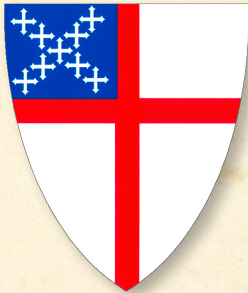


The sunrise service was organized by the Rev. William Robards Wetmore who had been rector of St. Luke's for three years, following his installation in 1862. As he had hoped, the service boosted the morale of the citizens and readied them emotionally for whatever the next day might bring.

Wetmore conducted a similar service every Easter for the rest of his long tenure as rector until his death in 1904. His successors have continued the tradition to this day, using now seldom-heard hymns that were popular in the middle of the 19th century and following the ritual outlined in the Book of Common Prayer of the Confederate States of America.

St. Luke's parish was already 25 years old on that dramatic Easter morning. Now, over a century later, it continues to play a pivotal role in the religious life of Lincoln County and Lincolnton, the county seat. Over the years, it has become a significant architectural landmark in the western Piedmont of North Carolina, listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1991. In addition to the church, with its hand-carved wood interior and spectacular stained glass windows, the St. Luke's complex includes a parish house, a century-old rectory, and a graveyard. Nowhere else in the city of Lincolnton does a trio of historic buildings and a graveyard survive on one tract of land.

The history of St. Luke's began on the night of November 29, 1841 when a group of thirteen citizens of Lincolnton gathered in the Pleasant Retreat Academy and formed a congregation to be known as St. Luke's Church. The deed to the land was transferred on March 2, 1842 from Col. John Hoke to the trustees of St. Luke's Church. One week later, on March 9, the cornerstone of the first church was laid. The church was consecrated on July 29, 1843 by the Right Reverend Levi Silliman Ives, the second Bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina. St. Luke's was admitted into the diocese at the convention of 1843 and subsequently became a part of the Diocese of Western North Carolina in 1922.



St. Luke's Episcopal Church  
315 North Cedar Street  
Lincolnton, NC 28092

704.732.9179  
[EpiscopalLincolntonNC.org](http://EpiscopalLincolntonNC.org)  
Contact the church for tour availability

# St. Luke's Episcopal Church

Lincolnton, NC  
Founded November 29, 1841



© David Crosby 2001

## History of St. Luke's

On Easter Sunday, April 16, 1865, the people of Lincoln County put aside differences of denomination and gathered at St. Luke's Episcopal Church for an ecumenical sunrise service fraught with religious and political significance. Just a week earlier, on April 9th, Palm Sunday, Gen. Robert E. Lee had surrendered to Gen. U. S. Grant, effectively ending the Civil War. On April 14th President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, intensifying demands for revenge across the North. The Easter worshipers knew that the next morning Union forces would enter Lincoln County and establish a military occupation. Against the backdrop of Gen. William T. Sherman's destructive march through Georgia and South Carolina, the congregation had reason to worry.

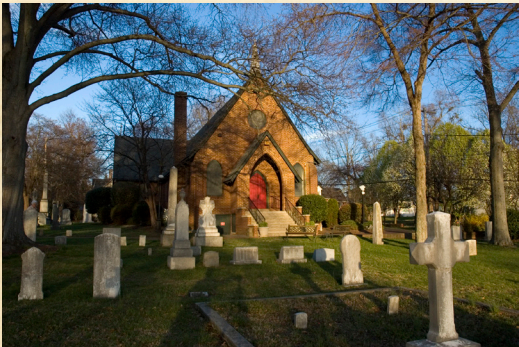


© David Crosby 2001



The Plan and Exterior

The plan of the first building was drawn by Haywood W. Guion, one of the founding members of the church. By the fall of 1858, the steeple had decayed so badly that it was removed and rebuilt in 1859. When a fire destroyed the first church building, leaving only the bell tower on the south entrance and the steeple, the vestry decided to construct a new building on the same site. The tower and the 1859 steeple of the original church were retained as the south transept. Unlike the original church, this church was to be built on an east/west axis. The cornerstone of the new church was laid on February 2, 1886 and this church plan was designed by Silas McBee (1853-1924), a renowned church architect and a member of the St. Luke's congregation. The building was consecrated by Bishop Theodore Lyman on August 12, 1886. Although the 1886 structure remains the basis for today's church, the exterior of the building was modified several times before it reached its present configuration in 1923.



