



OUR HISTORY

CHRIST CHURCH CHRISTIANA HUNDRED

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200 YEARS AGO

From humble beginnings nearly 200 years ago as a children's Sunday school, Christ Church Christiana Hundred has grown into a dynamic, diverse community of faith that is moving boldly into the 21st Century. Blessed with an abundance of talent and treasure and graced with singularly effective leadership, today Christ Church draws strength from the rich heritage of its past and inspiration from the challenge of its future.

It was in 1815 that Victorine Bauduy, the widowed daughter of Eleuthère Irénée du Pont, taught her first classes in what would become the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School. Her students came from families that earned their livelihood in the water-powered mills along the Brandywine Creek, including the black-powder business her father had founded in 1802 after coming to America from his native France. The little school's initial home was in a building erected for it on company land just down the hill from the present church. The building still stands and is now one of the popular attractions at the Hagley Museum, a restoration of the DuPont Company's 19th Century milling operation, Eleutherian Mills.



Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School

Madame Bauduy's school was non-denominational. The du Ponts came to America as Huguenots, Protestants seeking asylum from persecution in their native land. As they settled into their new homes on company-owned land on the high ground overlooking their increasingly prosperous milling operation, some of them gravitated toward the Episcopal Church. In those days, that meant a trip into town to Trinity Church, itself an outgrowth of a Swedish Lutheran church established by Wilmington's earliest European settlers.

It was the Presbyterians, however, who first took an interest in the area around the Hagley Yard. According to Charles Silliman's 1960 book, *The Story of Christ Church Christiana Hundred and its People*, Charles Love, a Presbyterian pastor, preached once a month at the schoolhouse from 1823 to 1856. Mr. Love was pastor of both Red Clay Creek and Lower Brandywine Presbyterian Churches, and apparently a favorite of Madam Bauduy, who defended him when other residents of the area, increasingly influenced by the Episcopalians from the city, disapproved. The Episcopalians persisted, however. In 1841 the rector of Trinity Church, The Rev. Dr. John W. McCullough, began preaching at the school twice a month. Then, in 1848 The Rev. Samuel C. Brinckle arrived as an Episcopal missionary on the bishop's staff and began preaching at the school every Sunday. Madam Bauduy welcomed him, but others were less enthusiastic.

OUR CHRIST CHURCH IS NAMED

Many of the men who worked in the Yard were Irish and Roman Catholic, and there were families of other Protestant persuasions living in the neighborhoods around the mill. Not all of them were interested in becoming Episcopalians. The Roman Catholics started their Mission at St. Joseph's-on-the-Brandywine in 1841, and in 1847 the Methodists transferred to the new Mt. Salem Church near Rising Sun Lane. Still later, the Presbyterians moved to Green Hill near the Wilmington Country Club, just off the Kennett Pike. There ensued a kind of tug of war between "high church" and "low church" factions for the affections of the Episcopalians who had begun to congregate around Madam Bauduy's little school. Certain high-church residents of the area, distressed at Brinckle's low-church leanings, encouraged the rector of Trinity to become increasingly active in and around the DuPont's neighborhood. Other members of the family, led by Admiral (then Captain) Samuel F. du Pont, countered by encouraging Brinckle to start a new church that would be more evangelical in its orientation (and thus less high-church) than Trinity. When it was organized in May of 1851, its low-church founders called it Christ Church, according to Silliman, to avoid a saint's name.

With the Sunday School increasingly fitted out as a church, complete with pulpit, and with Mr. Brinckle as its rector, the new congregation flourished. By 1854, it was evident that more space was needed, and under the leadership of Captain du Pont and Madam Bauduy's youngest brother, Alexis Irénée du Pont, a site was set aside from company land for construction of a new church. A building fund campaign was launched, the services of Philadelphia architect Richard Gilpin were engaged, and by May 18, 1854 workmen had begun blasting (DuPont powder, Brandywine granite) stone for a new place of worship for a congregation of between 250 and 300 (which Alexis thought too small). As is not infrequently the case with such projects, there was an overrun in construction costs, which Gilpin had estimated at \$6,000. The final bill was \$23,000.

