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HENRY WARD BEECHER AND ST. MICHAEL'S

The following letter is from the Bennett-Campbell Papers recently presented the South Carolina Historical Society by Mrs. H. Kalpashnikoff of Wayne, Pennsylvania.

The "story" herein mentioned may have arisen from confusion with the fact that Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher "appropriated a panel [inlaid with the initials *I.H.S.*] of the pulpit of St. Michael's Church."¹ Later, however, "... a Northern clergyman, who shall be nameless, restored the lost initials with the remarkable statement that he did so as there was no place for them in his church."²

Brooklyn Apl 21, 1869

My dear Miss Chevel,

You ask me,—or rather you tell me, about the story afloat in Charleston that, at my visit there, in 1865 I siezed and made off with the *Records of St. Michaels Church*. What on earth does any one suppose I wanted of church records? I am not an Episcopalian—nor a historian—nor a collector of old books. No—I never *took, touched* or *saw* the records of St. Michaels, or of any other Saints Church. Never did I commit sacrilege in removing any article of Church property. I have no taste for relics, at least of old or stolen ones. I took nothing away from Charleston but a heavy heart, that a city of my own country should lie so utterly desolated by war!

Yes—there was one thing that I brought away, now that I bethink myself— A officer of a colored regiment brought to my house and presented to me an *old family Bible* which had been saved from a burning house—on some plantation in the country. I entered the facts as narrated to me, on the fly leaf,—thinking that, after peace came, the family might perhaps be glad to regain this venerable old Book (printed in 1679.) I copy the entry verbatim: "Davis Plantation,³ near the Middleton Plantation, on Ashley river 20 miles from Charleston saved from burning

¹ D. D. Wallace, *Short History of South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1951), p. 557.

² George S. Holmes, *A Historic Sketch of The Parish Church of St. Michael, in the Province of South Carolina* (Charleston, 1887), p. 28. See also Thomas Smyth, D.D., *Autobiographical Notes, Letters, and Reflections* (Charleston, 1914), p. 367; and George W. Williams, *St. Michael's, Charleston, 1751-1951* (Columbia, 1951), p. 169.

³ Perhaps Dorchester Plantation. See Henry A. M. Smith, "The Upper Ashley; and the Mutations of Families," this *Magazine*, XX (1919), 155-156.

by an old negro—presented to H.W. Beecher by Lieut. Holland N. Batcheller, Charleston Apl 15, 1865.”

If the family or any member of it is alive and desires the Book, it would give me great pleasure to return it to them—none the worse I trust for a short sojourn in the North.

If any good will come of it, you may print any or all of this, which I suppose accounts for the story that I *stole* Church Records.

Truly yours

HENRY WARD BEECHER