

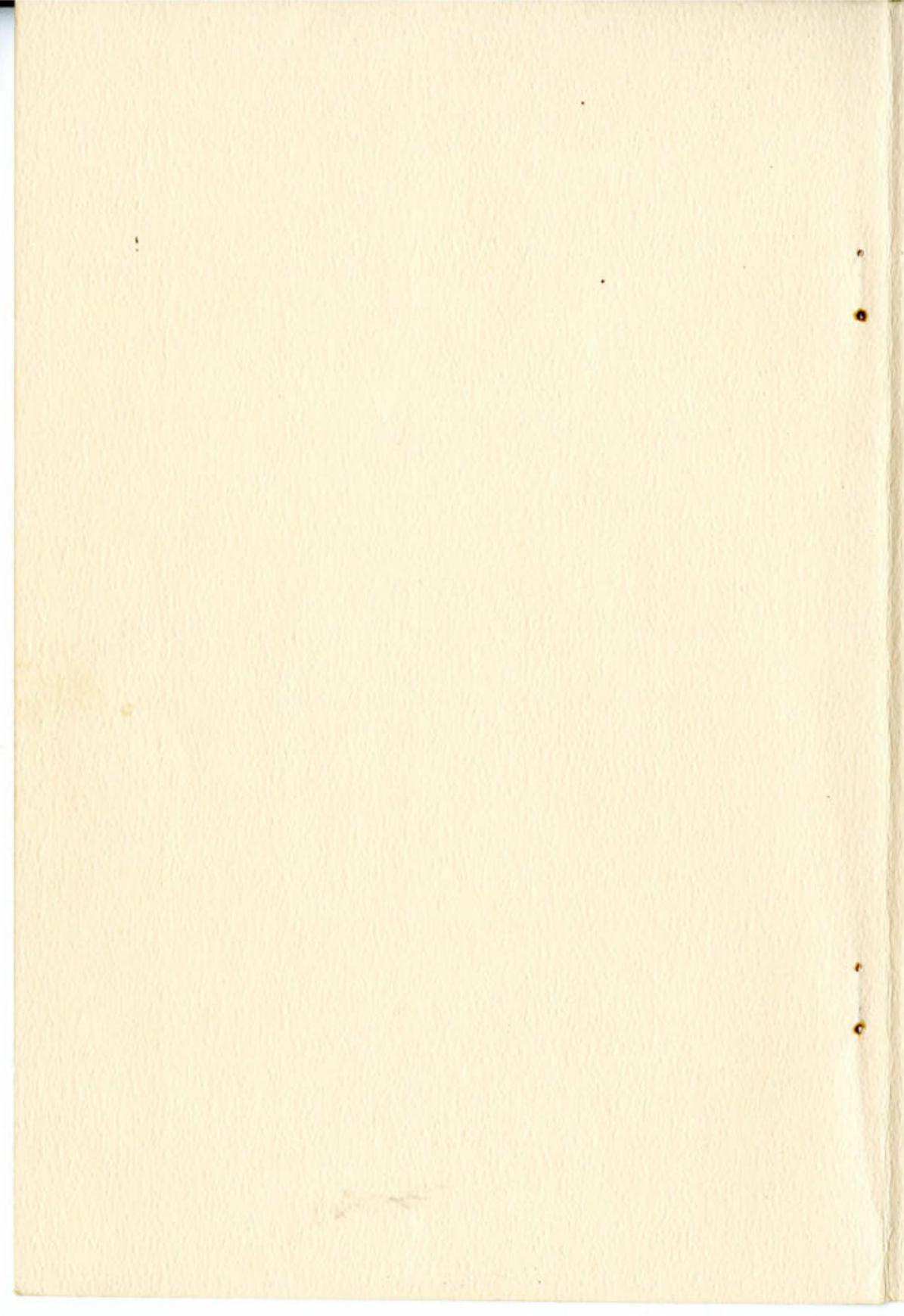
The Reverend John LaPierre

by Lillian Fordham Wood

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The Reverend John LaPierre

By Lillian Fordham Wood*

PREFACE

THIS compilation of data on the Reverend John LaPierre and the early chapels and churches he served in southern and eastern North Carolina was not written for publication. Originally, it formed a chapter of documented family history that I have compiled over the years, and did not consider of interest to the public.

About 1944, I detached the LaPierre chapter and supplied copies to several libraries, including the Wilson Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I also placed a copy, along with other papers, in the State Department of Archives and History in Raleigh. It soon became apparent that the LaPierre document was of interest to many people because it uncovered a period of early church history in North Carolina that had been lost to them in the strata of time.

By 1961 I was able to make a larger compilation which was given as a paper at a meeting of Daughters of the American Colonists in Kinston. Beautiful St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Kinston had its beginning as one of LaPierre's Church of England chapels.

I have now decided to share this collection of data with the public, in the hope that it will bring home to both ministers and laymen the fact that nothing of the spirit is ever lost.

The spiritual infusion, with its accompanying moral and cultural influences, injected into the early chapels and churches of the Anglican faith has been a potent and expanding force in the lives of the people in each community where such a chapel or church existed. Like the beautiful Neuse River and "the branches thereof" this spiritual infusion widens until its distant shore is blue and dim as it mixes its waters with the waters of the sea.

Very little is known of the Reverend John LaPierre before he came to America. The Librarian of Lambeth Palace Library, London, England, has written that John de LaPierre was admitted at

*Mrs. Wood, of Chapel Hill, a lifelong resident of North Carolina, has done research in colonial North Carolina history for many years. *Editor's Note.*

Pembroke College, Cambridge, June 14, 1672. He was the son of John, baptized at St. George's, Canterbury, November 1654. Also, a John of the same surname was admitted at Leyden in 1696. The writer made the comment: "It seems unlikely that the John de LaPierre admitted at Pembroke is the same as ordained in 1707, but he may have been his father, and perhaps the John de LaPierre admitted at Leyden (1696) is the one you are interested in." His study, however, was medicine and not theology. Three John de LaPierres, and one Abraham de LaPierre were admitted at Leyden.¹

The Reverend John LaPierre was ordained by the Bishop of London in 1707. In Queen Anne's Reign, 1708, he was sent to South and North Carolina to officiate as minister of the Church of England under the Royal and Episcopal Protections. South and North Carolina were one colony when John LaPierre arrived. It was not until 1719 that an official division was made. For twenty years he served a French parish named St. Denis on the Cooper River and assisted an English parish called St. Thomas. In 1728 he was sent to Cape Fear (New Hanover) with instructions to introduce the Anglican liturgy where it had not been in use, becoming the first minister there, and founded St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Brunswick, and St. James's Episcopal Church, Wilmington.