FIRST SERVICE IN A NEW CHURCH

There were construction delays too, and the first service in the new building was not held till May 4, 1856. Bishop Lee preached, The Rev. Joseph Wilmer (a friend of Captain du Pont's) assisted, and there was an enthusiastic turnout. Mr. Brinckle estimated that there were more than 100 people on hand than the church had been designed to accommodate. The collection, Silliman

reports, amounted to \$237.25. "The following week the rector noted that not more than 12 pews were unrented. A few days later his salary was raised to \$600 a year." With the completion of the new church, there came what the rector described as "a complete revolution" in the affairs of the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School. With Mr. Brinckle firmly in charge and with Madam Bauduy as his assistant, it became an Episcopal Church School, meeting for a shorter period of time and restricting its curriculum to religious subjects. Its first session on May 11, 1854 was closed with a hymn, apparently the first ever sung there.

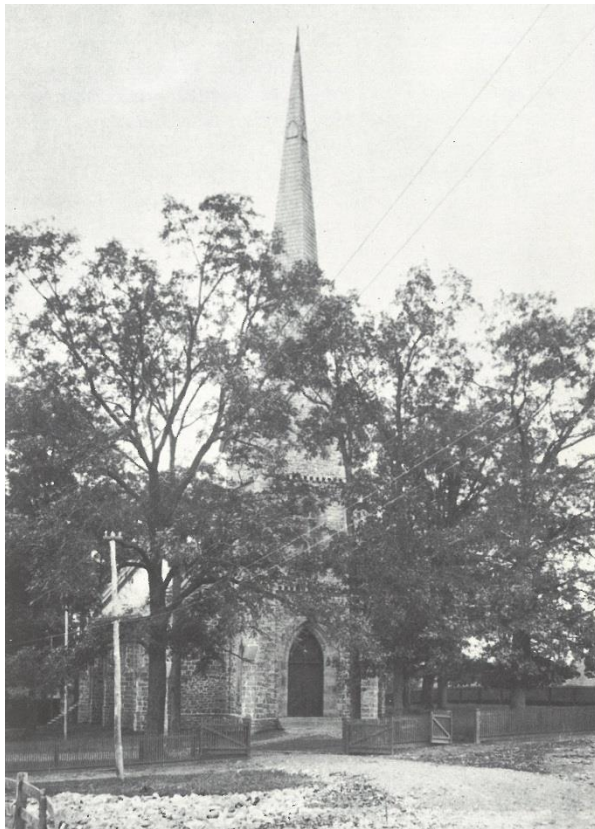
It was customary for members of the du Pont family to work right alongside their employees, and on August 27, 1857, the tradition cost Alexis Irénée du Pont his life. Fire broke out, touching off an explosion as he attempted to extinguish it. Blown into the road, Alexis jumped into the millrace to extinguish his flaming clothes and returned to help fight the blaze. He was on the roof of the pressroom when the building exploded, mortally wounding him. Four other men died in the blast, the worst of many that occurred over the years.

With the onset of war, which found Delaware siding with the Union despite the Confederate sympathies of slaveholders elsewhere in the state, the DuPont mills hummed, and Christ Church got a new rector, The Rev. William Allibone Newbold. He inherited from Mr. Brinckle in 1863, a young, thriving congregation with 91 communicants, 12 Sunday school teachers, and 135 pupils. By 1870, when The Rev. Isaac Newton Stanger was called from Germantown, Pennsylvania to succeed Newbold as rector, Christ Church had grown to 119 communicants, with a Sunday School enrollment of 184. Stanger, moving on after less than four years, was succeeded by The Rev. Dudley D. Smith, a Tennessean who had been serving as pastor of the Chapel of the Atonement in New York City. During his tenure, Christ Church observed its 25th anniversary (in 1876) with an extensive renovation program. The congregation continued to grow, with 141 communicants reported in its anniversary year.

