

Letters

To the Editor of *Spritsail*,

I have read with keen interest your winter, 1996 issue about the stone church of the Church of the Messiah, of which I was the rector from 1962-67 and am now the parish historian. We are all very much indebted to Sally Loessel and Bill Burwell for their interesting and valuable interpretation of the church building, its structure, decoration and equipment and the historical context of the iconography and the construction of this romantic Gothic revival building.

Perhaps I can shed a little light on a few details.

The issue of where the stone for the church came from is not as difficult to solve as it seems.

In the archives of the church is an "Occasional Paper" published by the parish in November, 1888 which discusses the project of building then underway. One article dated Sept. 17, 1888, the date on which the cornerstone was laid, reads:

"The new edifice is being built of stone, quarried near at hand, on the site of the present wooden building. . ."

I am informed by Mr. Clarence Anderson, who is a stone cutter and the son of a stone cutter in Falmouth, that rose granite boulders were available in great numbers in Woods Hole especially in the area of what is now the Golf Course. Some of them were of immense size. (See *Cracking a Boulder* by Wedge, *Falmouth Enterprise* Jan. 12, 1973.) He says that there never was a quarry on the Cape but the word "quarrying" was used for cutting local stone. According to Mr. Anderson, the late Frank Handy told him that he had worked as a stone mason on the building of the church and had quarried some of the original stone.

It is conceivable that additional stone had to be found in quarries off Cape but the evidence I have does not support that thesis.

Mrs. Loessel's article contains a brilliant and scholarly analysis of the various styles of the furnishings of the church but is frustrated by the lack of documentation available to confirm the date and workshop responsible for many furnishings and stained glass windows.

In the Occasional Paper mentioned above, a statement is made that the plans of the work and the superintendence of the work are in the hands of Mr. W. P.

Wentworth of Boston. The objective was to "form a beautiful church, substantial in construction and correct in design."

The word "correct" is an important clue to the choice of materials and the probable way in which they were selected.

In the 1840s a completely new theory was created to determine how churches were to be planned, arranged and designed. It was the work of a group of "ecclesiologists" led by Dr. John Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb of Cambridge, England, and by Dr. John Jebb and Dr. Theodore Farquhar Hook, vicar of Leeds. Their theories were part of the "Tractarian" Movement, which sought to restore Catholicism within the Anglican Church particularly in regard to discipline, worship and ritual. These theories soon caught the imagination of the church in this Romantic period. They eventually revolutionized the appearance and arrangement of Anglican churches throughout the world.

They began with the belief that there is one specific style of church architecture in which every church must be built. Their model was derived from the cathedrals of the Middle Ages and specifically from the Gothic of the fourteenth century. They dismissed church buildings erected since then as debased or pagan. The ecclesiologists were especially incensed by the high-backed pews and the three-layered pulpits of the Georgian era.

Dr. Neale's mind was focused on the importance of symbolism. Churches had to embody "sacramentality", that is, they had to embody Christian truths in symbolic form. The ecclesiologically correct church must have a chancel and a nave. The chancel had to be divided into a choir and a sanctuary. They should be separated from each other by three steps. In this way the threefold nature of God would be embodied.

The altar was to be the focus of the entire church and all seating was to be arranged so that all could see and pray facing the altar. In this way, the sense of the mystery and awe of God would be induced in the congregation. Dr. Neale suggested that the altar should be raised by three flights of three steps above the level of the nave. Again, the purpose was to symbolize the Trinity. The font was to be placed at the door or near it in order to symbolize the truth that Baptism is the entrance into the Body of Christ. The font had formerly been placed near the altar and accessible to the whole congregation. However, the thought of unbaptized babies being near the center of the Holy, the altar, was thought to be improper if not scandalous.

The ecclesiologists recommended that the Minister read the lessons of Morning and Evening Prayer from the lectern in the nave, placed opposite the pulpit and

outside the chancel arch. It was to be in the form of an eagle. An eagle lectern had been used in the Middle Ages for reading the Gospel and for the Cantor during the singing of the daily offices.

A Litany Desk, called a faldstool, was to be placed either just below or just above the chancel steps. (The Litany having fallen into disuse along with many penitential practices, the desk is now used for a healing station at the back of the nave.)