The early church records are few and sparse; many of them have been destroyed by fire or lost. We know from reliable sources that on coming to this country LaPierre was a young man, well educated, a French Huguenot, and was married to Susanna.

THE ST. DENIS ERA
1708 - 1728

John LaPierre was ordained by Compton, Bishop of London. Because of his linguistic ability he was sent to the most predominantly French quarter in Carolina to preach to the old settlers in French; his mission also was to bring the French, being Calvinistic in their habits, into harmony with the Church of England.

LaPierre's congregation in St. Denis,

in asking Sir Nathaniel Johnson (governor of North and South Carolina) to write to the Bishop of London for a clergyman, insisted that they must be permitted to receive the communion in the Calvinistic form and unless this would be granted them no minister need be sent. Whether or not Governor Johnson made the promise to grant the request is an unsettled matter,

¹This information was supplied to Miss Mollie C. Parker, Reidsville, North Carolina, by the Librarian, Lambeth Palace, London.

but the French in that region understood that in view of the fact that a clergyman had been sent them, he came with that stipulation. John LaPierre was the incumbent and found it very hard to satisfy both a clamouring Calvinistic French population—members of the Anglican Church with whose forms and practices they were not satisfied—on the one hand, and the strict demands of Commissary Gideon Johnston on the other²

It has been brought out that Bishop Compton,

allowed the French Episcopal Ministers in all the parts of his Diocese in England to use the English or Genevan Liturgy indifferently according as their people would have it and that nothing is more common in London, than for a French Episcopal Minister to pray and preach and administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the Meeting Houses of the Reformed, after the Genevan way; and that the Calvinist Ministers on the other hand preach with the same freedom at the Savoy and other places belonging to those of the Church of England.³

Owing to the fact that LaPierre had lived in England he was accustomed to these English views and customs in regard to Protestantism, and with the leniency of the English Church towards French Protestants in allowing them to pursue their "own wayes" in their worship services.

"In 1712 there were twelve Anglican ministers in Carolina and seven serving other churches. Of this total of nineteen, five were French. Two of the five had academic degrees, Francis LeJau, D.D., and John LaPierre, A.M."⁴

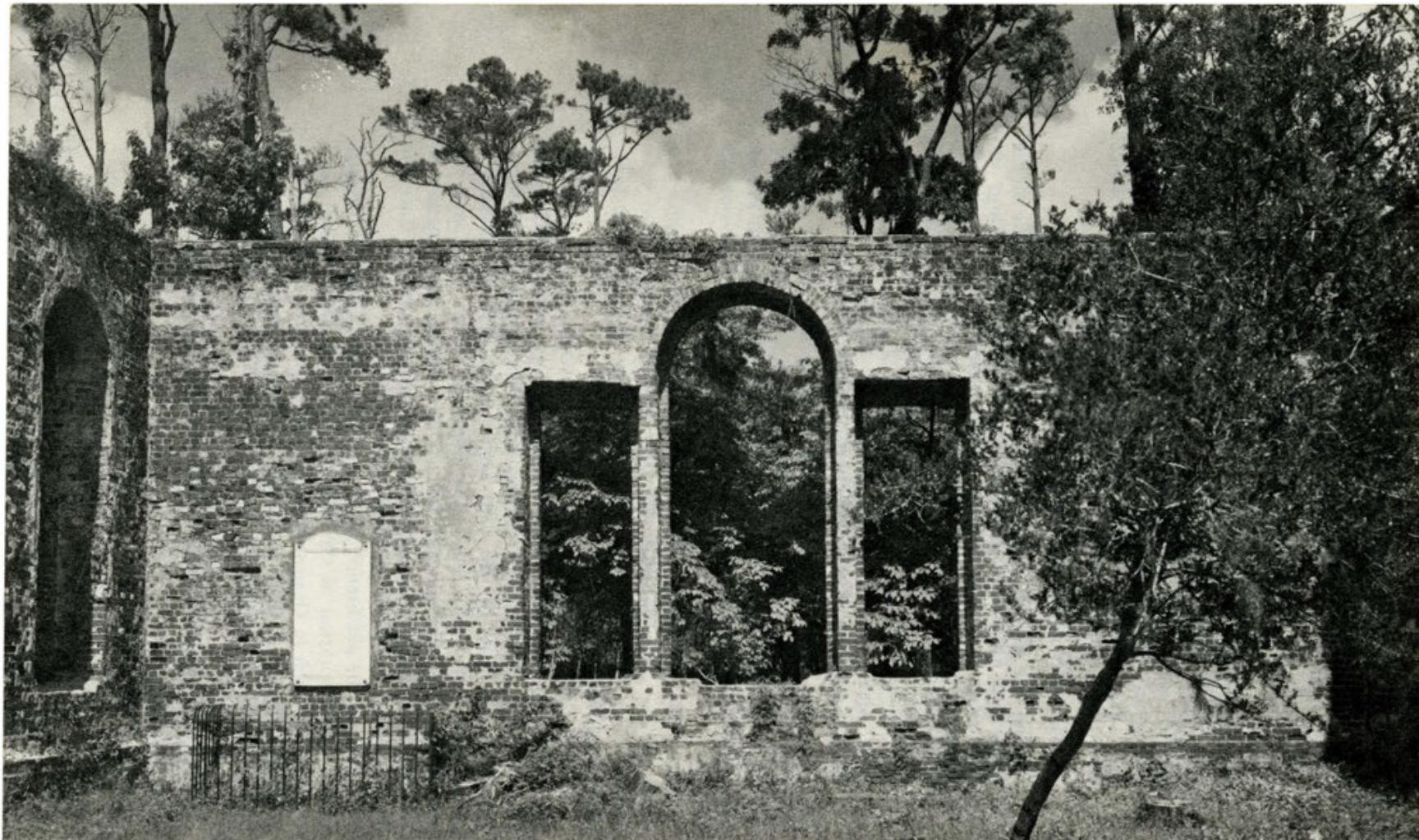
While the French in Orange Quarter, St. Denis Parish, had conformed to the Anglican faith in doctrine and policy, they clung tenaciously to their forms of worship and nothing could change them. No doubt, in order to win their favor to the extent of making it possible to work with them, and hopefully bring back into the church the large numbers that had left it, LaPierre administered the communion standing, sitting, or kneeling, as they desired, since the French were allowed this privilege in London.

Many of the old French in Orange Quarter had left for Carolina before the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. There was a Huguenot church in Orange Quarter built in 1687 by their own contributions. It was to this church that the settlers reverted when they were denied communion in the Calvinistic form in the Anglican

²A. H. Hirsch, *The Huguenots of Colonial South Carolina*. Durham, North Carolina, 1928. pp. 133-135.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 133-35.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 153.



Ruins St. Philip's Church, Old Brunswick Town, Brunswick County, N. C. Court
Church of the Colony. From The Cornwall Collection of Colonial Churches.

