

Expanded Parish History (through 1987)

The following narrative was compiled from two parish histories housed in the church archives. The narrative from 1876 to 1929 is a harmonization of an anonymous 1929 history and a history compiled by Mrs. Olin (Kathleen) Bates in 1977. The narrative from 1929 to the early 1960 's, when the period of significance for National Register purposes ends, is a slightly modified and abbreviated version of Mrs. Bates' compilation. Both narratives are from the church archives.

Adapted from the anonymous 1929 history:

The earliest information available on the foundation of St. James' Episcopal Church comes from Mr. and Mrs. Seaborn Jones, and Miss Kate Booz, Cedartown residents in the 1870s. Within their memory, the congregation's first services were conducted by the Rev. Mr. Epps, rector of the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd in Cave Springs. They met in the Presbyterian Church, which at that time stood approximately at the southwest corner of Herbert and Philpot Streets. The approximate dates for Mr. Epps' assistance to the Episcopal congregation are 1876-1877. From 1878-82, the Rev., H.K. Rees of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Cave Spring presided over services in Prof. Snow's Music Hall, near or in the building that is now 305 Main St. Around this time, members decided to construct a permanent church building.

Amos G. West, a prosperous, northern iron master who had built the Cherokee Iron Works in Cedartown in 1873, agreed to allow a church to be built on his land on Cherokee Street, now West Avenue, and to match in labor and material any amount raised by the congregation. The church, completed in 1883, was named St. James' after Mrs. West's home parish on Madison Avenue in New York City. Of all the congregations in Cedartown dating from the nineteenth century, St. James' is the only one occupying its original building. Upon Mr. West's death in 1892, his heirs deeded the property and building to the Diocese of Atlanta.

In 1891, St. James' applied to the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia to be admitted as a parish, a request granted on May 14, 1892. In 1883, the church secured its first full-time rector, the Rev. J. P. Lytton of St. Louis,

Missouri, about whom little is known. He was soon succeeded by the Rev. George Elliott Benedict, who became rector of St. James' Church while also serving the Church of the Ascension in Cartersville, and the Church of the Good Shepherd in Cave Spring. He continued to serve the three churches until 1897.

During his tenure as rector, Rev. Benedict established the Samuel Benedict Memorial School about two miles south of Cedartown, in the area still known as "Benedict." The school provided an excellent secondary education, and had a dynamic social and cultural impact on the community.

In 1903, the Rev. John S. Lightbourn was called to succeed Rev. Benedict. He was a musician who stimulated the choir, and made a lasting impression on the parish. He remained only until 1904, and Rev. Benedict assisted the parish from time to time until 1909. During his time in Cedartown, Benedict also served as Polk County School Superintendent.

In 1907, due to its having grown too large to be served by one Bishop, the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia was split in two, and the northwestern part of the State, including St. James' Church and twenty-seven other parishes and missions came under the jurisdiction of the new Diocese of Atlanta.

In 1909, the Rev. C. A. Ferdinand Ruge, a native of Germany and graduate of a German university, became rector. He was noted as an excellent musician, and for his scholarly sermons. His influence on music in the parish persisted after his departure in 1913, as noted by his successor, the Rev. J. Thomas Murrish, who served until 1917. The Reverend C. P. Wilcox became rector in the following year, and remained until 1922. Mr. Wilcox was active with young people, and established a boys' club for boys of the parish and the town. He was succeeded in July of 1924 by the Rev. William Francis Moses, a young and enthusiastic graduate of the University of the South, who served as a deacon until his ordination to the priesthood on February 15, 1925. His was the first ordination in the church. He was known for his talent and devotion, and was later consecrated bishop of a Florida diocese.

After the Rev. Moses' departure in November of 1928, the Rev. Randolph Royall Claiborne began his ministry at St. James' Church as a seminarian in the summer of 1929. During his summer in Cedartown he spent his time with parishioners, many of whom became his life-long friends. Rev.

Claiborne was eventually elected Bishop of Atlanta.

Adapted from Mrs. Bates' history:

During another time when St. James' had no priest, the Rev. James Dundan, rector of St. Peters' Episcopal Church in Rome offered his assistance on many occasions. He later became the Bishop of a Florida diocese.