The aim of these innovations was to call out from the lay people an attitude of awe and adoration. Services were to be offered by the clergy and by a surpliced choir who would conduct the services from the choir and sanctuary of the chancel. The vestments of the choir, which imitated clerical garb, were in fact an innovation of the Victorian era. The effect was to reduce the engagement and participation of the laity and to make them in a sense spectators of the performance of the clergy and those robed like them around and close to the altar. For a more complete discussion of the ecclesiologists one may refer to *The Architectural Setting of Anglican Worship*, by G.W.O. Addleshaw and Frederick Etchells, London 1948, Chapter VII.

These theories soon became popular in the United States. They coincided with the Romantic movement, the rise of Anglo-Catholicism and the era of industrial expansion and boom after the Civil War.

From the end of the Civil War until the beginning of World War I, the United States experienced an industrial and commercial boom that was unprecedented. The economy was growing at a rate of seven to ten per cent a year. It was often called the Gilded Age in token of the great wealth that was being accumulated in the hands of men of business.

Wealthy individuals underwrote the building of handsome church buildings in styles that were deemed to be "correct" styles. The federal style of church building typical of, say, Christ Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in which General Washington had worshipped was identified with deism and the Age of Reason. The Anglo-Catholic movement initiated by the Church of the Advent in Boston had many reverberations at a later date in furious controversies over matters of ritual and design in the period after the Civil War.

Bishop Eastburn of Massachusetts, who aided the first building project of the Church of the Messiah in Woods Hole declined to visit the Church of the Advent on the grounds that the congregation was involved in papist practices. He disapproved of candlesticks on the "Holy Table" as possibly idolatrous. By 1888, many of the practices recommended by the "High Church" group had become accepted.

In this trend it was only natural to try to recover the architecture of the pre-Reformation church.

Church redesign was by no means confined to Anglo-Catholics. Nor was the recovery of the Gothic style confined to churches. Memorial Hall at Harvard was built in Gothic style with stained glass to honor those who had served and died in the Civil War. Its wooden beams resemble those holding up the roof of the Church of the Messiah. Tiffany style glass was used to decorate the fashionable homes of the wealthy and the newly wealthy middle class. Trinity Church, Copley Square, built in 1873-77 is an exhibit of the architectural talent of Henry H. Richardson, whose recovery of the Romanesque style was enormously influential on public and private buildings throughout the country. Trinity Church was built in part as a recognition and celebration of the powerful preaching and ministry of Phillips Brooks, whose eloquence gained him international recognition. Brooks was not an Anglo-Catholic nor did he engage in theological controversies. He was Broad Church.

The Church of the Messiah and St. Barnabas Church in Falmouth are extensions into Cape Cod of the Bostonian architectural movement in which ancient styles were revived. Both of them refer back to English Gothic parish churches and reproduce modes of building and furnishings which reflect, as Mrs. Loessel pointed out, earlier theologies, symbolism, iconography and building furnishings.

The difficulty of such a revival is that the circumstances of 1888 were very different from those of the medieval times. Before the Reformation, a third of the people of England were in monastic orders. The daily offices were sung antiphonally in divided chancels. The "mass" was said or sung facing east in a "tongue not comprehended of the people." The action of the mass could be completed by the priest without a congregation. Since few members of the laity could read or write, the stained glass windows were a device for telling the story of God's love in pictures for the people He had chosen.

When the style of the Middle Ages is reproduced in a setting of literacy and a scarcity of monastics and clergy and entirely different congregational life, the strange results emerge. The emphasis tends to be on the beauty of the stained glass rather than its iconography or message.

When choirs sing facing each other but are singing choral harmony, the result is more difficult than it would be if the choir were facing the audience together as it does in concerts or if it were in a balcony behind the congregation in which it would be supporting the congregation's singing of popular hymns.

The emphasis on beauty may be illustrated by the use of figure of Christ and the woman at the well of Samaria which is over the altar. Mrs. Loessel has noted the naturalistic rendering of the landscape in the Tiffany-style window over the altar. The reason for the choice of that particular incident is not the message or symbol it conveys. Rather, it was chosen because it is one of the few places in the New Testament where the word Messiah is used to refer to Jesus. The writer of the Gospel of John uses the incident of the woman at the well to describe Christ as the Living Water, a reference to the gift of the Spirit in Baptism. It is therefore curious that the stained glass that refers to Christ's gift of Himself in the Eucharist is in the Baptistry while the symbol of Baptism is over the altar.

