

The Vinegar Bible in Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Cathy Ramey of the St. John's Heritage Committee recently discovered that St. John's Anglican Church in Lunenburg shares a special link to St. John's Episcopal Church in Portsmouth, New Hampshire: the Vinegar Bible! Since so few of these bibles were printed before the typographical error of "The Parable of the Vinegar" was discovered (sources vary between 12 and 40), this is a very special link.

Robert Mennel, a retired professor of History at University of New Hampshire and author of *Testimonies and Secrets: story of a Nova Scotia Family, 1844-1977*, published in 2013 by University of Toronto Press, is a parishioner of St. John's Episcopal Church, Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He is a summer neighbour of Cathy's in Crousetown. He contacted the Rector and the Historian of the Church in Portsmouth to give them information and the link to the Vinegar Bible sermon from St. John's, Lunenburg. Another link is the son of Dominique and Eleanor Williams of Crousetown, who is also a parishioner in Portsmouth.

Sarah Hamill, head of the Archives at St. John's Episcopal in Portsmouth, recently sent the following information to Cathy and the Heritage Committee:

The Vinegar Bible in Portsmouth was part of a gift from Queen Caroline of England, wife of George II. This Queen was interested in the efforts made by some members of the Church of England to establish Anglican churches in the New World. In 1745 she sent over to Portsmouth some communion silver, the Bible and two large mahogany chairs. In gratitude for the gift to the Portsmouth church, the parishioners named it the Queen's Chapel.

As you may know the "Vinegar Bible" is so named because of a misprint in the print shop of John Baskett in Oxford, England. There is a heading saying "The parable of the Vinegar" instead of "Vineyard". Apparently about 40 copies were printed and sold before the error was discovered.

There was a fairly substantial wooden church in Portsmouth, built in 1732. In 1805 there was a large fire on Christmas Eve and the church burned to the ground. However, some brave parishioners raced into the building and saved the Vinegar Bible, the silver, one of the chairs and a baptismal font. The Bible survived the fire in a remarkably good condition.

St. John's Church as it was by then known was built in 1808. The Vinegar Bible has had one other major adventure. In 1976 it was stolen from the church over a weekend, causing much distress to all. The thieves apparently thought it was valuable, and started a series of telephone calls to the Reverend Charles Hodgins, the Rector, asking for a ransom. He flatly refused to deal with these proposals, and several anxious months went by. Finally he received a letter, with a key attached to it, notifying him that the key fitted a numbered locker in a train station on Long Island and the Bible would remain there for a short time. Mr. Hodgins sent his Curate down to Long Island by car, and thus rescued the bible. The Bible may be seen to this day in a locked glass case on the second floor of the church.