A move was afoot among some members of the congregation, however, to launch a new church in Wilmington's fast-growing Highlands neighborhood, west of Union Street to the city line, and in 1884 they began laying plans for the construction of Immanuel Chapel (now Immanuel Church) at the corner of 17th Street and Woodlawn Avenue. Some of Christ Church's congregants with homes in the Highlands found the new church more convenient, and by 1888, when Immanuel was admitted to the Diocese of Delaware, Smith had lost a large portion of his congregation to the new church. Not coincidentally, perhaps, he resigned precipitously on a Saturday in February 1890 and conducted his last service at Christ Church the following day. Four months later, the Christ Church vestry called a new rector, The Rev. Hamilton M. Bartlett from Providence, Rhode Island, offering him a salary of \$1,500 a year, with rent-free accommodations in the rectory and a one-month vacation every August. He and his wife had just finished lunch with Mrs. Henry A. du Pont at her home, Eleutherian Mills, when the whole neighborhood was rocked by a series of seven terrific explosions in the powder yards. Twelve persons lost their lives, Eleutherian Mills was severely damaged, and windows on the Gospel side of the church, facing north toward the Brandywine and the mills along its banks, were blown out.

Undaunted, the new rector set about rebuilding the Christ Church congregation and revitalizing its programs. By the end of his first year, there were 126 communicants and 169 Sunday School pupils. The vestry entertained the idea of installing electric lights but deferred that move until 1892. It was Alfred I., a singularly inventive member of an inventive family, who spearheaded this modernization movement. The year 1892 also saw the construction of a new rectory, the gift of Sophie Madeleine du Pont, on Buck Road about midway between the Kennett Pike and what is now Montchanin Road. It was, Bishop Leighton Coleman acknowledged, “the best in the Diocese.” The church itself was extensively renovated, and a new organ, described by the bishop as “large and powerful” installed.

In 1896, Mr. Bartlett accepted a call to become rector of St. Michael’s Church in Yakima, Washington. He was succeeded by The Rev. Charles A. Horne, a recent graduate of Trinity College and the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Cambridge, Massachusetts, during whose tenure at Christ Church, a new parish house was built alongside the church. Sunday School classes moved there from their original schoolhouse down Smith’s Lane. Horne resigned as



Christ Church in the 1890’s

rector in May 1899 to take up missionary work in Idaho. He was quickly succeeded by The Rev. John Summerfield Bunting, assistant at the Church of the Holy Apostle in Philadelphia. A native of Richmond, Virginia and a graduate of the University of the South and Philadelphia Divinity School, Bunting was appalled at the “utterly horrible winters” that marked the early part of his ministry at Christ Church. Nor was he pleased by conditions he found in his new parish. Says Silliman: “The Sunday School had run down, the communicants had dropped away and, in his own words, ‘the church was low, very low. In fact, it was so low, it was flat and insipid.’” Bunting initiated a series of reforms that some found dangerously “high church” but came to be accepted enthusiastically. Meanwhile, the new parish hall came into use, and the first automobiles appeared on the scene. The innovator Alfred I. du Pont was, of course, the first to have one.

1900’S BEGIN ON A HIGH

With the advent of a new century, Mr. Bunting moved on to a parish in Georgia, and the Christ Church vestry turned to another Virginian, The Rev. William H. Laird, to take his place. Laird, as it happened, was a brother of William Winder Laird, a member of the Christ Church vestry (and son-in-law of Lammot du Pont). Taking an interest in their day-to-day needs regardless of

religious affiliation, Mr. Laird quickly endeared himself to families along the Brandywine banks, whether they attended Christ Church, St. Joseph's, or one of the other Protestant churches in town. During Laird's tenure, the vestry began to discuss abolishing pew rents, which had been assessed at Christ Church from its beginnings. It was decided to forgive some long-overdue accounts in hopes that the delinquents would resume regular attendance, but the vestry balked at the radical step of abolishing the system, which lingered at Christ Church until 1942. Change marched on in other areas: The choir was robed, a telephone installed in the parish house, and more electric lights added in the church. Running water was piped into the parish house from the DuPont reservoir on Buck Road. The rectory's old boxed-in tub was replaced with a modern (for 1907) one.

In 1914, an extensive renovation of the church took place under the discerning eye of the junior warden, Henry Francis du Pont, who in later life became the founder of the museum internationally known as Winterthur, which bears his name. The project was a memorial to members of the du Pont family who had helped the church over the years. It included a new organ and a vestibule with stairs to the balcony. After some time as rector of Christ Church, Mr. Laird took on the additional assignment of rector at Immanuel Church. In 1916, he left Christ Church to devote full time to his burgeoning duties at Immanuel, located as it was in the fast-growing Highlands section of western Wilmington. Accepting his resignation with regret, the vestry saluted him as "not only a kind and sympathetic friend but a gentleman of culture, piety, and learning."