D 73

JOHN LaPIERRE

Ordained 1707; came to America 1708. Served in many churches in area as missionary of Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. 1732-1755.

Historical Marker for the Reverend John LaPierre at St. Philip's Church, Old Brunswick Town, N.C. Photo supplied by author.

church. LaPierre wrote the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1719 that "their defection and falling from the Church of England have rendered my functions ineffectual amongst them."⁵

It was impossible to please both the "People" and the "Establishment." One writer said that Mr. LaPierre was "plagued by those headstrong fools." On the other hand the church was quick to resort to authority and threaten ministers with punishment by loss of salary and ejection from cures if they deviated from prescribed forms of administering the sacraments. Commissary Gideon Johnston admitted that LaPierre stood his ground, but that when in the course of time he made a promise not to deviate from church order he has "been as good as his word ever since." While neither convinced of the wisdom of strictness nor personally pleased, he never broke his promise.⁶

LaPierre lived near Governor Nathaniel Johnson. They became good friends and "often walked and talked together." LaPierre, though closely questioned, never revealed what the governor told him, if anything, about his promise to the French in Orange Quarter to have only a minister sent to them who would administer the communion in the Calvinistic form. Governor Johnson died with the matter still one of contention, and it was never settled.

Commissary Johnston wrote:

Tho' Mr. LaPierre lived not far from Sr. Nath'. and did often visit him, and converse with him, and had many opportunity's of knowing the truth of what was alleged he said to the French of Orange Quarter, yet to this very day Mr. LaPierre has never pretended to fasten anything of this kind upon that worthy Gentleman, who was a true member of the Church of England.⁷

While LaPierre's great work for the Church of England in South Carolina was in Orange Quarter, St. Denis Parish, he did serve other churches at convenient times. He served the church on the Santee River for about a year following the death of its incumbent, Philippe de Richebourg, in 1717. Mr. Richebourg had been the leader of the French colony from Manikin Town in Virginia that settled across Trent River about two miles above New Bern (1710) in 1707. Following the Tuscarora massacre along the Neuse and Trent Rivers in 1711, he moved with what was left of his colony to South Carolina and joined the French on the Santee River.⁸

⁵L. C. Vass, *New Bern Presbyterian Church*. Richmond, Virginia, 1886. p. 29.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 75-78.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 302-304.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 302-304.

A colony of French from Manakin Town had previously settled on the Pamlico River near Bath in 1690.⁹ They founded here St. Thomas Episcopal Church, the oldest standing and continuously used Episcopal church in North Carolina.

THE HUGUENOT CHURCH. The first church organized in the Carolinas was the Huguenot Church founded in Charleston 1681-2. A tablet at the church gives Fothergill's list of immigrating ministers to that region. Among them is "John LaPierre Feb. 23, 1707-8."

The Charleston French Church never conformed to the Established Church and has maintained the Calvinistic worship in unbroken form until today. Being more affluent than other French Protestant churches, it was able to support for many years a French Protestant minister who had not taken Anglican orders. In later years, due to the scarcity of qualified French Ministers who had not taken Anglican orders, the church "was forced to content itself with a French clergyman who had been ordained in the Anglican communion."¹⁰ John LaPierre served the Charleston church as its minister in 1728 just before moving to the Cape Fear River in that year.¹¹

A summary of the events leading up to the conclusion of LaPierre's work in St. Denis and his answering a call to Cape Fear are contained in one of his letters to the Bishop of London.

My Lord,

As I had the honour to have been ordained by your Lordship's predecessor in the year seventeen hundred and seven, who recommended me to the Governor of South Carolina, Sir Nathaniel Johnson to entitle me to a parish called the Parish of St. Denis in a French colony which I was to serve till the death of the old Settlers who did not understand the English tongue. So in the time of the new generation who understood the said tongue in which they were born, I became an assistant to the Reverend Mr. Hazel in the parish of St. Thomas next to my parish, hoping of the two nations to make but one and the same people; though they were a distinct parish they indifferently followed the English Church and the French as well acquainted with both languages; and then seeing that my ministerial functions were not essentially required from a French minister, and hearing besides that in a province of North Carolina called Cape Fear, alias New Hanover they wanted a minister, the inhabitants of that place sent for me and the Reverend Mr. Garden your Lordship's Commissary, in concurrence with the rest of the clergy did actually consent that I should go and settle the divine service where it

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 49-52.

¹⁰Hirsch, p. 59.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 53.

had never been, I readily complied to go thither, with the promise that they would inform your Lordship concerning my removal."¹²

THE CAPE FEAR ERA (1728-1734)

On November 29, 1732, Mr. LaPierre wrote the Bishop of London from "Cape Fear, alias New Hanover" as follows:

As I am one who, in Queen Anne's Reign, 1708, was by your Lordship's most worthy predecessor sent to South and North Carolina to officiate in both at several times as minister of the Church of England under the Royal and Episcopal Protections, having for the full space of twenty years shared my office between a French Parish named St. Denis and an English Parish called St. Thomas under the Reverend Mr. Hazel, the Rector of the same, I was at last called from this former Province to the next adjacent country named Cape Fear, or New Hanover, belonging to North Carolina where I have been already four years following my functions . . .¹³

In *Chronicles of the Cape Fear River 1660-1916* James Sprunt says:

The early history of St. James's parish in the town of Wilmington, is very closely interwoven with the history of the town itself. The settlement of the colony by English subjects established the ecclesiastical law of England as the law of the Church in the colony. The Bishop of London was made the diocesan of the colony, and the province of North Carolina became thereby a part of the See of London.

Little attention seems to have been given the religious needs of the colonists by the Church in England until the incorporation of The Venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in 1701.

It is in the records of the Venerable Society that we find the first official notice of St. James's parish. In 1736, the society records note that "Mr. Marsden had a settlement in the parish, and being a clergyman of the Church of England, had officiated there for several years past." We know, however, from local sources, that thirty years prior to this entry the whole province had been divided into twelve parishes, and several laws passed by the colonial Legislature for the support of religion. We also know from the same sources that the parish of St. James was organized in the year 1730, and that in 1729 the Rev. John LaPierre, a French Huguenot, who had been ordained by the Bishop of London in

¹²The original is in the Fulham Palace Manuscripts under "letters North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia."

¹³W. L. Saunders, *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*. Raleigh, North Carolina, 1886. Vol. III, pp. 391.

