

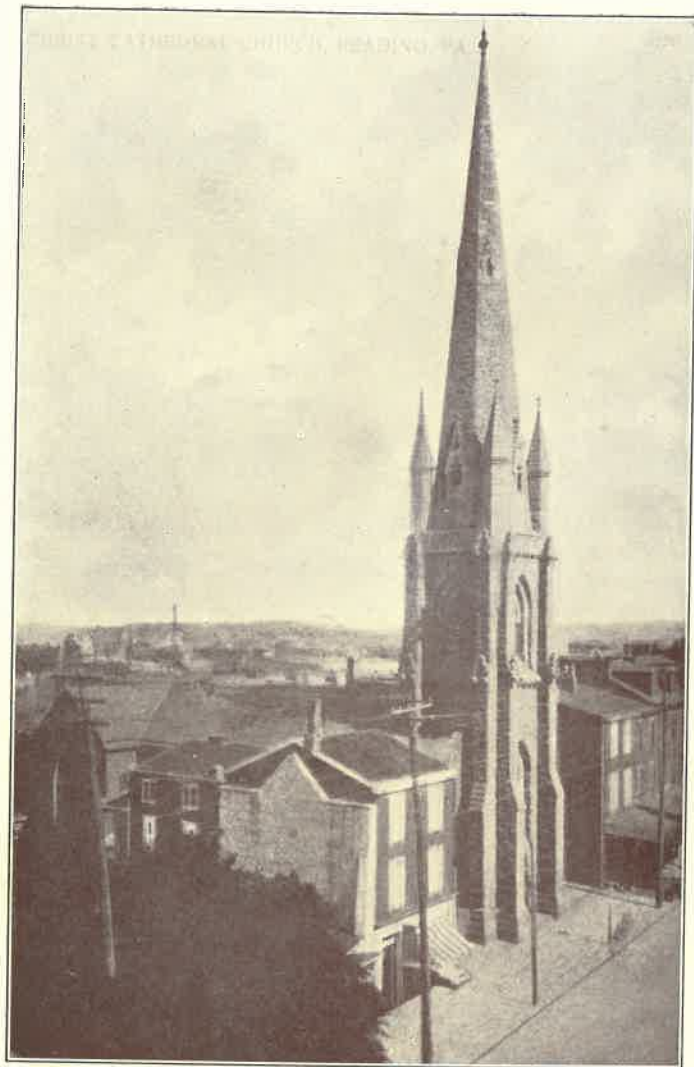
Christ
Church

READING, PENNA.

• 1826-1926

Centennial Souvenir





1826 CHRIST CHURCH, FIFTH AND COURT STS. 1926

HISTORICAL ANNALS

OF

CHRIST CHURCH

(Formerly called St. Mary's)

READING, PA.

BERKS COUNTY

DIOCESE OF BETHLEHEM

Issued in conjunction with their Celebration
of the Centenary of the Parish



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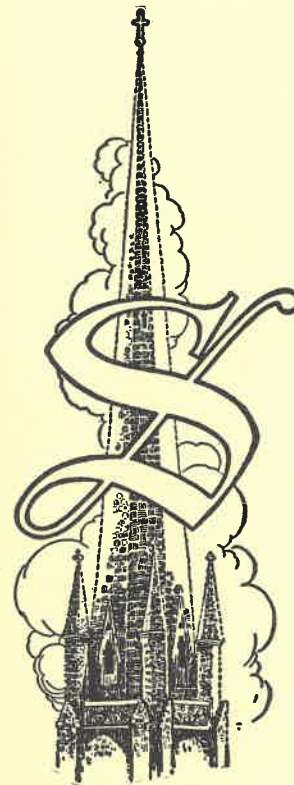
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PART I

*The Story of a
Church Spire*

"I saw the Spires of Oxford
As I was passing by.
The gray Spires of Oxford
Against the pearl-gray sky."



SEVERAL summers ago a party of tourists arrived in Reading from New York City, on their way to Wernersville for a vacation. On coming out of the Post Office I met the gentleman of the party, who was gazing down Fifth St. As I passed him he accosted me in a kindly manner, and pointing to the stately spire of old Christ Church he asked me if I could tell what building that was. My clerical clothing was no doubt the reason he appealed to me, rather than to others. Replying, I informed him that it was Christ Episcopal Church, usually called The Cathedral, because it had once been the Pro-Cathe-

dral of the Diocese. Further conversation revealed the fact that he was of another communion, but deeply concerned with the well-being of all religions, and was giving considerable time to the study of Church Art and Architecture. He said he very much admired the graceful and well proportioned design of this gothic steeple and its base. I cordially invited him to attend the services on the following Sunday morning. Finding him so interested I promised to secure further information concerning this spire and this Church building. We walked to the corner of Fifth and Penn Streets, and for more than ten minutes we both looked back and viewed the effect of the old Church from the south. We then shook hands and he rejoined the rest of his party.

