

Core Values and Mission Statement

Flourishing ~ Family ~ Community

To bear witness to the Spirit of God we see in Jesus as an Episcopal community open to all, centered in worship, Christian education, table fellowship, care for the environment, and compassion for neighbors local and global.

The Rev'd Bradford Clark, Rector



Circa 1920

Sunday Morning Services 8:00 & 10:15

31 County Street
PO Box 547
Ipswich MA 01938

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¹Nichols, A. Sumner. "Ascension Memorial Church Seventy-Fifth Anniversary, 1869-1944 bulletin: An Historical Sketch of Ascension Memorial Church." Ipswich: Ascension Memorial Church, 1944.

²Waters, Thomas Franklin. "Ipswich in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Volume II: Chapter XXIX, A History of the Town from 1700 to 1917." Ipswich: The Ipswich Historical Society, 1917. pp. 647-655.

³Parish record of the Church of the Ascension [April 22, 1867 to April 9, 1892].

⁴Parish Register 1867-1892 [and historical notes from 1861-1878].

⁵Record of Services held in the Church of the Ascension, Ipswich, Mass. from Sunday June 25th 1878 to [Sunday January 29, 1893].

The church was named The Church of the Ascension when the parish first organized, then later changed to Ascension Church.

Early photographs from Ascension Memorial's archives.

Dr. Bomer's memorial window photographed by Ian Barg in March 2020.

Ascension Memorial Episcopal Church

The Early Years



Dr. Joseph E. Bomer
memorial window

Ascension Memorial Church owes its inception to the devotion and enthusiasm of Dr. Joseph E. Bomer, a resident physician of Ipswich, whose memorial window may be seen on the Epistle side of the chancel.¹

"Realizing the need for an Episcopal Church in this historic community he enlisted the assistance of his young friend John F. Clothey. Their combined efforts started the movement which led to the formation of our present parish.

"The first Episcopal service was held on May 5, 1861, in the recently built Methodist Episcopal Church where Mrs. Bomer [formerly Miss Caroline E. Hayes of Gloucester] was acting as organist. The use of the Church was kindly extended by the Trustees and their choir assisted in the service. The officiating clergyman was the Rev. Robert F. Chase of Calvary Church, Danvers.

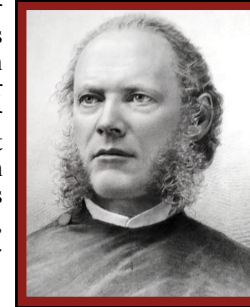
"During these Civil War years [1861-1865] and until the latter part of 1864, services were held intermittently whenever a priest could be obtained. In the meantime these efforts had aroused the interest of both the Rev. John Cotton Smith, D. D. [Rector of the Church of the Ascension in New York City], whose summer home was located in Ipswich, and his brother-in-law, Daniel Fuller Appleton of Appleton Farms. With their encouragement and support, regular services were started in the old Court House, then fallen into disuse, which was refitted for the purpose. At this time Mrs. Bomer became the organist, a position which she held for twenty-seven years.

"Inspired by the efforts of these devoted men and the support of many faithful families, Dr. Smith offered to personally raise money to build a Church in Ipswich. He proposed that it should stand near the South Cemetery but this was not found to be feasible.

"The year 1864 marked the death of Dr. Bomer amid widespread regret that he could not witness the completion of the work he had begun; however the work continued with enthusiasm and a preliminary meeting looking toward the formation of a Parish was held at the home of Mrs. Bomer.... Mr. John Worth was chairman of this meeting and a committee headed by Josiah H. Mann was appointed to draft a set of by-laws. On February 7, 1867, the first formal meeting of the Parish was held at the home of Mr. Worth...."²

Officers elected were Wardens John Worth and John F. Clothey, seven Vestrymen including Daniel F. Appleton, and a Treasurer and Clerk.³

"A report of the committee on by-laws was accepted. No further records of this period exist but it is probable that at this meeting a call was extended to the Rev. Henry Wall who had been one of the officiating priests and he became the first rector of the parish. His tenure of office was very short, however, and in less than a year's time he was succeeded by the Rev. B. R. Gifford [whose rectorship began in November of 1867].



Rev. John Cotton Smith, D.D.
"Founding Father"

"In 1868 the property on County Street owned by Mrs. Mary Ackermann, upon which the Church building now stands, was given* to the Parish by Mr. John Heard."⁴

"The Rt. Rev. Manton Eastburn, assisted by the Rector, the Rev. B. R. Gifford, laid the Corner Stone of the Church Edifice, Tues. P.M. Oct. 26th, 1869. The ceremonies were exceedingly impressive, and as the weather was favorable, a large concourse of people were assembled. The Bishop's address was very effective. The Reverends J. C. White of Newburyport, P. B. Morgan of Chelsea and R. Kidner of Salem were present on the occasion."⁴

Then the foundation was laid by "Mr. Roberts, a Master Mason of the place" and an architect and contractors were hired to finish the exterior.⁴

