

Centennial Moments in History 1912–1913

No. 2

February 9, 2012

The History of the Church of St. Michael and All Angels (1912–1928) In the Beginning . . .

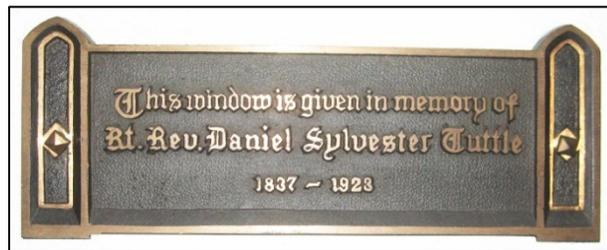
Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

— Hebrews 12:1–2a

In 1904, an exhibit of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition visited by hundreds of thousands of fair goers rested on the grounds where our church now stands. After “The Fair” closed, the city accelerated its westward expansion. A new residential sub-division was built just west of Forest Park. It was called Skinker Heights because the ground had been part of Mr. Thomas Skinker’s family farm. Mr. Skinker had been one of the founders of St. George’s Protestant Episcopal Church in 1845 when James Knox Polk was in the White House, the Union had recently been expanded to twenty-eight states, the population of St. Louis was 35,930, and the city limits extended to 18th Street.

The Rt. Rev. Daniel Sylvester Tuttle, the Third Bishop of Missouri who served simultaneously as the Presiding Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States from 1903 until his death in 1923, wanted to plant a mission church west of Forest Park to serve the growing number of residents there. To this end, he secured a \$40,000 gift in February 1911 (\$947,000 present value) from a New York City resident and friend who wished to remain anonymous. The donor stipulated that the money was to be used to establish a church in the rapidly expanding area around Washington University known as the Parkview region.

Bishop Tuttle established a Parkview Committee to help him organize the mission church. Among the eight committee members was Mr. Thomas Keith Skinker, son of the aforementioned Mr. Thomas Skinker, who resided at 6464 Ellenwood, the first house built in the new Skinker Heights sub-division. Mr. T. K. Skinker, an attorney, was active in real estate development. The committee selected the triangular lot at the intersection



This plaque is near the south window in the sanctuary that depicts scenes from the stories of St. Michael and St. George.

of Wydown Boulevard and Ellenwood Avenue as the desired church site. The streetcars ran conveniently just ninety feet from where the church doors would be, yet the line was “sufficiently removed to prevent their disturbing services”. The lot had an asking price of \$7,500 (\$178,000 present value). Mr. T. K. Skinker, with the cooperation of his business partner, offered the land to Bishop Tuttle for \$2,500 (\$59,200 present value), one-third of the market price.

Ground was broken on All Saints' Day, 1912. The church building was designed in the same English Gothic style and constructed with the same Missouri red granite and Bedford, Indiana limestone as the early buildings on the Washington University campus. Unanticipated construction difficulties were encountered early-on, and Bishop Tuttle secured an additional gift of \$9,776 (\$227,000 present value) from our generous, anonymous donor.

How was the name for the new mission church chosen? Miss Isabella N. Skinker, daughter of the aforementioned Mr. T. K. Skinker, tells the story. She had lived for a few months in Bishop Tuttle's residence when the family home was being constructed on Ellenwood Avenue, and the two had become close friends. When the question of naming the new mission church arose, Bishop Tuttle wrote Miss Skinker asking for her view on the matter. She already had given it thought, chosen a preferred name, and gotten the tacit support of several members of the Parkview Committee, including her father. So she answered the bishop's letter, asking that St. Michael and All Angels be the name. The reason for her choice? She said every other Saint's Day in the Prayer Book had already been used in St. Louis! Bishop Tuttle asked the Parkview Committee to adopt that name, and they did.



The cornerstone of the mission church was laid on 21 January 1913. When I recently took the photograph that you see here, I placed my hand on the cornerstone and said a prayer of thanksgiving for those who had the missionary spirit to take the gospel "to the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8, KJV) west of Forest Park. Among them were Bishop Tuttle who had a dream to plant a mission church in a new area; Mr. T. K. Skinker who made valuable land on the cutting edge of population growth available at one-third the market price; and, of course, our anonymous donor who gave the money to plant a tree under whose shade he or she would never rest.



What vision do you have for our church, and what actions must you and other parishioners take to make that vision a reality?

Why had our anonymous donor given the money? A note placed in the cornerstone when it was laid said the gift was given "solely for the glory of God and the good of Christ's Church Militant". Who was this anonymous donor? Watch your e-mail inbox for more "Centennial Moments in History".

Gracious God, from whom all our blessings flow: May we be grateful for our spiritual ancestors who sacrificed financially to plant our church, and may we ponder what financial sacrifices we should make today so that we too can pass on to others the blessings that others have passed on to us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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