Before departing our visitor agreed to motor in on the following Sunday for the morning service, and invited me to join him at dinner. He said he was much interested in the historic data connected with the erection of the old Church.

The following are the details which I handed to him at our next meeting, and I trust there are many others interested enough to give them their thought and attention:

“The tower and spire of Christ Church were erected in 1862. The undertaking was prompted and inspired by the young and enthusiastic rector who was then in charge of the parish. He was the

Rev. Alexander G. Cummins, a protege of Bishop Stevens, and the vestry and people loyally followed his lead. Their first wise action was to secure the services of the best skilled ecclesiastical architect in the country in the person of Mr. Edward T. Potter of New York, and the next decision was of equal importance; to select a native brown sand stone for the building material. Mr. Potter promptly prepared the plans, and it was decided to begin the erection of the entrance and tower at once, and the completion of the spire as soon as the funds were available. A wash drawing of the complete design was placed on display at Messrs. Strickland & Brother's Book Store on Penn Street, and it aroused general interest and enthusiasm. Mr. Cummins was of an old Delaware family, and possessed of considerable fortune. He headed the subscription list, and the work was pushed forward to completion. The plans called for a tower and spire 180 feet high, and we infer that that is the present height.

The tower, with its graceful points, is well proportioned with the spire, and the whole effect is a splendid example of the best Gothic, recognized very generally as the most appropriate architecture for church construction; with its every line eloquently pointing heavenward. A splendid chime of bells was added in 1870 by the children of Isaac Eckert, one of the active members of the Building Committee.

The subjoined deserve a permanent place in our memory for the splendid work they performed:

The Rector:

The Rev. Alexander G. Cummins.

The Building Committee:

G. A. Nicolls, Isaac Eckert, E. D. Smith.

The Vestry:

B. Todd, and D. E. Stout, Wardens.
J. L. Stichter, J. Glancy Jones, William A. Richards,
J. Pringle Jones, William McIlvain,
David McKnight.

The estimated cost exceeded \$10,000; the improvements costing \$8,000, and the new organ, \$2,500.

A lot for an English Church was given by the Provincial Government in 1765, at the corner of Sixth and Walnut Streets. This was afterwards exchanged for the present site, at an additional cost of 145 pounds sterling: about \$700.

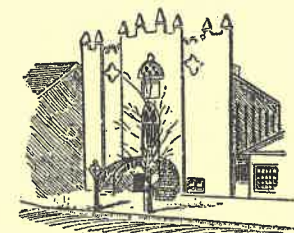
The records having been destroyed we have no certain information as to when the first church was erected, nor of its size or character. The only record we have is that a sexton was paid for making fires and ringing the bell. We also know that burials were made in the plot, and that an historical writer says there was a Church in Reading, as well as in Carlisle. There is reason to believe that its use was shared by the Presbyterians when they were building a new Church at Second and Penn Streets, in 1820. This fact is attested by a letter to the

Vestry from the Presbyterian trustees acknowledging their indebtedness, and offering to allow them the use of their new edifice on Sunday afternoons. The offer was courteously declined, with the announcement that a new Episcopal Church was to be constructed in the near future.

There is also the record of interments in the English Church burying grounds at Reading, and of the consequent removal of the bodies to the new cemetery.

Under the rectorship of the Rev. Robert T. Davis a substantial brick edifice was erected in 1825, and consecrated in 1826 by Bishop White, and a Convention of the Diocese, embracing the whole State of Pennsylvania, was held at the same time, many of the delegates coming by canal boat.

A second enlargement was made in 1871, and re-opened Jan. 30th, 1848 by Bishop Potter.



Christ Episcopal Church Erected, in 1825-26.

ENTRANCE TO CHRIST CHURCH IN 1857

This was again enlarged in 1854, and the spire and tower were added in 1863.

A recess chancel was added in 1873, at the beginning of Bishop Howe's regime.

Wood chapel was erected in memory of Miss Lucretia Wood from money given by her to be used for church purposes. It is in reality a well equipped Parish House and was built in 1885.

Finale

At a later date our visitor and myself spent a delightful hour looking over the Church and Chapel, inspecting the numerous memorials and the many other objects of interest. Afterward we received two letters: one from New York, as follows:

“Am just leaving for a trip abroad. Am going to visit old England. Use the enclosed for your Valley Forge picnic.”

The second read:

“Have made the tour of the great Cathedrals, and have visited with interest your name city, Reading. I am almost persuaded to become a Churchman. There is something deep and inspiring about the Church that has endured so long, and been so faithful to Her inheritance.”