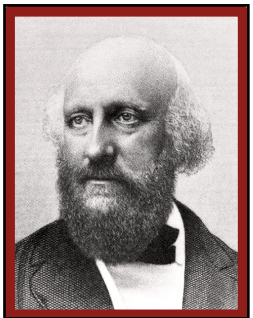
"The Architect was Mr. Renwick of New York City, and the style was to be Gothic and Cruciform, to cost from 10 to \$12000, and to accommodate about 400 people. Material of wood."⁴

Mr. James Renwick Jr. enjoyed a supportive and affluent family and a cultured New York City lifestyle. He was friends with the Rev. Smith and Mr. Appleton and a parishioner of the Church of the Ascension. Publicly he was known as a talented Gothic Revival architect who, over the course of fifty years, designed many unique and inspiring buildings of worship and utility. Three of his famous buildings are his first design named Grace Episcopal Church, the Smithsonian Institution known as "The Castle," and St. Patrick's Cathedral, an immense eclectic twin-spired structure that took twenty-one years to complete.

American Gothic Revival originated in England in the mid-1700s when politician and writer Sir Horace Walpole remodeled his home to reflect the castles and towers of the Middle Ages. At this time England was in the midst of its Industrial Revolution which the coordinated Gothic guilds pushed back against through their exquisite craftsmanship guided by aesthetic principles like the Golden Ratio.

Gothic Revival crossed the Atlantic Ocean. By 1840, its American version had become a popular design for modest homes for about twenty years, and a popular design for one-hundred years for rural churches like Ascension.

"The construction was in charge of contractors Foster Russell and Nathaniel Archer, both residents of Ipswich, and on Christmas Day of the same year the front wall of the Church was raised. This brings up the interesting point that it was constructed by a method no longer in use; an entire side being framed on the ground and raised into place as a unit. The first service in the new Church was held July 10, 1870, with the Rev. Dr. Smith being present."⁵



James Renwick Jr.
Architect for Ascension

*"Church Lot obtained in 1869: A suitable Lot of land for the erection of a Church was procured, and the money for its payment (\$550) was donated by Mr. John Heard."⁴



“With fine enthusiasm, services were begun in the church, as soon as the chancel was finished, though the windows were still covered with cotton cloth, and simple settees answered for pews. With the approach of Winter, the services flitted back to the more comfortable hall.

“Mr. Gifford resigned in the Spring of 1870, and for a time, Rev. Mr. Pickman of Salem and other clergymen officiated. In 1873, Rev. Benjamin F. Newton, then a student at the Episcopal Seminary in Cambridge, began his ministry, and new life and wholesome vigor seem to have been infused. The regular order of morning and evening service was maintained. New friends appeared and a complete reorganization seems to have been effected. At the meeting of the Parish on May 25, 1874, when the record is resumed, a Constitution and new By-Laws were adopted.”²

“The year 1874 is sometimes alluded to as the birth year of the Church [Parish]. Evidently its work was taken up with fresh enthusiasm. Some of the men who were elected to office that day for the first time, began then a long and loyal service. Mr. Daniel Fuller Appleton had been a Vestryman from the beginning and he continued to hold office as Warden or Vestryman until his death in 1904. Mr. Charles H. Noyes had been prominent in the choir for years and still remains a Vestryman, after forty-two consecutive years in that office. Mr. George L. Tilton, the new Clerk, was re-elected annually until his death in 1900, and his records are models of neatness and carefulness. Dr. Charles H. Osgood remained in office until his death in 1896, and Dr. Franklin, musical director for many years, continued his helpfulness as long as he lived. Mr. Everard H. Martin, the

Photographs: 1) Ascension Church on October 30, 1883, four months after construction was completed. Rector, the Rev. Julius W. Atwood in front of the door and in the oval portrait. 2) Church interior circa 1905. 3) A closer look at the second sanctuary window named *The Madonna of the Lilies*.

Junior Warden, continued in office as Junior and Senior Warden for twenty-six years, and Mr. John Birch was his colleague for a long period.”²

On August 23, 1874, a special meeting of the Vestry was held to discuss a letter from the Rev. John Cotton Smith, proprietor of the church. He granted the Parish its use for one year beginning July 1, 1874, and nominated the Rev. Benjamin F. Newton as “the Minister in charge” due to his “very favorable impression made upon the Parish.” The Rev. Smith also made it clear that the Rev. Newton would provide the Parish with direction “except while I am resident in the town, during which time, such direction and control are reserved by me.”³

Unexpectedly, raising funds became a constant difficulty despite the Parish’s best efforts. The somber mood of this interim reflects in the abrupt minutes written at the adjourned meeting held on March 29, 1875.³

At the next meeting on August 31, 1876, it was voted “that all existing pecuniary engagements be terminated at this date.” Committees were appointed to find ways to pay off existing debt, and to continue services without incurring new debt.³