1708, and for many years had served a congregation of his own people in South Carolina, called "St. Denis's Parish," came into the Cape Fear region, and served St. James's and St. Philip's, Brunswick, until about the year 1735.¹⁴

In Ashe's *History of North Carolina*, the following statement is found in regard to church affairs in North Carolina in 1732: "Although there had been no great change in the way of church privileges, yet there had been some important ones. John LaPierre a Frenchman, who had come to South Carolina in 1708, and had officiated on the Santee, had about 1727 come to the Cape Fear, where he remained several years."¹⁵

In his letters, LaPierre relates something of his hardships on the Cape Fear. LaPierre came to Cape Fear on the promise of subscriptions, but was soon placed under taxation which ran into trouble with the people. The people resented a tax for the support of the Church of England and refused to pay the minister. LaPierre tells of troubles caused by a minister named Marsden, who offered to officiate in the parish gratis while at the same time carrying on the activities of a "public merchant and traffickant since his late voyage to Lisbon in Portugal, and follows it daily amongst us and thinks it no way inconsistent with the Sacred Orders." It is interesting to note that Mr. Marsden served the Cape Fear settlement officially for about one year, 1736, following the departure of LaPierre, after which his appointment was withdrawn by the Venerable Society.¹⁶

In connection with Mr. Marsden's removal the following letter of interest was sent to the Bishop of London.

Monday, March 13, 1737

May it Please Your Lordship (Bishop of London)

It was very shocking to me to be informed by the Gentn that waited on you with my letter to acquaint your Lordship of my arrival from Cape Fear that I had suffered so much in your esteem that you was utterly averse to see me. I do with great sincerity and sorrow confess that I have given your Lordship great cause to be offended with me, but I can with good conscience declare that I have sincerely repented of every miscarriage that my memory can recollect and shall never be partial to myself but ready on all occasions to declare my detestation and abhorrence of every neglect of duty.

¹⁴James Sprunt, *Chronicles of the Cape Fear River 1660-1916*. Raleigh, North Carolina, 1916, p. 605.

¹⁵Samuel A'Court Ashe, *History of North Carolina*. Greensboro, North Carolina, 1925. Vol. I, p. 245.

¹⁶Saunders, Vol. III, p. 392.

I humbly beg your Lordship will judge charitably of me and if you will not be graciously pleased to interest yourself so far in my favor as to recommend my case to the Honble Society I humbly supplicate your Lordship to condescend to deliver to the Secretary of the Society the letter you received from the Inhabitants of Cape Fear in my favor from the hands of Mr. Hunter, and to inform him that you had received a letter from Gov. Johnson confirming from his own knowledge the character given of me by my parishioners.

I despise (desire) to live to no other end than to do service to God's Church and conscious of my own good intentions and desires suggests to me many flattering hopes of doing God and His church good service at Cape Fear if I meet with suitable encouragement.

I subscribe myself &c.

Richd Marsden

Capt. Wimble intreats your Lordship to accept the map of North Carolina.¹⁷

In his report to the Bishop of London, LaPierre says that Mr. Marsden was "formerly a minister in Charleston in South Carolina who declined appearing before Commissary Johnston and the rest of the clergy to show his credentials; afterwards my Lord Portland's chaplain in Jamaica; then an incumbent in Virginia in a parish called Princess Ann; and of late traffikant in Lisbon, and sometime after his return promoted by a few gentlemen to be a minister in Cape Fear, without any popular election a man of indifferent character and causing by the violence of his assessments great murmurings among the people before they can get a qualified vestry; and the said Richard Marsden, belonging to Liverpool, pleads that he was ordained by one of your Lordship's predecessors much about the same time I was sent to South Carolina under Queen Ann in 1707."¹⁸

LaPierre further reported that the people on Cape Fear were for the most part stated men and very substantial planters but unwilling to contribute to the building of churches and glebe houses or to the handsome maintenance of a minister.

THE NEIGHBORING SETTLEMENTS

ST. JOHN'S PARISH (ONSLOW COUNTY). In 1734, LaPierre extended his ministry northward to a colony called New River which consisted of above one hundred families and a large number of children needing instruction. Under the date of April 23, 1734, Mr. LaPierre wrote:

¹⁷*Ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 244, 245.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 623-625.

I had the honor in my last to inform your Lordship about the present state of Cape Fear both civil and Ecclesiastical. I was the first Minister of the Church of England that came to these places to preach which I did during the three years and a half . . . I went farther northward to a new colony called New River consisting of above one hundred families, all of poor people but very desirous to have the holy worship set up amongst them, Gov. Burrington and one Mr. John Williams being the first encouragers. It is a thriving place and likely in a few years to become a flourishing parish. There is a vast number of children among them to be instructed and if this place falls to my lot I shall make bold, my Lord, to send you a larger and more satisfactory account both of Cape Fear and that new place.¹⁹

A new county, embracing the New River area and named Onslow County, was formed from New Hanover County in 1734. By a further division of the Province into parishes by Act of Assembly in 1741, Onslow County became St. John's Parish.

Governor William Tryon wrote in 1767 that St. John's Parish in Onslow County was "willing, though hardly able to support a minister." Prior to 1800, New River Chapel went out of existence as an Anglican chapel. Worship services were held a short distance away in the village of Richlands and in other places in Onslow County. Small chapels were built at strategic places.

The Anglican faith was deeply seated in the county and eventually found expression in St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Jacksonville.

CRAVEN PARISH

ST. JOHN'S PARISH (CARTERET COUNTY). By an Act of the General Assembly in 1715, the territory in Craven Parish (later, Christ Church Parish) was defined as follows: "Neuse River and the branches thereof by the name of Craven Parish to which all the southern settlements shall be accounted a part of said Parish until further division is made."²⁰ This placed the settlements in Carteret County to the south in Craven Parish at that time. Subsequently, the very large county of Craven was severally divided and with each division a new parish was created. In 1723, Carteret County was severed from Craven Parish and for this county St. John's Parish was established. The division at this time was a division of parish only. Carteret County was one of the original precincts of the extinct County of Bath, as was Craven County.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 623-625.

²⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 207-209.

BEAUFORT. Beaufort Town in Carteret County was one of the early distinguished towns in the Province, having been incorporated in 1723 on land purchased of Robert Turner, Esq., by Richard Russell, Esq. In the plan of the town, lots were reserved and set aside for a church, a court house, prison, and market place.

"Article XI" in the incorporation proceedings says:

And whereas the said town of Beaufort and parts adjacent, is made a Precinct, divided from Craven, by the name of Carteret Precinct; be it therefore Enacted, by the Authority aforesaid, That the said Precinct be and it is hereby erected into a Parish by the name of St. John's Parish, and that the following persons be, and they are hereby appointed Vestrymen of the said Parish, Viz: Christopher Gale, Esq., Joseph Bell, John Shaw, Richard Rustell, John Shackelford, Thomas Merriday, Enoch Ward, Joseph Fulford, Charles Cogdell, Richard Whitehurst, John Nelson, son, and Richard Williamson.²¹

Joseph Bell and John Nelson had formerly served on the Vestry of Craven Parish.

