

## St. Mark's - My Church

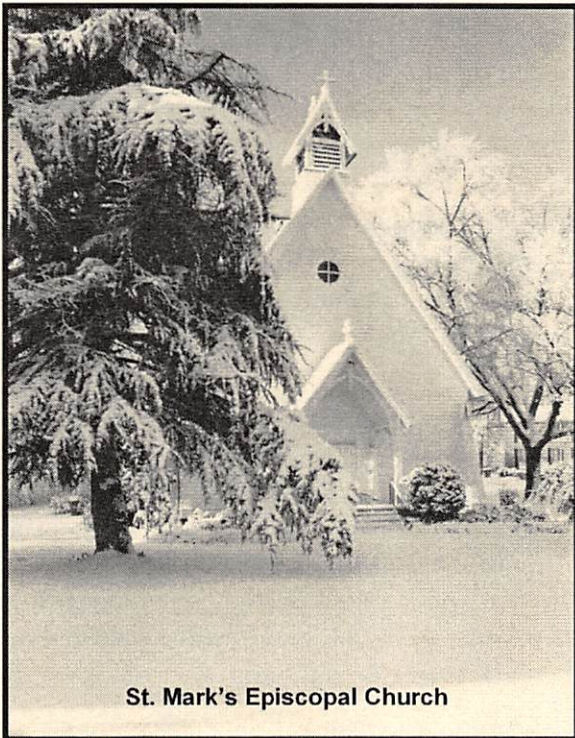
As one of the oldest members of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Chester, I have many fond memories. I like to recall much of its history, for it is indeed an historical group of worshippers.

It is hard to say exactly when its story begins, for it is closely interwoven with that of Immanuel Church that once stood at Landsford in the northeastern corner of the county. However, diocesan records show that the Reverend R. D. Shindler became missionary of the "Advancement Society" of the Episcopal Church in Chester and York Counties in May 1843. Mr. Shindler, an energetic missionary, held services in Landsford, Richardson's Meeting House, the Court House at Chesterville (as the town was then called), and in various places in York District. These services were for whites and Negroes alike.

The successor to Mr. Shindler was the Reverend S. Sealy, who at that time conducted a school in Chester called "Chesterville Academy." He continued to hold services in the court house or in his schoolhouse. It was during Mr. Sealy's time that the population in Chesterville steadily increased while it steadily decreased around Landsford.

The first annual report of an Episcopal Church for Chester recorded only thirteen families, ten communicants, and twenty-four services held for "St. Peter's Church," Chesterville. Erection of a church building in Chesterville was begun in the year of that first report. It cost \$2,700, quite a large sum in the Upcountry in 1855, but I have been unable to find any record as to where that first church stood.

Then in 1858, a new minister, The Reverend A. D. Gibson, reported the organization of a new parish in Chester, which he called "St. Mark's." Thus the name of St. Peter yielded to that of St. Peter's evangelist.



St. Mark's Episcopal Church

A handsome new church building was consecrated by the Right Reverend T. F. Davis, Bishop of South Carolina, on October 7, 1860. This building was of Norman Gothic design, extended 60 x 30 feet, and was located at the site of our present home, 122 Pinckney Street, where Mrs. I. C. Cross lived for many years. There were only five communicants and eight families in the church at that time, so the reported average attendance of fifty persons seems phenomenal. Because of this amazing fact, it is not surprising that the membership steadily increased.

However, during The War Between the States numbers again lagged. These were hard times, and there was no regular rector. But the church was not allowed to die, for several of the faithful continued to minister to the group.

It was during the summer of 1869, that the vestry sent out the following call, probably the first to be sent by a vestry of the Chester church. It read as follows:

August 2, 1869

Chester, S. C.

The Rev. S. R. Stuart

Dear Sir:

At a meeting of the vestry of St. Mark's Church of this place, you were unanimously called to the rectorship of the same, at a minimum salary of \$800 a year. Believing that your acceptance of this call will add greatly to the building up of our church, we pledge ourselves to make this change a pleasant one for yourself and family.

Earnestly hoping for a favorable answer, believe me.