Then on October 19, 1876, the Rev. B. F. Newton unexpectedly delivered his resignation. The Vestry eagerly tried to obtain his services until early June when the Rev. Smith would begin preaching for the summer, but without success. Fortunately, Mr. Reuben Kidner, a student attending the Seminary in Cambridge who was already engaged to preach for one month, agreed to stay on through the winter.^{2,3}

On Christmas Day of 1876, it was voted to move services to Odd Fellows Hall for months January, February and March because of “the unfinished condition of the church and the extreme cold weather of late.”³

Pecuniary difficulties did not abate and followed the Parish into the new year. At the Vestry’s meeting on January 24, 1877, members voted “to continue service another month, but not to exceed said time unless otherwise ordered.”³

By February, the Vestry agreed to accept the Rev. Smith’s offer to pay Mr. Kidner’s salary and travel expenses for ninety days so church services could continue. The Vestry also voted to maintain services until the first of June “on their own responsibility” and “to return to the church on March 21st” and to acquire chairs or settees.³

After a seven month leave of absence, “Mr. Kidner was called to the rectorship for year ending May 31, 1879.” He began in the summer of 1878 when admitted to Priest’s orders.³

In October 1878, the title to the church property was conveyed from the Rev. Smith to Vestryman Joseph W. Woods of Boston.³

The Vestry extended their profound gratitude to the Rev. Smith for his boundless generosity and support for the past fifteen years. It was their “hope and expectation” that they will “carry on its services in the future without any pecuniary aid, thereby showing that such expenditure has not been entirely thrown away on the Ipswich Parish.”³

By September of 1879, the Parish’s finances had much improved allowing the Rev. Kidner to enjoy a substantial raise in salary.²

“Complete ownership of the property was now the ambition of the young Rector.”²

With enthusiasm the Rev. Kidner canvassed for funds to pay the church’s final installment which he executed on April 8, 1881.^{2,3}

Then on January 2, 1882, the Rev. Reuben Kidner abruptly resigned “to accept a position as Assistant Rector at Trinity Church, Boston” with much regret from the Parish.³

Mr. Julius W. Atwood, a student at the Seminary in Cambridge, succeeded Mr. Kidner and was called to the rectorship by the Vestry on March 6, 1882. Not yet ordained, he began as a Lay Reader then became Rector in April once admitted to Priest’s orders.³

The last service the Rev. John Cotton Smith participated in at Ascension Church was on Sunday, September 11, 1881, noted as the “Thirteenth Trinity,” a day of Confirmation. Then after four months of increasing illness, the Rev. Smith died on January 9, 1882.⁵

In early March the Vestry expressed how the death of the Rev. Smith was an event felt widely throughout the country.



“But nowhere have his services been so invaluable and nowhere his loss so irreparable as in the parish of this town.”³

“The Parish adopted resolutions which characterized him as ‘the founder, benefactor and unfailing friend of the church.’ But it was recognized that something more costly and substantial was due, and in the mid-summer of 1882, the Rector [the Rev. Julius W. Atwood], Mr. Martin and Mr. Woods were appointed a Committee to secure funds to complete the church building.”²

The church building was finished by June of 1883. Upon the request by the Parish, Bishop Paddock sanctified the church on June 21 with two bishops, twenty-five clergymen, members of the Parish and many guests in attendance.³

Ascension Church became a memorial to the Rev. John Cotton Smith, D. D., “consecrated to his memory and thereafter known under its present name, Ascension Memorial Church.”¹

His memorial tablet can be viewed on a wall inside the church he wished to make “wholly beautiful,” a holy place where Earth and Heaven intertwine.³

“Throughout the years the Church has been enriched by many gifts and memorials.... The chancel furniture, a gift of the Rev. John Cotton Smith, was originally in the Church of the Ascension, New York City, where Dr. Smith was rector for twenty-two years. The rose window in the narthex was given in memory of Susan Cowles Appleton, widow of Daniel Fuller Appleton, by members of her family. The original sanctuary window was also the gift of Dr. Smith but replaced in 1897 by another window, *The Madonna of the Lilies*, the gift of Miss Margaret Baugh of Boston, which in turn gave place in 1906 to the present window [*The Ascension of Christ*] given by Mrs. Charles S. Tuckerman, eldest daughter of Daniel Fuller Appleton, in memory of her husband. Through generosity of Mr. Francis R. Appleton, Mrs. James H. Proctor and Mr. Herbert W. Mason the lot adjoining the church property on the south was acquired, the house moved and the land graded to form the side lawn upon which stands the Washington oak planted by the Rev. Carroll Perry, D. D. [on Sunday, May 22, 1932, and replaced by a beech tree in 1970], and later marked by a bronze tablet in his memory given by Mrs. Perry.”¹

More gifts from the Rev. Smith are within the sanctuary: large eighteenth century wooden tablets of the Lord’s Prayer, Apostles’ Creed, and Ten Commandments that have spoken to many through the centuries as they knelt before Christ’s altar and celebrated their faith. All are welcomed to visit and enjoy the many gifts Ascension Memorial Church has to offer. Come feed your soul by means of communion and music or simply by entering within this sacred space where you can sit silently amidst beauty and peace.