The records in the *Vestry Book* of St. John's Parish in Carteret Precinct begin in 1742 and end in 1843. The Vestry Book contains no records from 1723 to 1742. Other than this omission, they are the only complete records of any of the early parishes in North Carolina.

A security copy of the Vestry Book was microfilmed by the State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, and placed in its files November 9, 1953.

The first meeting of the vestry of St. John's Parish, Beaufort recorded in the Vestry Book, was held on Friday the 30th day of April, 1742, and the long record of one hundred years begins:

This Vestry hath ordered that Mr. John Simpson, the Clerk of the last Vestry be paid by the Church Wardens the sum of Ten Pounds Curr money for extraordinary service done for the Parish of St. John's besides the sum formerly allowed him to be paid by the former Church Wardens.²²

At a Vestry held at Beaufort Town on Wednesday the 10th day of May, 1742, it was "ordered that Seven Shillings and Six Pence be levied against each tithable in this county for the present year."²³

At Sessions of the Vestry, proper persons were appointed to read Divine Service at points throughout the county, some of the places

²¹J. C. Clark, *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*. Raleigh, North Carolina. Vol. XXV, pp. 206-209.

²²*Vestry Book*. Saint John's Parish, Carteret Precinct. There is a microfilm copy on file at the State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

²³*Ibid.*

later to have chapels. When readings took place in a home, the head of the house was paid by the Church Wardens "for the trouble of his house."²⁴ Readers were appointed to read Divine Service regularly at Hunting Quarter (Atlantic), Straights, North River, Beaufort Town, Newport River, White Oak River, Portsmouth, and at other points on the mainland and on the banks. Readers were paid twenty shillings a year. This method of extending Divine Service over a whole county must have been the same as that used in Christ Church and other parishes.

Provision for the aged, the disabled, and the orphaned children of the parish was arranged and the funds administered by the parish church.

The entries in the Vestry Book move on through the Revolutionary War, "when the streets of Beaufort were filled with English soldiers," and until almost the middle of the nineteenth century.

St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Beaufort has had a long history of devotion to Church, State, and Education. For many years it sponsored a well known and highly regarded school. The old cemetery that grew around the church contains the names of many notables. Here are buried Captain Christian Wulf of the Danish Navy, who died in Beaufort prior to the Civil War; an English officer whose request was to be buried in an upright position with his uniform and accoutrements on because he did not want his prone body walked over by rebels; and Captain Otway Burns, commander of the Privateer "Snap Dragon" in the War of 1812.

NEWPORT AND WHITE OAK CHAPELS. In 1752, the inhabitants on the southeast side of Newport River set aside certain sums of money for building a chapel, "on the aforesaid side of the river by subscription." A chapel was also built at this time by subscription on White Oak River. St. John's Parish contributed eight pounds each to the building of the two chapels.²⁵

Earlier records, 1740, mention a chapel at Newport which must have been replaced by the 1752 chapel.

Visiting ministers and probably a minister from Bath served St. John's Parish in Carteret County in its early days. The Reverend John LaPierre rendered service to the parish from 1734 until his retirement in 1755. For the remainder of the Colonial Period, it was served by his successor, Chaplain Reed, who wrote on June 21, 1764:

I have rode my long circuit twice with great satisfaction, my

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

congregations have been greatly crowded, my number of communicants increased and the return of my health made my duty not only easy but a real pleasure. I have likewise taken care of St. John's Parish, which sickness would not permit me to do last autumn and have visited it twice once at the court house where I baptized 24 children, again at a private house where I baptized 11 children and again at the chapel upon Newport River, where I baptized 14 children and administered the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to 36 communicants.²⁶

On July 10, 1765, Chaplain Reed wrote that he had made two excursions very lately into the remote parishes and preached for several days together until he grew hoarse. He further reported:

I have likewise visited St. John's Parish which is a very small one and contiguous to Craven County four different times during these last six months and baptized thirty-five white children and one black and administered the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to thirty-nine communicants at Newport Chapel.²⁷

THE NEW BERN ERA (1734 - 1755)

LaPierre came to New Bern at the insistence of the church, with the "good leave" of the Bishop of London, and on the promise of subscriptions from the church for his maintenance. He wrote the Bishop of London from New Brunswick, Cape Fear, October 9, 1733:

There is a certain Colony in this Province that requires my help upon promise of subscribing towards my maintenance with whom I will, with your Lordship's good leave, comply upon any reasonable terms sooner than to see the country destitute of the light of the gospel.

The bearer, My Lord, can testify to the truth of what I have here set forth before your Lordship, whose most obedient servant and dutiful son I ever profess to be in the gospel of Christ. John LaPierre.²⁸

The following year, 1734-5, LaPierre located in New Bern. It is attested that John Fonveille, vestryman, and LaPierre's neighbor and friend, Colonel William Wilson, saw to it that whatever agreement was arrived at between him and the church for his services was kept. Evidence that Mr. Fonveille was active in inducing the Reverend Mr. LaPierre to move to New Bern is found in a deed of 1740 filed in Craven County, New Bern, North Carolina:

Know all men by these presents that I, John LaPierre, of Craven County and Province aforesaid, Clergyman, for certain

²⁶Saunders, Vol. VI, pp. 1047, 1048.

²⁷*Ibid.*, Vol. VII, pp. 98, 99.

²⁸*Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 529, 530.

good reasons and considerations me heretofore moving have transferred, conveyed and freely set over as my deed of gift, and by these presents do transfer, convey and freely set over unto Benjamin Fordham, my son-in-law, in the county and province aforesaid, planter, and to Martha, his wife, my daughter, one hundred acres of land being part of the 360 I had of Mr. John Fonveille, Jnr., for the like quantity of my lands delivered to him in Cape Fear, the which 100 acres of land lying situated upon Neuse Road a place called Batchelder's Creek, to be admeasured, which said 100 acres of land upon the left hand of the bridge towards New Bern going to meet Col. Wilson's marked tree and so turning to my part of my land to make up his complements toward the land remaining in the possession of the said John Fonveille.²⁹

John LaPierre (Seal)

The agreement arranged by Mr. Fonveille and Colonel Wilson was doubtless an advantageous one for both LaPierre and the church. Additionally, LaPierre had some private resources. He furnished for himself a glebe of 360 acres and a residence, as can be seen from the Craven County deeds.³⁰ Prior to this time there was only one glebe and parish house in North Carolina, the one at Bath.

In his book *Governor Tryon and His Palace*, Alonzo Thomas Dill writes:

Clergymen from elsewhere preached in New Bern, but there was no regular minister until 1734, when the Reverend John LaPierre, a Frenchman who had been ordained in 1707 and as a young man had served both Huguenot and Anglican churches in South Carolina, came to New Bern.