Yours truly,  
George M. Melton  
Sec'y & Treas.  
St. Mark's Church

This call was written on a piece of tablet paper, and is now the prized possession of his grandson, the Right Reverend A. R. Stuart, presently Bishop of Georgia. I have seen the original for Bishop Stuart has himself often held services at St. Mark's, and he showed me the original copy of the letter.

During the three years that Bishop Stuart's grandfather was in Chester, the church took on new life, but the post-war resurgence didn't last. By 1875, St. Mark's was reported "dormant as a parish," and so lost formal representation in the diocesan convention. Various ministers did hold occasional services. Then soon the Reverend John Dewitt McCullough, the "great missionary of the Up-Country," began to give regularly one service a month, while "zealous lay readers held services every other Sunday."

The date March 3, 1881, was a sad one for the congregation of St. Mark's for on that day a cyclone struck Chester and completely demolished both the First Baptist Church and the Episcopal Church on Pinckney Street. Perhaps it also stirred up its members for they immediately started planning a new building to be erected on the same site, and on August 17, 1883, the second St. Mark's Church was consecrated.

Church records show that several different ministers served this church, usually having other charges as well, in Rock Hill, York, and other neighboring communities. It was during this period that the Reverend Theodore D. Bratton, a young theological graduate who was serving his diaconate, assisted the rector, the Reverend E.N. Joyner, at St. Mark's. In 1904, Mr. Bratton was elected Bishop of Mississippi.

It was in September 1899, while the Reverend Cantey Johnson was rector, that the congregation of St. Mark's moved to its present home, the little white church on Center Street. It has a curiously interesting history. The lot on which the church stands was donated to the Methodists in 1838, by Thomas McLure, a Presbyterian. Then the Associate Reformed Presbyterians obtained the land from the Methodists, and the present beautiful little structure was designed in 1878, by the well-known architect, Samuel Sloan of Philadelphia. Finally the Episcopalians bought the church from the A. R. P.'s. It was bought for \$1250, with friends of various faiths, along with Episcopalians throughout the Diocese, assisting in raising the necessary funds to purchase and renovate the building.

The years again brought changes in the ministry of the church. Perhaps the Reverend T. Tracy Walsh maintained the longest rectorship in the entire history of St. Mark's (1909 - 1919), although he resided in York. It was during his time that a pipe organ was installed. It was first played during a service on December 7, 1909, and is still being used today. As a child, I remember my mother, a

trained musicians, often came with Mr. Walsh and the choir from York to sing here at St. Mark's, while accompanied by this wonderful new organ.

I came to Chester as a bride in 1922, and immediately became a member of this small church. Though a pretty little building structurally, it had few of the comforts we now consider necessities. Well do I remember the pot-bellied stove that supplied the heat, only after one of the church's devoted members had built and stoked the fire.

The Reverend A. Rufus Morgan was rector of St. Mark's at that time. He and his family had not been long in Chester. Indeed they were the first to occupy the new rectory on Henry Street.

Some years later, when St. Mark's was again without a resident minister, I lived in the rectory and loved it. It was in that house that Allein, my only daughter, was born. Though quite a comfortable home, the street, now a pretty residential area, at that time was far from desirable. There were only three or four houses on the "Lane," as the street was then called. Of course it was unpaved, and there were deep, unsightly ditches on either side of the road. But the children in the neighborhood loved the ditches. They had great fun building dams after a heavy rain.

Though never large, under Mr. Morgan's leadership, St. Mark's prospered. It greatly increased its budget, and finally was admitted into the diocese as a parish, thus renewing a status it had lost a century before. (An Episcopal parish is represented at the Diocesan Convention by four persons and has the privilege of selecting and calling its own minister.)

Mr. Morgan will always be remembered as the man with the fiery red hair who never wore a hat, a most unusual habit at that time. This young, enthusiastic minister extended his work far beyond parish limits, working especially with young boys. It was he who first started the Boy Scout movement in Chester. Then in 1922, having discovered eight Episcopalians in Great Falls, began holding services there at any place that he could gather a group. Thus, Mr. Morgan, along with the Right Reverend Kirkman G. Finlay, who had just been made the first bishop of the newly created Diocese of Upper South Carolina, founded St. Peter's Mission in Great Falls.