© Mary Whisnant 2008

Graveyard

The historic graveyard of St. Luke's came into use with the building of the church of 1842. The earliest group of gravestones date from the 1850's to 1870. There are two adjoining cast iron fences which date from the late 1860's and enclose the graves of Major General Stephen Dodson Ramseur (1837-1864) and William (d.1863) and Edward (d.1864) Phifer, all of whom died in the Civil War, fighting for the confederacy. Ramseur, the youngest Major General in the Confederate

army, was mortally wounded and died at the age of 27 after the Battle of Cedar Creek in Virginia. The white marble obelisk of General Ramseur's grave was damaged during Hurricane Hugo in 1989. A replica of the obelisk, by Wiley Brothers, was erected at the grave in 1991. Several rows to the east of the Ramseur fence is another notable grave, William Alexander Hoke (1851-1925) who was elected to the North Carolina Supreme Court in 1904 as an associate justice and served as chief justice of North Carolina 1924-25. In a corner of the church yard, well back from Cedar Street, is a tomb stone in the form of a six-legged table, marking the remains of Lorenzo Ferrer (1780-1875), a native of Lyons, France. There are a group of signed stones dating from 1850-1881. The most important signed monument was created by the well known marble yard of J. Baird, Philadelphia, who supplied gravestones for elite members of North Carolina society in the antebellum period. This is the gravestone for Caroline Rebecca Guion who died in childbirth in 1854. The tomb is surmounted with an obelisk and reads, Caroline Rebecca, Guion, and Her Babe. Carved into an oval on the west side of Guion's monument is a recumbent figure that is summoned to heaven by an angel in the form of a winged babe and inscribed "and they departed together on the 11th of September 1843."

Interior

Despite the changes to the outside of the church, the interior of St. Luke's survives largely as it was in 1885-86. It is the only intact vernacular Victorian religious interior in Lincoln County and one of a small group of important Gothic Revival interiors in the western Piedmont. The altar, rood screen and other architectural features are hand-carved wood of pine and oak. Most of the work is attributed to McBee, who was also the architect. In contrast to the brown tones of the wood are the vibrant colors of 14 stained glass windows, depicting scenes from the life of Christ, interspersed with four windows dedicated to the writers of the gospels. Most of the stained glass windows, which grace the interior of St. Luke's Church, are the work of Charles Booth (1844-1893). A native of Liverpool, England, Booth had his



© David Crosby 2001

studio in this country in Brooklyn, NY and Orange, NJ. Booth's stained glass windows are found in a number of churches throughout the United States.

Additional Buildings

These include the Parish House, 1907-1908, the Rectory, built in 1911 as a home for the rector, and St. Luke's House built in the 1970's originally as a convent for the Sisters of the Transfiguration, an order of Episcopal nuns who assisted in social work in the community and the church.

The Reverend William Roberts Wetmore (1834-1904)



In its long history, St. Luke's has had just 29 rectors. None have been more significant in the history of the parish than William Wetmore who served from 1862 to 1904. He was rector when the second church for St. Luke's was built and consecrated in 1886. He is buried at St. Luke's .

St. Luke's Historic Preservation Fund

To provide for the conservation and preservation of St. Luke's historic structures for generations to come, the Vestry of St. Luke's in July 2008 authorized the establishment of a fund dedicated solely for this purpose. The Historic Preservation Fund, under the supervision of the Vestry, discerns and prioritizes goals for necessary repairs and restorations with this fund. The invitation is extended to parishioners, members of the community, and others who would like to be a part of the preservation of St. Luke's historic building to join The 1841 Society of St. Luke's by making a donation to St. Luke's Historic Preservation Fund. Send to:

St. Luke's Historic Preservation Fund  
315 North Cedar St..  
Lincolnton, NC 28092

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

All donations are tax deductible and will be acknowledged.

☐ Please contact me with information about how I can help the Preservation of St. Luke's in other ways such as listing St. Luke's Historic Preservation Fund as a recipient in my will.

☐ Please send me additional information on current preservation goals.