

**WASHINGTON'S CHURCH. AN  
HISTORICAL SKETCH OF OLD CHRIST  
CHURCH, ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA,  
TOGETHER WITH A BRIEF DESCRIPTION  
OF THE CENTENARY SERVICES THEREIN,  
NOVEMBER 20 AND 21ST, 1873**

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Washington's church. An historical sketch of Old Christ Church, Alexandria, Virginia, together with a brief description of the centenary services therein, November 20 and 21st, 1873 by Various

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**VARIOUS**

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ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA :

PUBLISHED AND SOLD FOR REPAIRS TO THE CHURCH.

—1888.—



## INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT.

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**I**N OFFERING the following pages to the public it is proper to give a brief outline of the character of the religious services which celebrated the Centennial Anniversary of our Church.

At an early hour on the evening of Thursday, the 20th of November, 1873, a large congregation had assembled, eager to witness the interesting ceremonies. Many may indeed have been drawn by no higher motive than curiosity; but the hearts even of these must have been solemnized by the chaste, beautiful and suggestive decoration which decked those venerable walls.

Appropriate texts from God's Holy Word met the eye on every side, telling us we were no idle spectators of a drama, but actors in a living present, linked with those scenes which have no "dead past," and whose future stretches on to the Throne of the Great Eternal. On the north wall of the Church we read, in letters of living green, "REMEMBER ALL THE WAY THE LORD THY GOD HATH LED THEE," words which gave to our Centenary the sanction of a divine command. High above the Chancel grateful hearts had raised an "EBENEZER," and written in strong relief, "HITHERTO HATH THE LORD HELPED US;" a devout and loyal recognition of the loving kindness of a century. And as past mercies are a pledge of future good, Faith had written on the southern wall, "SHE SHALL STILL BRING FORTH FRUIT IN OLD AGE;" while over the gates of our Sanctuary rose the aspiration of every heart, "PEACE BE WITHIN THY WALLS." Over the mural tablet of Washington, on the north of the Chancel, was the text, "THE LAW OF HIS GOD WAS IN HIS HEART," and beneath, the words, "ELECTED VESTRYMEN OF THIS PARISH, A. D. 1765," while the marble itself was adorned with a wreath and cross of pure white flowers. On the south over Lee's tablet, "MARK THE PERFECT MAN, AND BEHOLD THE UPRIGHT;" underneath, "CONFIRMED IN THIS CHURCH, A. D. 1853." On this too was placed, as a tribute to his great leader, from one of his surviving soldiers, a floral wreath and anchor. Three gothic arches, covered with evergreens, formed a perspective in the Chancel, the centre

one surmounted by a cross, three feet high, of flowers of God's creation. From this centre arch were suspended the words in large text, "CHRIST CHURCH." From either side arch, the dates 1773 (Old English) and 1873 (Modern), all formed with evergreens and white flowers. Above "Christ Church," in the centre arch, was a gas star, and below, just above the Communion Table, in letters of shining white, Earth's purest emblem of that purer robe we are to wear at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the old, familiar words, "ANGELS, AND LIVING SAINTS AND DEAD, BUT ONE COMMUNION MAKE." The Bible and Prayer Book of olden times were used on this occasion; the former once Washington's and presented to the Church by G. W. P. Custis, Esq., of Arlington, in 1804. On the table were the old Parish Registers, dating back to 1765, and copies of the "Contract for Building the Church," and of "The Act of Consecration." The full Evening Service was read; the lessons being selected from Deut. iv. 1-10, 25-40, and Hebrews xi.

After the hymn, "I love Thy Church O God," the Rector read the following "Historical Sketch."

The Rev. Philip Slaughter was then introduced, who celebrated the old Church and its worthies in verse, which we will not trust ourselves to characterize further than to say that it was to the full worthy of its high theme. We will only add that the recital of the poem electrified the crowded congregation and kindled an enthusiasm which was with difficulty restrained by the sacredness of the place.\*

The services of the first evening closed with the hymn, "Lo, what a cloud of witnesses, etc." Nor must we omit our tribute to the beautiful music which made another charming feature of the occasion.

But what word painting can give an idea of the second evening, when the Holy Communion was administered, and many, who for years had been separated, joined voice and soul in the service for "All Saints' Day." Children of the Church, whose paths in life had led them far apart, met together once more, to kneel at their Father's Board.

Even a more densely crowded attendance than the previous night marked the increased interest. The services were in full harmony with the occasion, beginning with the hymn, "O Paradise, O Paradise." Then the Ante-Communion Service was read, and the hymn, "Hark! the sound of holy voices."

\* We regret our inability to present this beautiful poem to the public. Neither the official request of the Vestry nor the most earnest private solicitations have been able to overcome the author's too modest estimate of its merit.

