

# Christ Church Looks Back

by Joseph A. Tomberlin



**A**s promised, our story continues and becomes “increasingly murky.” The Vestry convened, with the Vicar presiding, on Tuesday, July 8, 1952. Judging from the Minutes, nothing unusual occurred, and the group dealt only with routine business. Following adjournment and the Vicar’s departure, a far from ordinary event happened that Mr. White later described in a long letter to vestrymen as a “private caucus of the Vestry.” This “caucus” is the major reason for lack of clarity in this part of our story because no record exists of the discussion or of the decisions made.

Mr. White did not hear about the “caucus” until July 13, 1952, and, given the agitated tone of his letter, he was incensed. He asserted that not inviting him to the “caucus” smacked of “some ‘behind the back’ activity” or suggested that the participants did not “trust the kindness or discretion of their Vicar.” “In either case,” he wrote, “I am not complimented in the slightest by this activity. . . .” He reminded vestrymen of “another ‘caucus’ some years ago [in 1946] which led to the removal of your then Vicar [Thomas Mundy]; some of you remember it also. . . .”

Mr. White pointed out that the Vestry could not meet legally without the designated presiding officer, meaning, in the instance of a mission, as Christ Church was,

either the Vicar or the Bishop. Under the Canons as they then existed, other than the Vicar or the Bishop, only the Senior Warden could call the Vestry together -- by written notice to the full membership three days in advance and specifying the reason for the meeting. As the Vicar put the situation: “If the meeting was for the good of the Church, I should have been notified. If it was NOT for the good of the Church, it should not have been held.”

Mr. White then devoted three paragraphs to a discussion of Christ Church’s financial position. He declared that the decision by the American Church Building Fund Commission to grant a loan of \$16,000 to Christ Church [see December 2009 *Vineyard*] afforded a new perspective on the contract the Vestry had approved for him in the called meeting on May 16, 1952 [see April 2010 *Vineyard*]. In Mr. White’s words, “It is clear to me, and I know to you also that you cannot carry . . . [a] sizeable loan of this kind AND the tremendous financial obligation you have already pledged to me.” His reference was to the salary increase of \$3,900 over three years the Vestry promised him in return for his ending his teaching career at Valdosta State College over the three-year period. He was willing, however, to alter his May agreement with the Vestry: he would teach for “a longer time, as necessary.” In return, the Vestry could reduce the portion “of my

college salary . . . [it would] assume.” The money thereby saved could be applied to loan payments. Then he wrote:

*None of this would really be necessary, of course, if you and our other members really did what you ought; that is, tithed your income for the Church’s work, which means giving back to God what is really his. But in this I may have failed to impress you as I should have done. For this failure I am penitent and offer to pay the cost therefor . . . [by] continuing to serve as teacher and as your Vicar combined.*

Mr. White also observed that he believed that Christ Church had made “good progress” during his tenure. He had tried, he said, “to be cooperative with you; what you have asked me to do, I have done; and what the Bishop has asked me to do, I have done. . . .” As examples he noted that the Vestry had requested that he not use the title “Father”; not to include any listing of the sacraments in newspaper articles; not to make statements about other denominations in his sermons; and to use the title “Protestant Episcopal” on the church’s signboard; to refer to the Communion by that term only at the early service; to “give you a strictly Prayer-Book service.” “All you have asked,” he claimed, “I have done; I don’t think I have failed you anywhere in conforming to what you have asked which was proper (or reasonably possible without violating my ordination vows).”

More of this in June.