In order to further assist Bishop Finlay, Mr. Morgan left Chester in 1926, to become Executive Secretary of the Diocese. He kept this position for only a few years, however, for the call to return to his beloved mountains of North Carolina became too strong for him to resist. So he left the state to do missionary work in Franklin, North Carolina, and the surrounding region. Now at an extremely ripe old age and almost blind, he continues his good work. He has ever been an inspiration to me. I think of him fondly as the minister who baptized my two babies.

We've had a number of outstanding ministers at St. Mark's since I've lived in Chester, and certainly no church as small as ours can boast as many ordinations. The Reverend C. B. Lucas came to Chester as a deacon, and here in 1926 was ordained a priest. He left Chester to accept a call to a large church in Buffalo, New York.

The Reverend C. C. Fishburne also came to St. Mark's as a deacon and was ordained a priest in 1931. Many people, not only Episcopalians, will remember spending a happy hour each Sunday evening at St. Mark's Church, where Mr. Fishburne would show and interpret slides depicting Bible stories of the Old Testament. What a pity that this custom has not been continued! A bachelor during his stay in Chester, Mr. Fishburne left here as a young bridegroom, to take a more challenging charge in Martinsville, Virginia. Now he serves the great "Church Triumphant," as do others that I remember with affection; the Reverend Harold Thomas and the Reverend Julian S. Ellenburg. Mr. Ellenburg came to take charge of St. Mark's in June 1940, just after graduating from the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia. In Chester, he was ordained a deacon

and the following year he was ordained a priest. A quotation from an editorial in the Christmas edition of the Chester Reporter of 1941 well describes Mr. Ellenburg:

“...in the short time he has been here, he has greatly endeared himself to all, irrespective of creed, race, age, or anything else. Mr. Ellenburg aspires to do a kindness whenever he can, utter a word as he has opportunity, breathe a prayer, when a prayer is needed, and do it all in the name of Him our young friend serves.”

Mr. Ellenburg was indeed not only the Episcopal minister of St. Mark's he was a devoted Christian, who used his talents in many fields. I recall his active interest and help in establishing and furthering the work of the Drama Club, perhaps, the forerunner of our present Little Theater. Both he and Mr. Fishburne lived in my home during a large part of their ministry in Chester, and I shall ever be grateful to them for their influence upon my children. It was while Mr. Ellenburg was in Chester that the Parish House was built. This Parish House offered a hospitable retreat for the soldiers on maneuvers in Chester at that time, and it continues to serve the church and the community very effectively.

In March 1943, Mr. Ellenburg was given a leave of absence from St. Mark's to serve as chaplain in the armed forces of his country. This he did gallantly, for he was the first chaplain to land on the Normandy beaches on D-Day. Here he proved a combination minister and doctor, “praying with dying, tending the wounded and encouraging the living.” For this he was awarded the Silver Star.

During Mr. Ellenburg's absence, first the Reverend Gardiner D. Underhill, the small man with the powerful voice, rector of the Church of the Nativity, Union, and the Reverend Hopkins Weston, assistant rector of Trinity Church, Columbia, supplied. It was under Mr. Underhill's ministry that St. Mark's again lost it's status as a parish, and she has never regained it. She is still a mission and must look to the diocese for substantial aid.

It was a happy day when Major Julian S. Ellenburg, Chaplain U.S. Army, returned to Chester in November 1945, but he was here only a short time. The army called. So, on October 31, 1946, he left Chester to re-enter the armed forces. Before he left, however, the beautiful stained glass windows above the altar were installed and dedicated. These windows were given by Mr. and Mrs. W. S. Summersby, former members of St. Mark's in memory of their little son who had been tragically killed on October 5, 1945.

The Reverend Martin L. Tillson, a young theological student, rendered valuable service during the summer months of 1947, while the church awaited the Reverend Harold Thomas, who came that fall. Mr. Tillson is now a popular candidate for Bishop of Louisiana

On June 1, 1960, the Reverend R. Houseal Norris became deacon in charge of St. Mark's In May 1961, he was ordained priest, after having served the church as deacon for a year. This was the fifth service of ordination to be held in St. Mark's; quite a distinction for one so small!