The Rector struck the key note of the rich prelude to the service by quoting, "Angels, and living saints, etc." which vibrated through all hearts and tuned them to unison, as chord after chord was touched, waking sweetest memories, highest resolves, purest hopes. He was followed by Rev. Cornelius Walker, D. D., (a former Rector) and Rev. Philip Slaughter, each leading our thoughts from the Communion of the Church below to that time of Christ's own promise, when in our Father's Kingdom we shall drink anew of the fruit of the vine. This deeply impressive service influenced all present. The large congregation remained through the entire Communion. An unusual stillness reigned and it was observed that many, after communicating, seemed to forget to rise from the Chancel rail—so absorbed were they by the holy memories and meditations of the occasion.

It seemed most fitting that the services of the following Sunday should catch the sweet echo of that glad time, and that as we crossed the boundary of another century we should hear the words of the Lord, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward."\*

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\*This was the text of the sermon preached the following Sunday by the Rector, that day marking the close of the sixth year of his Pastorate of this Church.



**OLD CHRIST CHURCH.**

## HISTORICAL DISCOURSE.

BY THE RECTOR, REV. RANDOLPH H. McKIM.

"THOU SHALT REMEMBER ALL THE WAY WHICH THE LORD THY  
GOD LED THEE."—*Deut. viii. 2.*

**W**E ARE here to-night, my brethren, to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the day when these venerable walls were married to the services of our Holy Religion. We gather like children and grandchildren around their aged mother to commemorate her wedding day, to place affection's crown upon her dear old brow, and to invoke Heaven's choicest blessing upon her declining years.

The Present is ever the daughter of the Past, and therefore, there is something of the sacredness of a *filial affection* in the instinct which prompts us to do honor to ancient buildings and relics of the past. And although we have here no "massive walls whose date o'erawes tradition," nor ancient minster, which claims and holds the sacred dust of kings, heroes and sages of the olden time, yet is this sacred building, (simple and unadorned in its architecture, a building of yesterday by comparison with the cathedrals and abbeys and castles of the old world,) possessed of a history truly illustrious and which well deserves commemoration. But we are here not merely to gratify an instinct, however sacred, nor to indulge a sentiment, however hallowed, but to sit at the feet of the Past, as it is represented and embodied in this sacred edifice, and listen to the lessons it may teach. "'Tis greatly wise," says the poet, "to talk with our past years;" and a greater than Young has said, by inspired authority, "Ask now of the days that are past." It is this which we wish now to do—to listen to the story of a century—to remember all the way which the Lord our God hath led us, and our fathers, in this Holy Place, for an hundred years. It may be that contact with the past will quicken our souls to anew life for God, new gratitude for His goodness, new zeal in His service, even as the dead man revived when his body touched the bones of the prophet.

On such an occasion it would be proper that "Days should speak and multitude of years" declare the story of the past: but it falls to my lot, as Rector of this Church, to endeavor, as best I may, to sketch its history this evening. If I can gather but a few of the ripe lessons which cluster thick about these venerable walls we shall not have met here in vain to-night.

On the first day of February, 1765, by virtue of an act passed the previous year, (being the 4th, George III.) the Parish of Fairfax was created out of a portion of the Parish of Truro. On the 28th of March, the same year, a vestry was chosen, consisting of twelve gentlemen, one of whom was Col. GEORGE WASHINGTON, then just thirty-three years of age. His name stands *fifth* on the list, he receiving two hundred and seventy-four votes; while John West receives three hundred and forty, Chas. Alexander three hundred and nine, William Payne three hundred and four, and John Dalton two hundred and eighty-one.\* It appears thus that the Parish organization dates back one hundred and eight years, and it further appears from the records that there were two churches then in the Parish, doubtless of a very early date. The one at the Falls, known as "Falls Church," and the other at Alexandria, known as "The Lower Church."† The exact situation of the latter building is unknown, but it appears quite certain that it did not occupy the site of the present edifice. If tradition can be relied on, the Church at the Falls was the Parish Church, and the one at this place "The Chapel of Ease." The respective dignity of the two churches is indicated by the comparative emoluments of the office of sexton in the same; for, in the year 1766, Gerrard Tramill, sexton at the Falls Church, receives a salary of five hundred and sixty pounds of tobacco, while John Rhodes, sexton at Alexandria, receives only five hundred pounds of the same article!

That the Chapel at Alexandria was neither a very elegant nor a very substantial structure may be inferred from the fact that, upon the completion of the new Church at the Falls, the old structure at that place was sold by the Vestry for £7 10s.

\* The first record in the Vestry book bears date August 26, 1765, and Washington's name is not on the list of Vestrymen. Probably he found it more convenient or deemed it more important to act as Vestryman for Truro Parish, to which he was elected the same year, and so "may have" resigned his place in the Vestry of Fairfax.

† Through the kindness of the CENTURY Co., we are able to insert a wood cut of Old Pohick Church, which, being nearer to Mt. Vernon, enjoyed more of Washington's fostering care than even Christ Church, Alexandria. The two churches are twin sisters; of each Washington was elected Vestryman; in each he was a frequent worshipper. It is said that Old Pohick, then a ruin, suggested Bishop Cox's ballad, "Old Churches." At the request of a friend we append a verse or two: