

## *Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles*

"Ascension Episcopal Church 150th Anniversary"  
Carroll County Times article for 25 September 1994  
by Jay A. Graybeal

Last evening nearly 200 members and friends of the Ascension Episcopal Church in Westminster gathered to break bread and celebrate the 150th anniversary of their church. One of the evening's highlights was the unveiling of a new church history publication entitled, *So Great a Cloud of Witnesses* published by the church. The new book begins with a transcription of an interesting diary kept by Isaac Van Bibber (1810-1847) of his March 6-26, 1844 trip to raise monies to build an Episcopal Church in Westminster.

Isaac Van Bibber lived at "Avondale," the elegant former home of Legh Master located several miles from Westminster. The 34-year old lawyer embarked on fundraising "expedition," as he called it, to solicit subscriptions for building the new church. His diary provides a fascinating look into travel, accommodations and the gentry in Antebellum Maryland. The following excerpts describe some of his adventures and misadventures of his trek.

Wednesday, March 6th. I was mounted on Chew's mare, and bound for Sykesville, with the intention of proceeding thence to Baltimore to obtain credentials from the Bishop. As Mr. Garratt was not at home upon my arrival in Sykesville, and most of the doors appeared to be locked, I enjoyed an opportunity not to be neglected of ascertaining by repeated measurement the number of paces in the hall and portico of the hotel. Shortly after, Mr. Garratt made his appearance, and in answer to my salutation of "how he did?" very obligingly gave me an account of all his complaints for the past six months, and then by an easy and perfect transition passed over to a very minute detail of the purchase, wearing out and final abandonment of a remarkable overcoat.

Thursday, March 7th. After breakfasting and making a few purchases, Chew and I called on the Bishop, who received us kindly, and after reading Mr. [Rev. David H.] Buel's letter, promised to give me a circular recommending my undertaking to the liberal and charitable of his diocese.

Saturday, March 9th. Immediately after breakfast I entered the cars, and read and shook and grunted until I arrived at Sykesville. Here I met with Mr. [George F.] Warfield, who very pressingly invited me to come and see him. At the same time I met Mr. [James] Sykes, who gave me permission to put his name down on my subscription list for 10 dollars.

Sunday, March 10th. About 4 o'clock I again set out, and shortly before sunset arrived at Mr. Warfield's. Here, I received a warm welcome, and also three names to add to my subscription list. Miss Susanna and Wm. Henry [Warfield] sang and chanted; and the old man dwelt upon reminiscences of by-gone days until he was thrown into a terrible panic, by a little negro boy getting under a side table, and by his noises inducing a belief that a ferocious bandit, or, at least, a sanguinary housebreaker, was in the room. With the exception of this little romantic incident the time flowed smoothly away until the hour of bed, when I sank into a sweet sleep under a silk coverlid.

Mr. Van Bibber arose on the morning of March 11th and "indulged in the rarity of a clean shirt." He traveled to Ellicott's Mills and stayed there several days collecting \$40 in subscriptions. He then journeyed to Annapolis by rail on the 14th. He spent several days seeking funds and on one day made

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"an attack upon the social circles of Annapolis." The difficulty of his task is well illustrated by a visit to a Mrs. Ray on the 18th.

From Mrs. Vorhees I proceeded to the house of Mrs. Ray, whom I found sitting with dishevelled locks, in a most interesting and disconsolate state of widowhood. Although no longer young, she was still handsome, and finding the maiden ladies whom I had visited were to be no longer thought of, I began to turn my attention to widows. Having presented my letter, I watched her until she had finished it; and then commenced a long and eloquent address; to which she appeared to listen with the most intense attention; smiling at times as though she were equally pleased with the matter and manner of my discourse. With rising hope, my heart began to expand. I drew my chair closer, and infused into my tones a tenderness sufficient to dissolve a glacier. The answer came at last--and with it came a death blow to my hopes. The lady was evidently [deaf]--she hadn't heard a word I uttered. And what was still worse--notwithstanding the lady failed to discover a particle of humour, she kept me in a roar during the whole time I was conversing with her. I roared, however, to some purpose, for the lady responded to my call to the tune of five dollars.

Mr. Van Bibber departed Annapolis on the 19th and crossed the South River Ferry which he wrote was powered by "oarsmen who were at the same time drunk, noisy and talkative." For several days he traveled throughout Anne Arundel County collecting subscriptions. Among those he met were a woman whose "manners were colder than her parlour" and a woman who inhaled snuff. Mr. Van Bibber ended his journey in the nation's capital where he sought a female acquaintance, "the incomparable Kate Eveleth." Unfortunately, he behaved foolishly with her at a social event and this part of his visit was a disappointment.

Despite ending on a sour note the trip was a financial success. Recorded in the back of Mr. Van Bibber's diary are figures totalling \$2,000 for the new church. He also listed his expenses of \$35.82 1/2 which included items such as "Dinner, Supper, lodging, breakfast & servant" for \$2.

The new church publication also includes reprints of the 1894 and 1944 church anniversary histories, a history of the last 50 years, a list of rectors, cemetery inscriptions and numerous photographs of the church and its rectors and members. The book may be purchased from the Parish Office by calling 848-3251.

Photo Caption: Ascension Episcopal Church, Westminster, c. 1900. The grey stone Gothic Church was designed by Robert Carey Long of Baltimore; it was consecrated on Ascension Day 1846. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection, gift of Mrs. Ruth Billingslea Weller, 1979.