

Centennial Moments in History 1913–1920

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The History of the Church of St. Michael and All Angels (1912–1928) From Mission to Thriving Parish

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

— Hebrews 12:1–2a

*This is the church,
This is the steeple.
Open the doors
And see all the people.*

With the construction of the church underway, Bishop Tuttle met with the Parkview Committee on 19 October 1911. He said, “If building goes on without a congregation, it would be a good deal like putting the cart before the horse.” The first worship service of the St. Michael and All Angels mission church was conducted in Graham Chapel on 4 February 1912. Bishop Tuttle officiated with 76 people in attendance despite the near-zero temperature. The bishop appointed a quasi-vestry to be in charge of the mission, naming Mr. T. K. Skinker as warden.

The Rev. George E. Norton, a curate at St. George’s Church in New York City, was called to take charge of the new mission. He arrived on 12 June 1912 with his new bride, the former Lillian Drouet, who had been an instructor at Wellesley College. Many years later, Mr. Norton recalled his arrival: “St. Michael’s was the beginning of my ministry. There was nothing there when I first went out except a lot of land and a church to be and 18 families who would guarantee my salary for three years if I would come out and try it.” Mr. Norton and the small congregation got busy building the membership. A volunteer choir and a Sunday school that had 16 scholars were in place when Mr. Norton arrived. Soon there was a Church Service League, a Women’s Auxiliary that was active in missions education and support, and an Altar Guild.



This portrait of the Rev. Norton hangs on a wall in the Great Hall.

A silver communion service was given by Mr. T. K. Skinker’s wife, Bertha. She and Mr. Skinker had married in Virginia shortly after the Civil War when most everyone in that Confederate state had lost everything. She received only a few, meager wedding presents and still had no silver coffee or tea service by 1911, although she had been saving to buy one for some

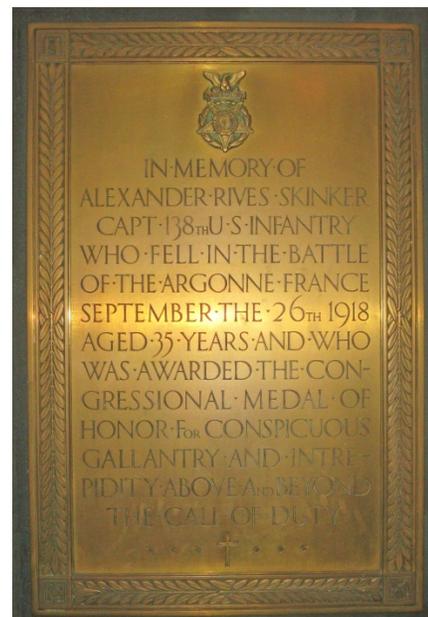
time. When the new mission was started, she said she would rather buy a communion set in memory of her father-in-law with her savings than a silver coffee and tea service for her home. Mrs. Skinker's daughter, Isabella, noted that "extending hospitality in one's home is a beautiful thing, but the hospitality of the Lord's table is a far greater thing." The Rt. Rev. John N. McCormack, Bishop of Western Michigan, blessed the sacred vessels at the mission's first worship service. They rested on the Graham Chapel organ console that served as the altar.

The mission was incorporated as a parish on 30 November 1913. The Rev. Norton who had been in charge of the mission for 18 months was named rector. A nine-member vestry was elected with Mr. T. K. Skinker as senior warden; Dr. John L. Green as junior warden; and Mr. Clinton L. Whittemore as treasurer. Mr. Whittemore gave several windows in the church in memory of his family members as denoted by extant plaques on the church's interior walls. The vestry's first meeting was held in the residence of Mr. T. K. Skinker. The new parish was sometimes called the Church of St. Michael and All Skinners, and not without reason!

The congregation conducted the first worship service in the newly constructed church on Christmas Day, 1913. Bishop Tuttle pointed to all areas of the church and said, "The angels of God are here. In the years to come those who worship here will remember the love and devotion of those whose gifts and works have been helped to establish this mission, and in every nook and cranny they will feel the presence of the angels of God." May we who worship here a century later remember.

Bishop Tuttle came to the church to visit the rector one day in the early summer of 1914 and said, "You need a rectory. Here, build a rectory. No debts. No debts. I am giving this check to your treasurer!" The rector later recounted that the check was "for something like \$25,000 or \$30,000" (multiply all dollar figures in this e-letter by 22.5 to get an approximate present value, based on the CPI). Our anonymous donor had given \$15,000 of it. The rector, his wife, and their infant son moved into the newly completed rectory on 19 December 1914.

The Great War, now known as the First World War, took its toll on the parish. Two of the parish's sons fell in the Battle of Argonne in France near the end of the war: Cpl. Montgomery Schuyler Batdorf and Capt. Alexander Rives Skinker, son of Mr. and Mrs. T. K. (Bertha) Skinker. A plaque in memory of Cpl. Batdorf is affixed to the south wall of the nave. A plaque in memory of Capt. Skinker, who was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor "for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty," is affixed to the west wall of the nave and shown at the right.



With 100 scholars already in the Sunday school and with expanding parish programs, there was a pressing need for a parish house. Our anonymous donor gave \$25,000 towards the cost of the building. As construction began, it was decided that the parish house was to be a memorial to the anonymous donor. Who was this person? When Miss Susan Mount, a member of St. Paul's Chapel of Trinity Parish, New York City, died on 21 May 1917, Bishop Tuttle was free to divulge her name as the generous donor for the church, the rectory, and the parish house. The parish house cornerstone was laid on 14 July 1920. Its concise inscription reads, SUSAN

MOUNT MEMORIAL — 1920. Today, the Susan Mount Guild, formed in 1927, meets at the church on the second Monday of each month September through May for lunch and a program of general interest. Miss Mount is among the “cloud of witnesses” that surrounds us today.



The history of the first decade is filled not so much with events as with people, for it is the people who are the church, not the building. Bishop Tuttle had a dream and worked to make it happen. Miss Susan Mount gave money that allowed the mission to break ground before there was a congregation. Numerous laypeople, some of whom we have read about, gave of their time, talent, and treasure, and gave in faith, not knowing how things would turn out. Mr. Norton and his young bride left the northeast of their childhood and early adulthood to cast their lot with a new parish in a strange land at a mission that had no rectory or parish house.

God placed us here with a purpose in 1912, and God has kept us here with a purpose for 2012 and beyond. In what concrete ways can we, like our spiritual forebears, be found faithful? What risks of faith must we take to bring the gospel to our increasingly secular community?

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

— John R. Tyler
Historical information from *Trilogy* by Harriet Davidson