Bishop John Walthour preached his last sermon at St. James' during the decade of the thirties when, at times, the parish had no priest at all. In 1934, there was no priest and no church school, but the spirit of the church remained undaunted. Dora Young started a Sunday School with three young nieces. The men managed the church affairs and the women kept the lines of communication open. In 1941 John Breckenridge Hunt, a seminarian at Sewanee, began to conduct services. He eventually moved his family to Cedartown while he was in Seminary. His sprightly spirit was contagious and he became much beloved by the congregation. Although he entered Sewanee from the Diocese of Florida, after his graduation he came to Cedartown, through an arrangement by the Bishops of Florida and Atlanta. His twenty years saw much growth in the parish, both physically and spiritually. The Sunday School was coaxed into growth, and around the time of World War II an army barracks was purchased and remodeled into a Parish Hall for which the men built pews and dividing screens. An electronic organ was purchased for the church building, replacing the pump organ. Stained glass windows, chandeliers, a heating system, and a new study, which is now the sacristy, were added. The choir became full and joyful, and the Christmas Eve Service became a community event. The Churchwomen were active in the Diocese. The Hunt family interacted with the community and with the congregation. Bishop Walker took an interest in Mrs. Hunt's unusual talent with art and sculpture. She attended the High Museum of Art during the week and lived in the Bishop's house, commuting to Cedartown for the weekend. She later taught art classes for private students in Cedartown.

As the years passed, Father Hunt's health became a source of great anxiety to the congregation. His bronchial disorders and his fast-failing hearing and eyesight made it difficult for him to conduct services and to preach. His spirit remained undaunted. He continued to be a vital pastor to this flock, and to counsel not only members of his congregation, but

many people in the community. By the early sixties, however, it was evident that a change would have to be made if St. James' were to go forward. The services were being held by a lay-reader, and Rev. Hunt was growing less and less able to function. With a great deal of soul-searching and pain, the decision was finally reached that he should retire. He is still beloved by those who knew him, and his spirit of caring and personal involvement stand as an example for those who follow.

In the summer of 1962, the Rev. Helon L. Chichester came to Cedartown as a newly ordained deacon and a graduate of College Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley, California. After a year, he was ordained to the priesthood at St. James' with the eminent Reverend Massey Shepard preaching the ordination sermon. Mr. Chichester brought with him all the verve of the seminarian and a vast amount of ability in Christian Education. One by one he brought new ideas into our midst. He was ten years ahead of Cedartown, and St. James' was five or ten years behind what had been happening in the national Church. The next three years proved to be filled with activity, enthusiasm, tension, conflict, joy, and pain.

The parish was introduced to the Church's Teaching Series, to new concepts of worship, to the Seabury series of Church School literature. There was intense training for Church School teachers and parishioners became aware of new concepts they had never even thought of. For the first time, many of them found themselves involved in Christian Education as adults. Childhood beliefs were coaxed into mature attitudes and decisions. "Journey in Faith," intensive weekends, prayer groups, and the theological influences of the sixties: Rouel Howe, Paul Tournier, Massey Shepherd, James Pike, Stephen Bayne, and Rodenmeyer became household words. Under the instigation of the rector, and the leadership of the senior warden, St. James' became involved in the Christian Giving Program, and we embraced new concepts of stewardship and worship as a total way of life, to be celebrated with joy together on Sunday mornings. The results were astounding in a very concrete way: Parish pledges soared. Communicants grew to 100 confirmed, and 150 baptized. In 1964, the Wood House adjacent to the Church was purchased and decorated and used for classes and study groups.

All this innovation was not without upheaval. Fr. Chichester did not always fit the image of a priest in a small town, neither to the town nor to some of the congregation. Changing lifelong religious traditions in a short time is

not easy. The church and the world were in transition. St. James' had black communicants very early in the Civil Rights movement. The Rector's wife and a parish member worked at Head Start.

After three years Fr. Chichester was called to All Saints' Church in Beverly Hills, California, where he became Christian Education Director. During those three years many people had learned the meaning of Christian Community, total giving of self and treasures, and experiencing Christianity as a joyful expression of life. Others felt alienated and it was apparent that an ideological rift that was felt in the national church and in the Diocese was causing problems in Cedartown.

During the interim after Fr. Chichester left in July of 1965, St. James' experienced a remarkable three months when Father Robert Parker, a retired priest, came into their midst like a whirlwind. He whipped them into action with all the energy and excitement of a dynamo. He and Mrs. Parker brought a spark of life and zeal and activity to the parish, and everyone hated to see them go.