Like the Civil War and the Spanish American War, the Great War of the early 20th Century produced unprecedented demand for DuPont munitions and explosives and brought immense wealth to the family of French expatriates that had built the powder mills along the Brandywine. It also resulted in the dispersion of the company, and the family, to new plants and new homes in other parts of the country. Eventually, the yards fell silent, replaced by modern plants in other parts of the country and destined to linger in picturesque abandonment until the 1950s, when the family created the Hagley Museum to preserve the Brandywine's industrial heritage.

Yet another Virginia clergyman, The Rev. Robert Coles, was called to replace Mr. Laird in 1916, as war raged on the other side of the Atlantic. Coles, in poor health most of his ministry on the Brandywine, resigned in 1919 on the advice of his physician. He was replaced by The Rev. Frederick T. Ashton, a newlywed from the Diocese of Albany, New York. After one last blast that again shattered windows on the Gospel side of the church, things settled down for what Silliman calls "The Quiet Years." He writes: "The powder mills closed in 1921 because of the growth of Wilmington in that direction, and many people moved away from the area. The old Route 7 trolley to Wagoner's Row was a big help in bringing out those who lived in the city, but as the years went by, fewer and fewer people came." It was a challenging time for Mr. Ashton and his dwindling congregation, but the church survived with help from its founding family. Mr. and Mrs. Pierre S. du Pont each contributed DuPont stock. H. F. du Pont conveyed land for the parking lot to the church for \$10, stipulating that it was never to be used as the site of a new

building. Miss Evelina du Pont hired a bus to bring in parishioners from the Mt. Cuba area on the far side of the Kennett Pike.

Thanks to Pierre du Pont, the church was blessed with the services of Firmin Swinnen, the organist Pierre du Pont had hired to play the new organ at his Chester County estate, now famed as Longwood Gardens. A Belgian who had fled to the United States during the war, Swinnen had played the organ with 75-piece orchestras in New York's Rialto and Rivoli Theaters. He beefed up the music program, replacing Christ Church's venerable organ with one twice as large and powerful. From very early on, when it established a paid choir, Christ Church enjoyed a reputation for outstanding music. It is a tradition that continues to this day.

The old rectory was sold in 1937 and a new one, still in use today, erected near the church two years later. The church itself hardly buzzed with activity, however, in those years before World War II erupted. To some, it seemed to be drifting lazily toward the vine-covered somnolence that had enveloped the nearby powder mills. The congregation fell off to a handful, Silliman writes, "and sometimes only the minister and the choir were present." During the fall of 1942, the Sunday School simply stopped functioning.

After more than 20 years as rector of Christ Church, the beloved but less than dynamic Ashton resigned in 1942 to accept the newly created position of Episcopal chaplain in Wilmington's hospitals. The vestry turned to The Rt. Rev. Arthur R. McKinstry, who had come from Texas to become the Diocese of Delaware's bishop in 1939, for help in finding a replacement. McKinstry unhesitatingly recommended his old friend, The Rev. Dr. William C. Munds, rector of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Corpus Christi, Texas, which had been dramatically revitalized during his tenure. When Dr. Munds hesitated about coming to Wilmington, Edmond du Pont took him for a ride out the Kennett Pike and explained, writes Silliman, "how in 10 or 20 years the place would look like the Main Line of Philadelphia." He continues: "He (du Pont) knew Wilmington was getting overcrowded, and he visualized a great movement of young married people to the Greenville area. He saw Greenville itself as a huge shopping center and new homes springing up in Westover Hills and on Barley Mill Road. With the war's end, many of these people would be hungry for religion, and Christ Church would be ready."