However, only the Reverend Louis C. Melcher, Jr. can claim the distinction of being the only minister to be married in St. Mark's. On June 19, 1959, he and Miss Jo Ann Ogle of Coco, Florida, were united in marriage, with the officiating minister being his father, the Right Reverend Louis C. Melcher, retired Bishop of Central Brazil. He, too, left Chester a bridegroom. He now serves one of the largest churches in Raleigh, North Carolina.

It would be impossible to tell the story of every minister who has served our little church since I came here in 1922, for there have been many. In addition to those I've mentioned, there were: The Reverend W.P. Peyton, the Reverend T. P. Devlin, the Reverend R. Hampton Price, the Reverend

W. C. Dennis, the Reverend Raymond L. Phillips, and our present vicar, the Reverend George R. Clark. Each has contributed much to further God's work in Chester.

Father Phillips made his mark in a most dramatic way. He came to Chester in 1969. On Wednesday, November 12 of that year, he moved his household belongings into the rectory recently purchased on Sunset Drive. That night the rectory caught fire and was seriously damaged. The Phillips lost all their furniture, clothes, and everything. Fortunately, they themselves had not spent the night there. Nothing daunted, however, the Phillips made their temporary home in the Magnolia Apartments, next to the church until the rectory on Sunset Drive was rebuilt.

During Father Phillip's ministry, eight beautiful stained glass windows were installed in the church, one in memory of Joan Bollin Oliphant (Mrs. Albert D. Oliphant). The others were made possible because of memorial gifts made to the church in her name, and through the added gifts of the Oliphant family. These windows may become memorials to others, if one so desires and pays to the church the cost of the windows.

It was also at this time that the adjoining property on Center Street was bought as a parking area for the church. Mr. Phillips, himself, undertook the task of making the small building on this lot into a lovely little chapel. Most of the work he did himself, installing stained glass windows, altar, and other churchly furnishings. This he did in memory of his mother.

Unfortunately, his dream of a parochial school was never realized, for he was obliged to retire from the ministry because of failing health.

Many improvements have been made through the years to the church building and grounds to make them more beautiful and more useful. For many years, the women of the church held a bazaar and dinner to raise money to meet their needs. Gifts and memorials have been given by members and friends, too many to catalog. You have only to visit this historic little church to be impressed by its quiet beauty and churchly atmosphere.

Though never large numerically, its members have ever been strong in the spirit that bids a Christian to keep up the fight. Certainly from the group have come leaders in the larger church activities.

Martha Jo Davis lived for some years on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, where she worked as a missionary to the Shoshone and Arapaho Indians. She also acted as Director of Christian Education at the historic old church, Prince George Winyah, Georgetown. Though now back in Chester as a public school teacher, she continues her active interest at the local church.

Allein White (now Mrs. E. M. Ward), before her marriage to an Episcopal minister, acted as Episcopal Student Worker for the boys and girls of the University of South Carolina and Columbia College. She now fills the job of wife and helper to her husband, the headmaster for the Episcopal boy's school, Salisbury School, Salisbury, Connecticut.

St. Mark's has also nurtured two past presidents of the Episcopal Church Women of the diocese, Mrs. J. Floyd White (now your writer, Mrs. W.M. Fewell) and Mrs. Julian Hinson, presently living in Kershaw. Albert Oliphant, Reginald Wilson, and several of our laymen have held important posts in diocesan affairs. Possibly there are others that should be mentioned.

Our late bishop, the Right Reverend John A. Pinckney, aptly called the Episcopal Church in Chester a "Feeder Church". Many members have come into the church only later to move on elsewhere. I have often remarked that could we have kept all the transients as permanent members, St. Mark's could well boast a large and prosperous communicant list. But life today is uncertain and

people keep moving as business and interests dictate. Also, many have felt they must go with their spouses to larger and more active local churches. Thus, we lose.

But those of us who do remain like to think that the COMMUNITY, the DIOCESE, the NATION, and even the WORLD have been enriched through the Christian efforts of St. Mark's members.

*Frances Allein Fewell*

#### **About The Author**

Frances Allein Fewell was the daughter of Anne Ball Allein of Meridian, Mississippi, and of Robert Cox Allein of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Frances was brought up in York, South Carolina. She was graduated from Winthrop College and was first married to John Floyd White (b. April 9, 1899 - d. December 10, 1945) of Chester. After his death, she married William Miles Fewell. The Fewells lived at 115 Pinckney Street.