From 1965 to 1985 adapted from Mrs. Bates' History

In January of 1966, the Rev. William O. Boyd came to St. James' from the Diocese of Tennessee, and stayed for about five years. During this time, Mr. Boyd successfully led the congregation to accept the "Green Book" of proposed revisions to the Book of Common Prayer through frequent use and careful teaching.

After Rev. Boyd left to answer a call to Washington, Georgia, St. James' was again without a rector for a few months. In 1972, Bishop Wood appointed the Rev. Nathaniel Massey to serve both St. James' and the Church of the Transfiguration in Rome. Mr. Massey lived in Rome and spent two days a week in Cedartown, holding St. James' Sunday service at 9:30 a.m. Eventually, this arrangement began to undermine the vitality of both the church and its rector, and for this and many other reasons, attendance dropped to its lowest level in many years. Pledges dwindled and for two years St. James' did not pay its diocesan assessment. Bennett Sims, Bishop of Atlanta, called the congregation to task and asked that they demonstrate why St. James' should continue to exist. With the assistance of a consultant, Mrs. Caroline Hughes, the Wardens, Vestry and members of the congregation produced a history of the parish, and through

small discussion groups assessed where they were, and where they wanted to go. The Bishop nonetheless decided to close the church, but pondered his decision as he drove to Cedartown to bring the Vestry the news. At the meeting with the Vestry, Bishop Sims discovered that the congregation had taken hold of its destiny. Among other things, the parish had instituted a successful face-to-face stewardship plan and established a Thrift Shop organized by the Episcopal Churchwomen. Bishop Sims not only changed his mind about closing the church but asked to conduct the Christmas Eve Service of 1977.

The service found the church in dire repair. The paint was peeling, the roof was leaking, and the wood was rotting in places. The parish house (AKA the Wood House) looked shabby inside and out. Candles were lit throughout not only for the festivities, but to hide the sad state of disrepair. In spite of all, the church was filled with people - both members and visitors who had come to share in the celebration. The people of St. James' had at last claimed ownership of their faith and ministry.

During the service, Bishop Sims announced that he had appointed the Rev. James A. Callahan, a deacon at St. Bede's in Atlanta, to be the Vicar of St. James' as of January 1, 1978. As a non-stipendiary priest, Rev. Callahan continued to live and work in Atlanta, devoting his weekends and many week nights to St. James'. During his tenure, the diocese discontinued financial aid to the parish, which assumed responsibility for his salary and expenses. Under the Rev. Callahan, attendance at St. James surged, the parish became financially healthy, and the church was painted inside and out.

In 1982, Rev. Callahan accepted a full-time Rectorship in Carrollton, but for many months continued as Vicar at St. James', holding evening services on Sunday, and ministering to the congregation as pastor and preacher. Because he was loved by so many people, no one wanted the association to end, but the arrangement became difficult for all parties concerned, and St. James' was once again without a Vicar.

The Vestry appealed to the Department of Congregational Development for financial assistance to hire a full-time priest who would live in Cedartown. The Diocesan Council gave its approval in January of 1983 and, at the behest of Bishop Judson Child, the congregation began the search process. In October of 1983, the Rev. Charles Girardeau, a newly

ordained priest and assistant at Trinity Church in Columbus, was called as Vicar.

The next three-and-a-half years produced numerous changes at St. James' Church. The visible, ongoing presence of a full-time clergyman was a welcome change, both for the church and the entire community. Once again, St. James' was represented in the Ministerial Association, which led to participation in community worship services and outreach, culminating in an ecumenical food program at Samaritan House (a downtown charity operated by local churches), and a monthly, week-long soup kitchen. As Rev. Girardeau became familiar in Cedartown, St. James' Church became more visible in the community.

During this time, the parish house (AKA the Wood House) was completely repaired, and sided in vinyl. Most of the rooms were repainted, much of the furniture was refinished, and a small library was gathered. The parking area was paved, and the Sunday School building was paneled inside. The aisle of the church was re-carpeted and the altar was moved forward to be free-standing. In 1983-84, St. James' celebrated the centennial of the church building. In March of 1987, Rev. Girardeau left St. James' Church to accept a call as Rector of Holy Trinity Church in Decatur.

And the history of St. James' Cedartown continues to evolve... *so stay tuned!*