MID-LAST CENTURY

Dr. Munds listened to the persuasive arguments of Edmond du Pont and Ellason Downs, a du Pont in-law who like Edmond was bringing new ideas to the vestry, and came to believe that God was calling him to lead an era of change and growth at Christ Church by reaching out to a broader, more diverse community. He accepted the challenge and arrived in Wilmington in December 1942 with his wife Catharine and two young daughters. His first order of business was the abolition of pew rents. Then came Christ Church's first Christmas Eve service—a revolutionary idea to some—with 13 worshipers on hand for an event that has been SRO for many years. Gradually, attendance at Sunday services increased. A new director of religious education, Louisa Russell, was hired, and the Sunday school reopened with 63 pupils attending. The women's auxiliary, under the leadership of Edmond du Pont's wife, Averell, hummed with

activity. An altar guild was formed, taking on assignments that Mrs. E. Paul du Pont had handled entirely on her own for years.

When the new rector arrived, Christ Church had 143 communicants. By 1952, there were about 600. The budget had increased from \$15,000 to \$81,000. Christ Church contributions to the diocese and the national church had gone from \$5,000 to nearly \$23,000. It took three or four years, Dr. Munds said, but at last he felt the church was rolling on its own steam. By 1948, when Christ Church observed its centennial, it was ready—at last—to be consecrated. This was a formality that had been delayed for years, if not forgotten, because the church had not had clear title to the ground on which it stood. Bishop McKinstry formally consecrated the church at a service that also marked its 100th anniversary.

The physical plant continued to expand. More space was needed for the rapidly growing Sunday school and other activities. An 8-room addition to the old parish house, considered a temporary expedient, was thrown up in 1945, and then, with the end of the war, the old one was demolished and a handsome new education building, with room for 250 Sunday school pupils and an adjoining chapel, added to the campus. The Chapel of the Christ Child was erected as a memorial to Richard du Pont, a pioneering glider pilot, with funds contributed by his mother, Mrs. Chichester du Pont. Christ Church moved into the post-war era with energy and confidence. Several leaders of the old guard, including Henry F. du Pont, stepped aside to let the younger generation take over. Mr. du Pont had been a member of the vestry since 1903, and senior warden since 1928. When he resigned, his peers on the vestry elected him honorary senior warden for life.

With Dr. Munds' retirement in 1960, Christ Church faced the unenviable task of finding a replacement for the most dynamic rector in its history. In The Rev. John O'Hear they found a man who had no trouble filling Dr. Munds' shoes and walking in his footsteps. While Munds had revitalized the church, wrote a historian for the Hagley Museum and Library, O'Hear brought the church into the community and onto the global stage, spearheading efforts to promote racial and social justice and reaching out to help struggling families in the less privileged neighborhoods of Wilmington. Remarkably, in the course of 20 busy years at Christ Church, he achieved popularity and respect at least equal to those enjoyed by his predecessor.

While the 60's and 70's had been marked by social concerns and continued outreach, some parishioners perceived a need to improve and upgrade the church's property. The Rev. Adam Lewis, rector from 1983 to 1994, seemed well-suited to the task. Under his leadership, the church was completely restored, and a new Brombaugh tracker organ was given in memory of Victorine du Pont Bauduy and her sisters, Sophie and Eleuthera, who had done so much for the little Sunday School that became Christ Church. Other renovations were made. The Parish House was redecorated, creating a more efficient and attractive office area for an ever-enlarging staff. Eleven acres were procured with a home to be used for staff housing. Members pledged funds for a Memorial Garden, dedicated in 1994. It was in that year that Dr. Lewis left Christ Church.



All Saints' Memorial Garden and Christ Church Today

21ST CENTURY

The Rev. John Martiner became rector in 1995, determined to bring about a more open and hospitable environment, especially for families with young children. Martiner encouraged the development of new and diverse ministries, including Christ Church family and youth work camps in the Dominican Republic. During his tenure, a commodious addition was added to the Parish Center, freeing up space for the establishment in 2006 of the Christ Church Episcopal Preschool. With that, Dr. Martiner retired and the parish began the search for a new rector.

The search ranged far and wide but eventually focused on a parish less than an hour's drive from the Brandywine Banks. There, at St. Peter's Church in Glenside, Pennsylvania, the search committee found The Rev. Ruth Beresford, a graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary who had been rector there since 1993, and called her to take Martiner's place at Christ Church. On September 4, 2007, Ruth began her ministry as Christ Church's 15th rector and the first woman to hold the job.