The explanation, of course, is that Mr. Jeremiah Hopkins, one of the few Episcopalians in the original founders of the parish, had been a member of the Church of the Messiah in Boston. Parishioners from the Boston parish had raised a substantial sum for the first church. The name of the church therefore honored that memory and determined the subject of the most prominent stained glass window.

The stone church was Mr. Fay's gift but his initiative produced many other gifts toward the furnishings. When the church was dedicated in July, 1889, a brass plaque was installed to memorialize these gifts and is visible on the west wall of the nave. These gifts were listed as follows:

Altar	Mrs. Marion Foster
Lectern	Mr. Francis Foster
Organ	Women of the Parish
Pulpit	Church Work Association
Cross	Church Work Association
Vases	Church Work Association
Candlesticks on the Altar	Church Work Association
Chancel Rail and furniture	Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Fay, Jr.
Windows except for the Baptistry	Miss Sarah B. Fay
Brass Alms Basin	The Rev. George S. Converse
Baptistry windows, originally in the chancel of the Old Church	The Rev. Benjamin Gifford
The font	Mr. and Mrs. H. H. Fay
The cross on the west wall, originally surmounting the belfry of the old church	Mrs. Martha W. Parsons

It is reasonably clear that Mr. Fay's approval was sought by the Church Work Association for its memorial gift of the pulpit in honor of the Rev. Charles McIlvaine Nicholson, the rector of the church in the early 1880s.

The design of the pulpit was done by W. P. Wentworth, the architect of the church building. It is clear that the design of the chancel rail in front of the altar carries out Wentworth's design for the pulpit through the use of the similar figures, a vine with threefold leaves, again symbolizing the Trinity.

I find it hard to believe that Mr. Wentworth and Mr. Fay did not have a clear influence and voice on the choice of all of the furnishings mentioned above in order to ensure that it was "correct." It seems probable in any case that the major items of furnishing listed above are still in the church and that they can be dated as created in 1888-89.

There is one other matter, however, the organ.

According to the Occasional Paper of November, 1888, a fund was started in March, 1885 for the purpose of "putting a good pipe organ in the church, by a few earnest church women of the parish. . . The rector has been authorized to make arrangements for having a suitable instrument built."

We have a note in the files from Henry H. Neale, the then rector, requesting a check for \$1750 to pay in full the expenses of the erection of the organ in the church.

The organ was constructed and installed by Mr. George S. Hutchings of Boston as Opus 196. It was not a Baroque organ at that time. Its pipes were nicked in order to produce a soft and mellow sound that was in favor during the Victorian era. The pipes and the apparatus were enclosed entirely within a large space to the right of the chancel and none of the pipes was outside the pointed arch.

By 1960 the organ which was a tracker design had come close to collapsing of old age. A tracker organ employs a direct connection between the keys and pedals and the opening of the various pipes. By 1960 it was held together by such expedients as hair pins and rubber bands and chewing gum. It had roughly 600 pipes and nine or ten stops.

Patricia Brown, our organist at the time, was a superb musician with a particular interest in the music of the Baroque period. She described the Hutchings organ in its final stages as sounding like "alligators."

By 1962, an organ fund of over \$19,000 had been organized and the vestry had authorized a contract with the Schlicker Organ Company of Buffalo, New York. It was not until the end of 1963, however, that Mr. Schlicker arrived to disassemble the organ and take it back to his workshop for repairs, reconfiguration and the addition of new stops. The objective was to improve the tonal quality and to increase the capacity and the flexibility of the instrument. One stop, the

Salicional, was kept intact from the Hutchings organ. A number of the original stops were revoiced by removing the nickings which were part of the Hutchings design. Stops were added to the pedal and mixtures to the Great and the Swell. The organ pipes when they are opened have a characteristic "chuff" sound that is a bit percussive. It is a sound that is typical of the tracker organ of the Baroque period.

From the end of 1963 until September of 1964, the parish had an empty organ loft. Pat Brown and the choir used a small reed organ for musical accompaniment.

