**BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**PITTSBORO, NC**

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH**

* 1771: St. Bartholomew's Parish is formed with Chatham County in the colony of North Carolina, following British custom (*no church yet*)
* Episcopalian families from the lower Cape Fear establish summer homes in and around Pittsborough soon after the Revolution. By 1830 they have become permanent residents and are served by visiting Episcopalian clergy. (*no church yet*)
* By fall 1831 there are enough communicants - more women than men - to form a church; an
* organizational meeting is held to elect vestry and name the church; and a contract is let for Martin and Wesley Hanks to build a frame church, paid for by subscription but guaranteed by Nathaniel and Frederick Hill. Total cost is about $1,150.
* Cornerstone is laid in March 1832, first services conducted in December 1832, and consecration celebrated in June 1833.

## **RECTORS**

Among the many devoted rectors, several stand out, perhaps because of tenures during difficult times.

* The Rev. Robert Bean Sutton, 1860-1878; 'started Locust Hill Female Seminary; held services at the county poor house, in Haywood, and in Moore County; improved church building, making altar, communion rail, and lectern from native walnut, saw parish grow from 40 to 68 communicants.
* The Rev. Edmund N. Joyner, 1879-1883. During this period a mission and parochial school was established for African-Americans, which was named St. James. Expanded missions to Haywood, Lockville, Egypt, Sanford, and Brown's.
* The Rev. Royal Graham Shannonhouse, 1924-1949; wrote the first history of St. Bartholomew's to celebrate its one hundredth anniversary; over 200 attended the birthday party, with the choir led by Mrs. Shannonhouse; built four log houses (*still standing*) for low-cost rental to mill employees; extensive renovation of the church; ministered throughout county.
* The Rev. William Coolidge, 1981-1993; community projects such as solar energy retrofits, vegetable gardening, woodcutting, CORA (*food bank*); increase in communicant strength and return to full-time rector; newsletter started; participation in Pittsboro Street Fair.
* The Rev. Ida Louise Johnson, 2002-2004; first woman and first African-American to become rector.

## **THE EPISCOPAL CHURCHWOMEN**

Beginning as the “Working Society of the women” made improvements in the house of worship in 1837. They sang, held fairs, sewed, prayed, polished and even gave their own silver to be melted and made into a communion service.

* In 1880 in the *Church Messenger* (*now known as* ***The Disciple*** *published by the Diocese of North Carolina*) that the society had been organized for the purpose of aiding foreign missions and was responsible for an annual scholarship of $50 in aid for Bishop Charles C. Penick’s work in West Africa. (*Historical note: Penick Village in Southern Pines was built and named in honor of Bishop Edwin A. Penick*).
* In 1882 the society had resolved to become a branch of the Women’s Auxiliary. In 1892 the Thompson Orphanage Guild was organized at St. Bartholomew’s. The Thompson Orphanage Guild became a part of the Women’s Auxiliary to the board of missions, and still later, that group became the Episcopal Churchwomen. Thompson Orphanage is now known as the Thompson Child and Family Focus located centrally in Matthews, N.C. [www.thompsoncff.org](http://www.thompsoncff.org).
* Today the Episcopal Church Women of St. Bartholomew’s actively participating in the life of the Church and community is represented in the Durham Convocation of the Diocese of North Carolina.

## **THE CHURCHYARD**

Filled with stone and flora are monuments of those who have loved and served this little church. In the spring, all who visit will find a quiet garden of pink and white dogwood and azalea in bloom. All other times visitors will always find evergreens, ivy, boxwood and holly in addition to the birds and squirrels.

* The plantings of the cemetery are themselves a memorial to Henry Adolphus London (*1808 – 1882*) who placed many of them there long ago. A giant holly stands by his grave.
* Gravestones with the earliest death dates are those marking the resting places of William Boylan (*1806 – 1828*) graduate of the University of North Carolina living at Buck Horn plantation; Mary E. McClenahan, 3 months, who died in July 1830; and John Waddell (*1770 – 1830*).
* More than twenty persons buried at the church were soldiers in the Confederate Army some officers and some enlisted men.
* As one walks through the beautiful cemetery that is St. Bartholomew’s churchyard, it is hard not to believe that the real heroes that rest here are the mothers and fathers who gave so much to the church and the community.
* Many tiny graves tell a history of struggles by men and women during the past one hundred and eighty years, struggle to survive and grow in spirit, and to contribute to the well-being of generations to come.

