestion came to nothing, but it shows how Becket's mind was working. To him Episcopacy without the episcopate was indeed a very emasculated form of churchmanship.

In October of 1728 he described the churches comprising his parish:

"The dimensions of the Church at Lewes is as follows, viz. 40 feet in length 24 broad, the height of the wall between the plate and the sill is 15 feet. The frame is of Wood the Roof is covered with Cypress Shingles and the wall with Boards of the same wood. The inside of the Church is not yet finished, only the floor is laid, and the walls wainscotted with Cypress plank as high as the tops of the pews. the Pulpit, reading desk, Communion Table and Rail are handsomely built of black Walnut—and the pews are all made of pine plank. . . . The number of people frequenting this church I reckon at a mean computation of about 150.

St. John Baptists church was raised on Wednesday the 27th of March 1728. The frame is of white Oak, the dimensions are as follows, viz. 30 feet long 20 broad & 12 feet between the plate and sill. It stands about the Center of the county in the forest of Sussex and is inscribed to St. John the Baptist.

The covering of the wall is to be of Cypress board and the roof of shingles of the same wood which is most used here for like purposes as the rain will not cause it to Rot. The work is being carry'd on by voluntary contribution of the inhabitants as it has already been raised on that foundation. . . .²³

St. George's Chapel in Indian River hundred, 9 miles distant from Lewes was raised in December 1719. The frame of Oak—the length of it was 25 feet the breadth 20 and the height 12 feet. The walls and roof were covered with red oak boards and thus remained till the year 1725 when a new addition of 15 feet was made to it; the older part of this building has a pulpit, gallery and floor, the new part is not yet floor'd, but we have agreed with a workman this year to cover the whole roof with cypress shingles and to lay the floor of the new part, the congregation frequenting this chapel consist usually of about 200 people.

This building was rais'd as all the churches in this Government are by voluntary contribution. The sum contributed towards carrying on the work at first was £34 15s. 8d. and the repairing and enlarging it since, has cost about as much more.

²³The construction of this church and the care it had had, may be judged from the fact that 46 years later, 1774, the Rev. Samuel Lyon calls it "an old ruinous church."

The Contributors were about 66 in number to raise the first sum. The people here are constant attenders on the public service and annually contribute something of their small substance towards the carrying on the building of their yet unfinished chappel & the maintenance of their minister.

St. Matthew's Church Cedar Creek was raised in the year 1707 being the first building that was erected for the service of God and Religion in this Country according to the Rites and Usages of the Church of England. It was a timber building, the wall covered with boards of Cypress, and the roof with cypress shingles, the floor has been laid, the pulpit, desk, Communion Table and some pews, were built about 4 years ago but the inside of the church is not yet finished.

The dimensions are as follows, Thirty feet long 20 wide 12 between joysts viz. between plate and sill. The reason why the building was left unfinished was, because of the difficulty they had in getting a missionary, who had contributed toward the building of it. But why they have not gone on with the building since their church was supplied, is not so clear. The work was begun and has been carried on by contribution, but as the subscription has for as much as I can learn been lost, so I cannot get any account of the Contributors names or of the sums they gave.

The congregation here is numerous being generally on Sundays when the weather is good to travel about 200 persons the church not being large enough to contain many more than one half the number, though a small gallery²⁴ has been raised across one end of the church. I am in hopes however to persuade them shortly to enlarge it. The first Missionary here was the Rev. Wm. Black, now of Accomack County in Virginia, who staid near two years, after his departure the people had no minister settled among them for about 12 years, until the year 1721 when the present Missionary arrived here . . .

The missionaries in Delaware were all under the supervision of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and while this required no more than quarterly reports to the Society concerning their activities and semi-annual meetings of the clergy, this was more supervision than many of them were able to bear gracefully. The additional stipends of the Maryland and Virginia establishments were enticing, and Becket was no exception. In 1732 he made an attempt to be nominated for a Maryland parish.²⁵ This venture failed, but had beneficial results. The parish subscribed to buy him a farm along Indian River

²⁴It may be well to note that these galleries are today commonly called "slave galleries." This is a misnomer. The term is not used in a single contemporary document. The galleries were simply to hold the large crowds which attended these small churches.

²⁵He also asked and received permission for a three months' visit to England, but did not take advantage of the permission. See Perry, V, 59.

Bay in Indian River Hundred. Writing to the S. P. G. on April 15, 1732, for the assistance of the Society in the purchase of the farm he said:

" . . . That the Parishioners of yor Sd Petitioner have been exceedingly kind to him during the whole time, by subscribing liberally towards his Support & maintenance (considering their poor circumstances) & by many other kind and good Offices, which has been a great encouragement to your Petitioner in the midst of his Labour. That besides what is already mentioned they have at this Time done an extraordinary Act of Kindness to your Petitioner A good Farm being offered to sale of about 400 Acres of Land with a good House on it a good Orchard of near 1000 fruit Trees, a good Barn Frame with a Kitchen & out Houses abt 7 miles from Lewes. They have advised him to buy it & promised to assist him unanimously to pay for it, that he may be enable to secure a more certain support for his Family.

And also yt no invitations from any neighboring vacant Parishes in Virginia or Maryland (Many of which have been offered to him) may move him to leave them. Accordingly he hath joined them in a bargain with the Owner of the Sd Land &c the price to be paid for it is 270 pounds of this Currency. 160 pounds are to be pd down now, & 110 a year hence. Your venerable Board will see by a Copy of the Subscription which he has caused to be exemplified & sent over to you regularly attested how far the poor people of this parish were able to help your Petitioner in this Affair. A Testimony of their zeal for Religion & their Esteem for your Petitioner.

But as Lewes is a chargeable place being a small Sea Port on the Mouth of the great River Delaware where all European goods are generally sold at near 200 pr cent advance in Short & for as much as your Petitioner hath a numerous Family to maintain viz a Wife & 4 Children & hath been often times in Charity obliged to entertain Ship wrecked & distressed people as well as in Civility to entertain Gentlemen & Strangers of the Communion of the Ch of England especially, who occasionally resort to the place, and as a Clergyman must be given to hospitality as well as apt to teach Sr your Petitioner hath not been able to save any money except only what may buy a Stock of Cattle & such Implements for Husbandry as are necessary upon a Farm & without wch it cannot turn to a profitable Account. Upon the whole your humble Petitioner desires the Hon Society to concur with his Parishioners in this Charitable Act that they will be pleased to bestow on your Petitioner something (whatever they in their wisdom & goodness shall think proper) towards paying for the Farm on which he is now settled, Or if not yt they will be so good as to advance a years Salary for him on the 25th of March next (when the Purchase Money is to be paid) . . ."²⁶

²⁶Turner, *op. cit.* p. 195.