We used the interval to try out a different arrangement of the chancel. We built an hexagonal platform in the chancel, built a rail around it and moved the altar down to the middle of what is now the choir. We took some of the altar platforms away. The choir sang from behind the altar facing the congregation.

When Mr. Schlicker and his crew returned in September of 1964, we could not use the church for three weeks because 900 pipes were laid out across the pews while the organ was being reassembled. We enjoyed the hospitality of St. Barnabas parish in that period.

In the end, we decided with the help of the Worship Commission to return the altar to its east-end position but to leave an adequate space between it and the reredos so that the celebrant could celebrate from behind the altar facing the congregation. This was a restoration of a very ancient practice from the centuries before the Medieval time. We relined the organ loft with plywood to make it more resonant. Through the generosity of Brackett and Sally Hersey, the entire chancel and choir were redone in red Vermont slate to make the space more "live." Mr. Schlicker mounted some of the pipes outside the organ chamber with a similar objective.

The number of steps under the altar was reduced so that those serving at the Eucharist could move about it without danger of tripping or falling. The choir, however, was returned to the divided chancel.

The discussion of the possibilities had surfaced a great many divergent and strongly held views. One imposing summer resident told the Worship Commission that to have the choir face the congregation was a Baptist practice and that all proper Episcopal churches had seven steps leading to the altar. When I informed her son of this remark years later, he laughed and said, "That's funny. She was a Presbyterian."

Twenty years later, in 1985, Tom Renshaw, of Woods Hole, assisted by George White, created new paneling behind the altar from white oak to replace the

temporary plywood paneling which had been used to cover the hole left when the altar was separated from the reredos. The craftsmanship is so exquisite that it is almost impossible to distinguish it from the older paneling on either side of it.

In 1989 the stone church celebrated 100 years of its existence. This centennial gave the impetus for more renovations of the organ and the addition of a Great Principal stop by the Andover Organ Company. Robert Newton, the Andover Director for Old Organs and Marsha Zafiriou, our current Organist, planned the work, which was completed in April, 1990. The complete list of stops, which now number 18, is found in the bulletin of the Henry Lowe Organ Recital, celebrating the new ministry of Myrick Cross, the present Rector, May 11, 1990.

The beauty of the church building and its organ grows on one and its space has provided a welcome place for worship, inspiration, weddings, music and meditation. Those who seek serenity and the beauty of music can find it here. However, this church and that of St. Barnabas remain as unique examples of high architecture in the Gilded Age imported from Boston. They have not been copied or imitated elsewhere on the Cape.

Larger Episcopal churches have emerged in Barnstable, Yarmouth, Chatham, Orleans and Sandwich. They have tended to employ the vocabulary of typical Cape domestic architecture: weathered shingles, clapboard and siding of wood; cozy rooms and interiors. One reason for this is that the hand-crafted stone masonry of this sort is probably a dying art, although rose pink Falmouth granite continues to be used in memorials such as John Kennedy's in Arlington cemetery. Beautiful and romantic the church is but it is also expensive to maintain and safeguard it from the Cape's wet weather. It would be prohibitively expensive to recreate something like it today.

In some ways, the church might be viewed as an exhibitionistic program by a wealthy Boston merchant and his family. Joseph Story Fay had almost single handedly provided most of the financial resources to the parish to enable it to survive in its early days. Without his subsidizing of the rector's salaries, the church would not have survived. He foresaw that the building would require more maintenance than the parish could afford and so in his will he provided an endowment for it. In the end, the Fay Fund has not been enough, thoughtful foresight though it was. In some ways, an unhealthy dependency on a few wealthy members may have developed.

Yet it must be remembered that Mr. Fay felt that he was giving back what had been given him in trust. It was only temporarily his. His wealth was a gift from

God. He did not want to worship God without contributing to the costs of doing so. The plaque on the west wall has two scripture references which are worth quoting:

One is from the prayer of King David: "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come of thee, and of thy own have we given thee." 1 Chron. 29:14.

The other is also a quotation from David when he desired to buy the threshing floor of a man named Araunah, in order to build an altar in Jerusalem: "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord, my God, which cost me nothing." II Samuel 24:24.

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