

The Establishment of St. Saviour's Episcopal Church, Bar Harbor

excerpted from "The Episcopal Church Comes to Mount Desert Island"

by The Rev. Edwin Atlee Garrett, III, Th.M.

The History Journal of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society,

Volume III, 2000, pp 20-31.

In 1820 the Diocese of Maine was established... just one month after the District of Maine had become the State of Maine. It was a tribute to the commitment of both clergy and laity that many additional Episcopal congregations had come into being between 1820 and the 20th of July, 1867, when Henry Adams Neely, newly consecrated at Trinity Church, New York City, as the second Bishop of Maine, arrived on Mount Desert Island. He came at the invitation of his Portland neighbor Jonathan Ignatius Stevens. Bishop Neely sailed from Portland with the intention of conducting a service in the Hulls Cove schoolhouse built by Capt. Stevens in 1863. Delayed by a gale, Bp. Neely's vessel put in on Saturday night at Northeast Harbor and the next morning he walked to Hulls Cove, discovering that, not only was he far too late for the scheduled service, but Capt. Stevens had been called back to Portland by unexpected business requirements.

Having missed the intended service at the Hulls Cove schoolhouse, Bishop Neely walked that July afternoon to Bar Harbor where he organized and conducted an evening service for a group of vacationing Episcopalians at the increasingly expanding hotel called the Rodick House. Before a week had passed, the Bishop was back in Portland at the bedside of Captain Stevens, who had suddenly taken ill and was breathing his last. Bishop Neely promised to send a clergyman to Hulls Cove as soon as he could. Recognizing an opportunity for mission, he returned to Mount Desert Island himself later that summer, the next year, and thereafter. By the summer of 1870 there were enough individuals-both 'rusticators' and local people at East Eden (later Bar Harbor)-to form a congregation and choose a name from the Victorian-romanticized tales of French settlement in Acadia: "Saint Saviour," an anglicizing of "Saint Sauveur," the short-lived Jesuit colony of 1613. Summer services of worship were held either in, if available, the 1855 Union Church by

the Rodick Family Burying Ground, now Mount Desert Street Burying Ground, or at one of the hotels. There was neither a book for recording worship services nor a Parish Register for recording communicants, baptisms, burials, or other official acts during the period between 1867 and 1879; hence, baptisms-and reportedly they did occur -were probably recorded by officiating clergy in their home parishes elsewhere. This was also true of those occasional summertime celebrations of the Holy Communion.

Impetus for the gathering of the first Episcopal Congregation on Mount Desert Island, which was also the first in Hancock County, came not only from people like Capt. Stevens and Bishop Neely, but from summer visitors - both clergy and laity-from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. The "pilgrim age" character of the congregation, moving for worship to whatever site might be available, is symbolized by a crystal bowl used for baptisms in this early period, now among the treasured possessions of St. Saviour's.

Land on Philadelphia Avenue, now Mount Desert Street, was purchased in 1875 by Gouverneur Morris Ogden, a Vestryman of Trinity Church, New York City, who built in 1868-1869 the second summer cottage, after fellow Episcopalian Alpheus Hardy, a wealthy and cultured clipper trade merchant, built his in 1868. That land, to provide the future site for St. Saviour's, was transferred to the Trustees of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. The Trustees, in 1876, conveyed the title to Gardiner Sherman, of New York, who had offered to build a church. Excavation for a basement was done in the fall of that year, with construction continued throughout the summer of 1877, enabling services to be held late that summer. The following summer services, there being no resident clergyman, were conducted by the vacationing clergy as well as by Bishop Neely. The liturgy for the Consecration of the new church (the transepts of the present building) was conducted by Bishop Neely on August 21, 1878, with Daniel F. Tuttle, Bishop of Missouri, as the preacher. For the sum of one-dollar Gardiner Sherman had conveyed the property plus the new rectangular church back to the Trustees of the Diocese.