In 1728 LaPierre was rector at Cape Fear, but after a few years the settlers there failed to subscribe properly to his allowance, and he was, he tells us, 'forced to work in the fields' for his living. The New Bern and Craven settlement urged him to move to the Neuse River. The invitation may have come through LaPierre's fellow-countryman, Jean Fonveille who was for many years a church warden, for it was Fonveille who assisted him in securing a home about ten miles from town.

During LaPierre's residence, the parish achieved permanence and prestige. It was renamed 'Christ Church Parish,' as it remains today. Because the parish records were destroyed or lost early in the nineteenth century, the story of the Anglican church at New Bern at this period is obscure.³¹

²⁹Craven County Deeds. New Bern, North Carolina. Book I, 414. La Pierre's land is identified above Brunswick, next to R. Moore.

³⁰Ibid., Book I, pp. 414, 417.

³¹Alonzo Thomas Dill, *Governor Tryon and His Palace*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1955, pp. 64-66.

In 1737, Alexander Garden, Commissary of South Carolina and North Carolina, wrote the Bishop of London concerning church affairs in North Carolina. The following is an excerpt from that letter:

So. Carolina, Charleston
Sept. 6, 1737

The Governor & Council of that Colony (North Carolina) have it much at heart to obtain a Legal establishment of a competent maintenance for the Clergy, but the unhappy discord subsisting twixt them and the Commons House of Assembly about civil concerns has hitherto obstructed it, meantime they think that the pension of £80 allowed Boyd by the Honorable Society would be applied to the best advantage if £25 a piece were given to the *two clergymen at Bath Town and New Bern* who are in great poverty; and the remaining £30 to some sober clergyman to be sent over to Bladen Precinct where the Governor is settled and where he assures me his neighborhood is well disposed to join with him for making up a handsome maintenance.³³

The above letter shows that the church in North Carolina was not separated from the church in South Carolina in 1737. They were both under the supervision of the Bishop of London's Commissary in South Carolina. The letter establishes that New Bern had a resident minister at this time, 1737.

The Minutes of the General Assembly held in New Bern in 1738-1739 record the Governor's speech to the Assembly in which he said: "That in such a wide extended Province as this is, inhabited by British Subjects, by persons professing themselves Christian there should be but two places where Divine service is regularly performed is really scandalous."³³ At the same session of the General Assembly fifty pounds was paid to the Reverend John LaPierre for claims.³⁴ He was paid at intervals until 1755 for sermons preached before the General Assembly at its sessions in New Bern.

The Reverend George Whitefield, the famous English theologian and evangelist, arrived in New Bern on Christmas Eve, 1739. He received the sacrament from the Reverend John LaPierre and preached on Christmas Day in the Court House. He was grieved that the minister encouraged dancing. Whitefield visited New Bern again in 1764.

The vestry at New Bern levied a county-wide tax for building a church in 1739; one year later an Act was passed by the Legislature for building such an Episcopal Church. In the minutes of Craven County Court, June 20, 1740, is found: "It was ordered that John

³³Saunders, Vol. IV, pp. 263, 265.

³⁴*Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 357.

³⁵*Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 375.

Bryan Esq. receive the remaining part of the Levys laid for the church by the former vestry, and he gives Securetys, Col. Wilson and John Fonveille Jun. in the sum of 500 £ Procl. money."⁵⁵ A few months later at September court following, a similar entry was made. The levy was continued for ten years. It is learned through an Act of 1741 that the vestry had laid a tax to support a minister. This tax was collected and diverted to the building of the church, which was described as being urgent. Craven County at that time extended almost to Raleigh in as much as Christ Church Parish consisted of Neuse River and its branches. Since the tax for the support of a minister and the church was a county-wide tax, part of the money must have been used for the benefit of people too far removed from New Bern for them to participate in a church there. The minister was often absent from New Bern as much as three weeks at a time visiting the chapels and the people throughout the parish.

It is not possible to get a full story of LaPierre's work in Christ Church Parish, but that he was the official minister in New Bern, and that the work of the Anglican Church in no part of the very large parish was neglected is well attested. The many references from authoritative sources to the minister in New Bern during this period have puzzled church historians, there being no local record of such a minister.

The Reverend Mr. Vass was puzzled when he wrote in 1886: "Rev. George Whitefield arrived in New Bern on Christmas Eve, 1739. He received the sacrament—from whom I cannot discover—and preached on Christmas day with his wondrous eloquence in the court-house."⁵⁶

THE CHRIST CHURCH PARISH CHAPELS

When the chapels in the vast area that was once Christ Church Parish were built, the rivers and creeks were the highways. The chapels were spaced about a day's journey apart, and were located on streams, usually near a ferry or where one stream runs into another, thus affording access to church to people coming from all directions. With one or two exceptions, the churches that evolved from chapels are situated very close to the original settings of the chapels.⁵⁷ Some of them have grown into beautiful modern churches, others are small and quaint surrounded by their ancient grave yards. They have been

⁵⁵Vass, p. 29.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵⁷Grace Episcopal Church at Trenton, having served its purpose in its original setting, is five or six miles from the location of the 1740 chapel on Trent River.

loved, revered, and visited by many successive generations. Descendants of the Reverend John LaPierre are serving today on some of their vestries, as well as on the vestry of the Mother Church in New Bern.³⁸

When Chaplain Reed came to New Bern, the agreement between him and the Church Wardens and the Vestry of Christ Church Parish stipulated that he was to

perform Divine Service at the Church in New Bern, and at the several chapels within the said Parish *now erected*, all Sundays in the year, except such as he shall be attending the chapels within said Parish and at each of the chapels the said James Reed shall attend and perform Divine Service three times in each year.³⁹

Of the numerous chapels established in Christ Church Parish during the tenure of the Reverend John LaPierre, eight were within the geographic limits of the parish when Chaplain Reed arrived. Not all of them have been located. Those known to have been in existence and dated sufficiently early to place them among the chapels opened by LaPierre are described below.

THE PALATINE CHAPEL ON TRENT RIVER (LATER, GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH, TRENTON). In 1740, a petition as follows was recorded in Craven County:

Whereas we, the subscribers, have agreed and concluded to build one house of worship, or chapel, on Trent River in Craven County in the Province of North Carolina out of one flock of Cattle which a certain person hath willed and given for the same use and purpose for the use of the Palatines or Germans. Now we, the subscribers hereof, have chosen and elected Mr. Jacob Sheets, John Simons, John Kinsey, and Peter Remm for to build the same church or chapel, *for the use of the High Germans and the Church of England* and the same chapel is to be built on the south side of Trent River between the ferry and John Kinsey's plantation, and the same chapel is to be 30 feet long and 20 feet wide, and 12 feet high; and furthermore, we, the subscribers hereof, do give unto the above Jacob Sheets, John Simons, Peter, Remm, and John Kinsey full power and authority to build the same chapel, or church, as they shall see fit and convenient to build or cause to be built, and the name or title of the same church, or chapel, is to be called the Palatine Church, or the High German Chapel, as witness our hands, this second day of

³⁸Zachery Taylor Koonce III, a direct descendant of LaPierre, is serving on the Vestry of Christ Episcopal Church in New Bern, while the Reverend Fred Fordham, another direct descendant of LaPierre, is serving an Episcopal church in Eastern North Carolina.

