



Christ Church Looks Back

by Joseph A. Tomberlin

John Courtenay LeBey, who shaped the plans for the new Christ Episcopal Church on North Patterson Street was described in his 2002 obituary as “one of Savannah’s most distinguished architects.” A Savannah native, born in 1905, he graduated from Savannah High School, and earned his architectural degree from Georgia Tech in 1928. LeBey spent the summer of 1927 in France where he studied at L’École des Beaux-Arts in Fontainebleau and received the institution’s Diploma in Architecture. He was intensely involved in more than sixty building restoration projects in the Savannah Historic District. Among others, he designed the renovations of the Davenport House and the Waring House and guided thirty restoration projects for Mills B. Lane, Jr. LeBey was responsible for the design of the Georgia Salzburger Museum in Ebenezer, as well as the New Ebenezer Retreat Center. His personal Savannah residence for many years was the historic Cruger House at 4 West Taylor Street, a Greek Revival style structure built by Nicholas Cruger in 1852.

For Christ Church Valdosta, LeBey produced a design that, below the tower level, incorporated elements of Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg, and he modeled the tower itself upon a seventeenth century design by Sir Christopher Wren. For designing the new church, he received \$2,000.00, which came from the \$25,000.00 that Bishop Middleton Barnwell pledged toward the project. However, he did not supervise the construction work;

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that was instead in the hands of Lloyd Greer, one of Valdosta’s best known architects of an earlier time. For his work, Mr. Greer was to receive a fee amounting to 1½ percent of the project’s total cost. As Vicar Clifton White reported to Vestry on April 4, 1948, Greer was “at present familiarizing himself with the plans and specifications and will invite bids in due time, calling for them the end of the first week in May [1948].” Vestry then held a called meeting on April 18, 1948, that focused on “final approval of the plans for the new church.” Members of the Executive Board of the Women’s Auxiliary also were present to discuss the possibility of increasing the kitchen’s size from its original dimensions. Vestrymen granted approval to suggestions by the Vicar that would “enlarge the kitchen to about 15 [feet] x 18 [feet].”

The church ground breaking ceremony occurred on May 3, 1948, and was followed by a meeting of Fr. White and three vestrymen, Jerome Tillman, Noah E. Fry, and Robert G. Macks, with Bishop Barnwell to learn his “views . . . on several points.” One issue was the bonding of the Christ Church’s treasurer for a minimum of \$2,000.00, to which the Bishop agreed, with the provision that Vestry arrange the bonding and pay the \$5.00 annual fee. He agreed to save Christ Church the expense of bonding the Building Fund Treasurer for \$50,000.00 by requiring three signatures on all Building Fund checks. The signatures were to be those of Senior Warden Jerome Tillman, James D. Carroll, Chairman of the Building

Committee, and Fr. White.

Bishop Barnwell would be out of country on an extended European trip at the time of the cornerstone laying. Consequently, he approved the appointment of Arthur Goodin as his deputy for the service. As the final issue, the vestrymen raised the possibility of bids on the new church exceeding the money available for construction “in view of the Bishop’s anticipated absence abroad.” Barnwell responded that, if bids were more than available funds, the Building Committee should “make the necessary loans, if any, at a local bank, and the matter would be taken care of on his return.” The final statement in the minutes of this meeting declared: “The foregoing points are made record of and introduced into the records of the Vestry in order to indicate approval by the Bishop, of necessary future acts of the Vestry.”

After the meeting with Bishop Barnwell much of the building project activity dealt with matters such as insurance on the new church while it was constructed. Vestry Clerk Robert G. Macks had correspondence with Zoe Colburn, Secretary-Treasurer of the Diocesan Executive Committee, including a letter to Miss Colburn on May 4, 1948, that obviously answered a letter from her that is no longer in the Parish records. He responded to her inquiry about insurance, “At the moment nothing can be done about insurance on the new building. When construction is undertaken, the contractor will place his construction risk, and we take over when the building is delivered to us.”

More in the November 2011 *Vineyard*.