

St. Bartholomew's historical ties to Chatham

Our neighboring county to the north, Orange, originally included the area that is now Chatham, and extended down to what was the original southern boundary of the Granville patent. The Colonial Assembly at New Berne ratified an act in January 1771 calling for the establishment of a "New County" from the "Southern Part of the Inhabitants of Orange County." The act stipulated that this new, distinct county be named Chatham County and St. Bartholomew Parish, even though there was no church established in the area. This arrangement conformed to the system of the Church of England and anticipated the growth of the latter in the county.

The reasoning behind the split of Orange was to make it easier to enforce the requirement that local citizens had to take a turn at public works, such as road building. Perhaps the Assembly also realized that this arrangement would segment the Regulators who had been encouraging political unrest in the area, holding large gatherings in Hillsborough. At the time, there was no "Pittsborough", the area being referred to as "Chatham Court House" until the town was formed in January 1787.

There apparently were no organized churches in North Carolina until 1727 when Paul Parmer began the first Baptist church in eastern North Carolina. By 1775 the Baptists were the most numerous denomination with at least one church in every county. Nevertheless, until the time of the American Revolution approached, the official state church in North Carolina remained the Anglican Church, even though by 1774 it had grown so weak that it was all but non-existent.

The upheavals caused by the Revolutionary War were reflected in a complete break between the church and state, and the Church of England no longer existed as a political power in the newly United States. Eventually the Protestant Episcopal Church of America arose, much like its predecessor but without administrative ties.

In the early 1800's St. Bartholomew's was still a parish without a church. Occasional services were held in various locations by visiting clergymen. In October 1823 the Rt. Rev. John Ravenscroft, Bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina reported that he visited Pittsborough and preached to "an attentive congregation of different denominations." Soon after the beginning of the nineteenth century a number of families of Episcopalian background from the lower Cape Fear area built summer homes in and around Pittsborough to escape the mosquito borne sicknesses, such as Malaria, which were prevalent near the coast. Some of these families were the Hills, Waddells and Moores. Eventually, a number of these summer visitors built year-round homes in the area, which provided the needed number of permanent communicants necessary to form a church. In October 1831, a contract was awarded to Martin and

Chatham's Historical Heritage

by Fred J. Vatter, Jr.



Many beautiful stained glass windows grace the church.

Wesley Hanks to build a "House of Worship" at a cost of \$850, which with additional expenses, eventually reached \$1,125.12. The payment of the contract was guaranteed by a physician, Dr. Nathaniel Hill, and his nephew, Dr. Frederick J. Hill, a

member of the Senate and House, and an advocate of public education. By 1834 the parish had 30 communicants, a Sunday school of six teachers and 40 pupils and a bible class of 18 people. During the year, 10 whites and 14 African-Americans were baptized.

In April 1862 the Vestry of the church offered the church bell to the Confederate government to be used in casting cannon, but the offer was not accepted. Later on, in the third year of the war, St. Bartholomew joined with four other Episcopal parishes in purchasing five bales of cotton. These were sent through the blockade to England to pay for the printing of a Confederate edition of the Book of Common Prayer, which substituted "Confederate" instead of "United" States of America. The prayer books came safely through the blockade and were distributed throughout the Confederacy.

By the end of the Civil War the local economy was devastated from a lack of labor and supervision for agriculture, pillaging by passing armies, a shortage of manufactured goods and non-local food items, and the negligible value of confederate money. In 1865 the Rector of St. Bartholomew's wrote, "Since the surrender of General Lee no collections have been made in consequence of the almost entire absence of money from the community." He was obliged to add teaching to his many duties to get bread for his family, forming Locust Hill Seminary for Girls.



for the colored people in Pittsboro" and the following year he advanced funds to permit St. Bartholomew to purchase the former Methodist parsonage for that purpose. The school opened in March 1881 with 60 pupils. This mission, eventually named St. James, continued until 1968, by which time most of its communicants found new church homes. Many joined St. Bartholomew.

The beautiful, peaceful churchyard of St. Bartholomew's contains the graves of many people who took part in the legal and political growth and structure of North Carolina. Some of these are: Abraham Rencher - Congressman, Minister to Portugal and Governor of New Mexico; Governor John Owen; Colonel Edward Jones - Lawyer and Trustee of UNC; Henry Mauger London - Treasurer of the Diocese of North Carolina, Legislative Reference Librarian for North Carolina and Secretary of the North Carolina Bar Association; John Manning, LL.D - Delegate to the Constitutional Conventions of 1861 and 1875, member of Congress in 1871, North Carolina Code Commissioner and Professor of Law at UNC; and John B. Toomer, who welcomed Lafayette on his visit to Fayetteville. Over 20 graves are those of soldiers in the Confederate Army or Navy. One of these is Henry Armand London a founder and editor of the Chatham Record, President of the North Carolina Press Association, North Carolina State Senator and a 40 year member of the Democratic State Executive Committee. Many tiny graves tell of tragedies in the lives of local folk who struggled to survive, grow in spirit, and contribute to the well-being of future generations.

For art lovers, the church's stained glass windows are worth seeing. The round window above the front entrance is in memory of "Uncle Alec" Scarborough, a former slave who was sexton for almost 50 years. It is over the southern balcony where Mr. & Mrs. Scarborough sat during services for many years. Two windows were designed by Frank M. London, Pittsboro native who went on to become an artist of world renown. The window called "St. Cecelia" was designed as a memorial to London's aunt, Anne Mauger London, the church organist for 66 years. St. Cecelia is the patron saint of music. The other window, called "Well Done Good and Faithful Servant", was designed as a memorial to London's father, William Lord London. He was captain of the Chatham Rifles, the first company from Chatham County to serve in the Civil War. He was wounded three times and promoted to Adjutant General of his brigade.

Frank London also has windows in Pittsboro United Methodist Church, Church of the Good Shepherd in Raleigh and in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine (Belmont Chapel) in New York City.

A visit to St. Bartholomew's and its serene churchyard can give you a glimpse back at some of the influential families who helped shape the history of the Pittsboro area.

Sources of information were: History of St. Bartholomew's Parish 1833-1983; The Chatham Historical Journal 1992 (Article on Frank M. London by Bonnie Vargo); Chatham County 1771-1971 by Hadley, Horton, Strowd; and The State Magazine, 2/39.

Fred J. Vatter is past president of the Chatham Historical Association and a board member.

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