³⁹Clark, Vol. XXIII, pp. 420, 421.

August, Anno Domo 1740.⁴⁰ Permission to build the chapel was granted by the Court of Quarter Sessions in Craven County, December, 1740.

JASPER CHAPEL (LATER, ST. THOMAS EPISCOPAL CHURCH, JASPER). St. Thomas' Episcopal Church was closed about 1940. Its members merged with other Episcopal congregations.

The Spectator, published in New Bern, announced on January 23, 1835: "The Reverend William N. Hawks will preach at St. Thomas Chapel on Sunday next the 25th inst." Hawks was rector of Christ Church in New Bern. He organized a Negro congregation in New Bern in 1845 that became St. Cyprian's.⁴¹

BAY RIVER CHAPEL. The exact location of the Bay River Chapel is not known but records show that it was built prior to 1747. Identification of the site is complicated by the fact that the dividing line between Beaufort County and what then constituted Craven County (Pamlico not having been formed from Craven until the 1860's) was long unsettled. As a result, many deeds for land now lying in Beaufort County were recorded in Craven County since the land was at that time in Craven County. (This is also true of Pitt County which was formed from Beaufort County in 1760 and borders Craven on the north).

Beaufort County records (recorded in the office of the Registrar of Deeds, Craven County, New Bern, N.C.) contain the following entry:

"1747/8, Feb. 23 Samuel Tindel sells to William Lewis . . . on the South side Bay River . . . at head of a small creek *near the chapel.*"⁴²

In addition, the record of patents granted by the State of North Carolina, Craven County, contain for the year 1784 the following:

"Maxamillian Fulsher, 35 acres on the south side of Bay River, beginning in Wharton's line, to Moor's Creek, right against *the chapel*, up the creek, near Moor's line near the bridge."⁴³

MAULE'S RUN AND SWIFT CREEK CHAPEL (LATER, ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, VANCEBORO). Evidence that this chapel was established prior to 1749 is found in the *Craven County Deeds*:

⁴⁰*Craven County Court Minutes. Records of the Court of Quarter Sessions in Craven County.* December, 1740.

⁴¹*Elizabeth Moore, Records of Craven County, North Carolina.* 1960. Vol. I, p. 70.

⁴²*Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 34.

⁴³*Craven County Deeds, Book II, 1747/48, February 23.*

Lewis Bryan of Craven County sells to Richard Hart land on Maule's Run upon which the said Richard Hart now lives being the plantation where the said Lewis Bryan did live, *one acre for the chapel and five for the mill being reserved and taken out*, being part of Lewis Bryan's patent bearing date, 1739.⁴⁴

ATKINS BANKS CHAPEL (LATER, ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, KINSTON). The earliest records of the town of Kinston, later Kinston, speak of "the Chapel" as being already in existence. In the Act incorporating the town, dated November, 1762, trustees were appointed to lay off the town out of the land on Atkins Banks. In the Act special instructions were given "to reserve *one acre and a half of said land whereon the Chapel and public warehouses now stand of their respective uses.*"⁴⁵

No one knows just how long the Chapel had been in existence when the town was formed. It was built on land granted to Robert Atkins in 1729, and later acquired by William Herringate.⁴⁶

Atkins Banks and its surrounding territory was probably the most thriving area in Christ Church Parish. Nearby Stringer's Ferry (1737) was a popular river crossing, gathering place, and depot for trade and produce. It was a meeting place and cross roads for a wide area. It was the site of Tower Hill Plantation, owned by Governor Dobbs,⁴⁷ and the first appointed capital of North Carolina. It is logical to conclude that this strategic and prosperous place was the site of one of the earliest of the chapels.

In 1746, Craven County was divided and Johnston County was formed from Craven and Edgecombe.⁴⁸ It embraced most of the territory now lying in Lenoir, Greene, Wayne, Johnston, and Wake Counties including Atkins Bank. The law establishing Johnston County also created, within its limits, St. Patrick's Parish and named a vestry for the parish. It is apparent, therefore, that in 1746 the area that became Johnston County was severed from Christ Church Parish. There were still only two places in the province—New Bern and Bath—where Divine Service was held regularly. As late as 1764, there

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, Book I, p. 400.

⁴⁵Clark, Vol. XXV, p. 468.

⁴⁶*Kingston Daily Free Press*, November 23, 1957.

⁴⁷Royal Governor Arthur Dobbs persuaded the English government to purchase Tower Hill Plantation for the capital of the province. After the Revolutionary War, Governor Richard Caswell memorialized the legislature in an effort to purchase Tower Hill. It was vested in trustees and could not be sold at that time. The property was sold in 1800 and General William Croom became the purchaser.

⁴⁸T. C. Johnson and C. R. Holloman, *The Story of Kingston and Lenoir County*. Raleigh, North Carolina, 1954. pp. 7, 10, 11, 21-24, 26.

were only six ministers in the whole province to supply twenty-nine parishes, each embracing a whole county. In view of this situation, the newly-formed St. Patrick's Parish continued to be served by the rector in New Bern. (By a subsequent division of St. Patrick's Parish, the eastern division remained St. Patrick's and the western division became St. Stephen's.)

"The Huguenot ministers travelled circuits in accordance with the time honored custom of frontier life dispensing drugs to the sick, giving aid to the poor, distributing books to such as would read, and consoling the spiritually needy."^{47a}

LaPierre had been officiating in Christ Church Parish twelve years when the area became Johnston County and St. Patrick's Parish created within its limits. The whole area already had been organized, and worship services were being held by readers at established points over the county. From congregations established, at these points eventually evolved the Episcopal churches in that area all along the navigable length of Neuse River and its branches.

As far as is known, the oldest Church of England chapel in St. Patrick's Parish was on Atkins Banks, Kinston. It is thought to have been built not long after its neighboring chapel on Trent River. No doubt, a Church of England congregation was well established here some years before the chapel came into existence.

There was no minister in St. Patrick's Parish until about 1767. Governor Tryon reported in that year that the Rev. George Miller was officiating in St. Patrick's Parish, and added the notation, "*Not yet established.*" The Reverend Mr. Miller remained but a short time in Kinston and St. Patrick Parish was without a resident minister again until after the Revolution.