## **ST. JAMES**

In response to the state’s enacted Jim Crow legislation St. James mission was established in 1879 for the colored people in Pittsboro under the supervision of the rector of St. Bartholomew’s. The Methodist parsonage was purchased for the use of the mission.

* One may be able to locate the metal stob marking a corner of the former tract which is now in the cemetery of the Pittsboro United Methodist Church.
* St. James Mission began ‘life’ as a parochial school for black children. While at the same time the building was necessary to serve as a worship center for black families who after *reconstruction* were active members of St. Bartholomew’s
* Rev. Mr. Joyner in his parochial report for 1882 remarked that “the mission was doing all we could expect, and its progress in many respect has been beyond the hopes we at first felt to entertain. This has been due…to the zeal and devotion of Mr. White, the Lay Missionary”. The property served as a schoolroom, chapel and living room for a teacher.
* In June 1882 Bishop Lyman visited and held a service and confirmed eight persons. The families that were the strength of St. James’ Mission in its early years were: Womack, Quince, Harris, Tinnen, Evans, Anderson, Ramsey, Alston, Bland, Crump and Council.
* Communicant strength at the end of 1963 was listed as 14, with 5 baptized children. St. James’ was built large in hope and expectation, but the communicant strength lessened and its very size made it impractical. By 1968 most of the communicants of St. James’ had found new ecclesiastical homes. Many became members of the St. Bartholomew’s family.

## **BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS**

• 1869: roof is reshingled and belfry fixed (*bell had been offered to the Confederacy but the offer was refused*) • 1875: rearrangement of altar in recessed chancel • 1889: new roof and bell tower; side galleries removed; pine beadboard installed on walls • 1938: entire church bricked; three rooms added for Sunday School; central heating installed • 1954: additional work on parish house • 1960: new sills; painting • 1978: plexiglass installed to protect stained glass windows • 1980s: cemetery surveyed, Saints Garden added • 1982: enlargement of parish hall; ramp built; renovation of kitchen • 1990s: planter added to Saints Garden • 1993: balcony renovation; replacement of sill; renovation of Pilcher organ • 1998: altar space enlarged and rearranged • 2006: rectory deconstructed; grounds cleaned up and benches added.

## **STAINED GLASS WINDOWS**

Visitors to St. Bartholomew’s view with wonder the stained glass windows designed as memorials to loved ones by those faithful parishioners who came before us. These faithful founders of the church memorialized their loved ones with scripture and beauty so that worshipers could also share in the history of the church.

## **LAY SERVICE**

A long list of generous, devout parishioners have served the church as wardens, vestry, committee members, Sunday School teachers and organizers, nursery volunteers, hospitality, grounds crew, members of Episcopal Churchwomen and Altar Guild, organists and choir, acolytes and their leaders, and ...

* The London family, beginning with William Lord London in the late 19th century and ending with John London in1981, has served on vestries and as officers both at St. Bartholomew's and in the diocese
* Peggy Harbison Williams was the first female senior warden, from 1982-1983.

### References

*St. Bartholomew's Parish, 1833-1983* by Martha Hope Smith, 1983

*Map and Index of the Church Cemetery* by Jane Pyle, 2003

"Frank Marsden London, Artist" by Bonnie Vargo and Ann Williams, *Chatham Historical Journal*, July 1992 and August 1992

“St. Mark's Chapel: Migratory and Enduring" by Wade Hadley, Jr., *Chatham Historical Journal*, November 1994

"The School-Girl" by Jane Pyle, *Chatham Historical Journal* April 2006

Clippings file, local history collection at Wren Memorial Library, Siler City (*e.g., rededication of St. Mark's, 1994, newspaper clippings about St. Mark's, 1960 brief history, articles from 1930s*)

Files of the Chatham County Historical Association, Chatham Historical Museum, [*old courthouse, Pittsboro*] (*e.g., 1933 history by Mr. Shannonhouse, recipe book by women of the church, oral history tapes, original issues of "The School-Girl", back issues of the* ***Chatham Historical Journal***)