Kinston, not being the county seat of Johnston County, was under no necessity to build public buildings. Kinston consisted of buildings for the inspection of tobacco, the "public warehouses." The chapel had been built voluntarily at some time in the past.

The early chapels were not built by taxation, but by subscriptions and gifts. The law provided that ministers were not to bear the expense of the use of ferries in travelling from chapel to chapel and from one congregation to another. This expense was taken care of by law.

From its beginning as a Church of England chapel, called St. Mary's Chapel, to 1832, the history of the church at Kinston blends with that of Christ Church, New Bern. At that time the church in

^{47a}Hirsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-53.

Kinston had the status of a mission of Christ Church. "In 1832, St. Mary's Mission was organized into a parish called St. Mary's Parish and papers to that effect and a copy of the original deed are still extant."

A narration of the Church's history, including the above event, was given by the Reverend John H. Griffith, Jr. in 1906 in a special "Industrial Issue of the Kinston Free Press."⁴⁸ At the time he had been rector of St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Kinston, since 1898.

In the year 1751, the church in New Bern was not completely finished, and

Whereas several of the inhabitants of Johnston and Craven Counties have not paid the several taxes by virtue of several Acts of Assembly, for and towards buildings and said Church in New Bern: Therefore be it enacted by the authority aforesaid, that the said Church Wardens and Vestrymen, for the time being, or the majority of them, are hereby directed and empowered to issue a warrant or warrants, directed to the Sheriff of the respective county, where any person or persons being in arrear for the aforesaid taxes shall or may reside, to levy as much money of their goods and chattels as it shall appear they, or any of them are in arrear, the said Sheriff shall account with and pay to the said Church Wardens or Vestrymen, or the majority of them, all such sums of money as he shall receive by virtue of the said Act.^{48a}

GRACE CHAPEL ON CONTENTNEA CREEK (LATER ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, GRIFTON). St. John's Episcopal Church near Grifton (Bell's Ferry) was built in 1845. The church evolved from the membership of Grace Chapel living on Contentnea Creek, one of the main branches of Neuse River. It was in Craven Parish in 1715, and still being served by Christ Church in New Bern in 1821. The parish registry entries show in Volume I, Christ Episcopal Church, New Bern: Baptisms at Grace Chapel in Pitt County, August 5, 1821, "Eliza Wooten, Daughter of Council and Mary Wooten, born September 17, 1814, and Council Wooten, son of Council and Mary Wooten, born March 18, 1817. Sponsors, Mr. Simon Burney and Mrs. Burney."⁴⁹ A Church of England congregation was seated on Contentnea Creek as early as 1740.

THE LATER YEARS

In 1754 in answer to an appeal from the church wardens and vestry of Christ Church Parish, the Reverend James Reed, known as

⁴⁸*Kingston Daily Free Press*, Nov. 23, 1957.

^{48a}Clark, Vol. XXIII, pp. 365, 366.

⁴⁹Papers of Miss Gertrude Carraway, in State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

"Chaplain Reed," came to New Bern from England. On arrival he found a completed church, numerous established chapels, a glebe, a rectory, and compensation greater than that of any other parish in the Province. He served the parish until his death in 1777. This date about marks the end of an "established" church in North Carolina.

The first church building in New Bern, built during the Reverend John LaPierre's tenure as clergyman and used from about 1750 to 1820, had a square tower, a cupalo, and a bell. It stood very near the site of the present Christ Church. Governor Dobbs described it as a "pretty brick Church." In 1752, King George II presented to the church a solid silver Communion Service. The service, first used by the Reverend John LaPierre more than 200 years ago, is complete and still in use.

The last mention made of LaPierre in the Minutes of the General Assembly, January 1755, reads:

"To the Rev. James Reed Chaplain	£10
To the Rev. John LaPierre	£20" ⁵⁰

By 1755 the Reverend John LaPierre, having served the Church of England in North and South Carolina for forty-eight years, was an old man. He was no longer able to carry out the duties of the Church, which included not only the work of Christ Church in New Bern but that of the widely-scattered parish chapels. Governor Dobbs wrote that "by reason of his foreign Dialect and his age" he was of very little service to the people.⁵¹

LAPIERRE MEMORIALS

The only structural reminder of the Reverend John LaPierre's work for the Church of England in North Carolina is the ruin of Old St. Philip's Church, organized by him in 1728-9.

The church took many years to build, being completed largely from the reclaiming of a sunken Spanish privateer in 1748.⁵² During Governor Gabriel Johnston's administration, England was at war with Spain and a considerable number of troops from North Carolina served in the war under Admiral Vernon, of the British Navy, for whom "Mount Vernon," the home of President George Washington, was named. During the course of the war, two Spanish privateers that were ravishing the coast of North Carolina, causing great alarm,

⁵⁰Saunders, Vol. V, p. 307.

⁵¹Dill, pp. 64-66.

⁵²Louis T. Moore, "Things of Interest in Brunswick County," *The State*, April 30, 1949.

came up the Cape Fear River. One of them was driven off and the other blown up. Part of the proceeds from the wreck were given to the churches at Brunswick and Wilmington "by the General Assembly."⁵³ Lightning struck the church when it was finished, tearing off the top. This caused a long delay in its dedication and occupancy.

Bishop Francis Asbury (1745-1816), first Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church ordained in the United States, visited the region in 1804. He wrote of Brunswick: "An old town' demolished houses, and the noble walls of a brick church; there remain but four houses entire."⁵⁴

The "noble walls" of St. Philip's Church, three feet thick, still stand (1970). With no top, no windows, no doors, and no floor, with only its thick walls defying time and coastal storms, the church is today considered by some to be the State's most important historical ruin.

On November 28, 1968, the State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina; the State Highway Commission; and the Brunswick County Historical Association, sponsored a highway marker to the Reverend John LaPierre at Brunswick Town. The Reverend Mr. LaPierre richly deserves this distinction because of the enduring foundations he laid for Episcopal Churches in North Carolina. It is fitting that the marker should be placed near the walls of St. Philip's Church where 240 years ago he actually preached the Gospel where it had never been preached before.

Other than the silver communion service and a picture of the church in New Bern, no visible evidence of the long, often hard, and dedicated work of the Reverend John LaPierre in Christ Church Parish remains. The church building in New Bern has long since vanished and the records have disappeared. Yet in each community where a church or a chapel is known to have been located, there has been for over two centuries an Episcopal following and a nucleus of people of culture.

The substance has passed away, but the spirit and the influence cannot be measured or destroyed; they will remain with us forever!

⁵³Herbert O'Keef, "Old Brunswick Wrote History," *The News and Observer*, Raleigh, North Carolina, August 24, 1952. See also C. H. Wiley, *The North Carolina Reader*, 1851, no. III, p. 147.

⁵⁴O'Keef.