

TRINITY CHURCH

HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA

Something of Its Story



By

JAMES R. HAWORTH

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*We love the place, O God,
Wherein thine honor dwells;
The joy of thine abode
All other joy excels*

Hymn 398

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JAMES R. HAWORTH

The author of this book certainly needs no tribute, since that is provided by the book itself. But Trinity Parish is in his debt both now and in the years to come for his work in researching the records, interviewing older members of the congregation, and compiling this history. Those of us who have had the pleasure of knowing him can certify to later readers that his delightful personality is accurately reflected on every page.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
John H. Oley, Abiel Abbot Low, Ely Ensign, John W. Ensign - - - - -	14
Rev. Edward Valentine Jones - - - - -	40
Rev. John Willis Lea - - - - -	60
Rev. Norman F. Marshall - - - - -	100
Rev. J. B. Fitzpatrick - - - - -	94
Trinity Church 1900, 1925 - - - - -	84
Rev. John S. Gibson - - - - -	118
Rev. John S. Douglas - - - - -	132
Rev. Samuel Roger Tyler - - - - -	138
Rev. Robert Bruce Hall - - - - -	176
Rev. Robert Poland Atkinson - - - - -	196
Trinity Church 1964 - - - - -	244
Rev. Hugh E. Cuthbertson, Charles M. Gohen, A. Hallam Christian, Charles A. Hamill - - - - -	234
Trinity Choir 1908 - - - - -	266
The Memorial Garden - - - - -	290

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Thank You - - - - -	7
Their Name Liveth Forever - - -	9
The Bishop's Foreword - - - - -	11
<i>Chapter I</i> Before the Beginning - - - - -	15
<i>Chapter II</i> The Beginning - - - - -	29
<i>Chapter III</i> Rev. Edward Valentine Jones - - -	41
<i>Chapter IV</i> Mr. Huntington and His Friends - -	47
<i>Chapter V</i> Rev. John Willis Lea - - - - -	61
<i>Chapter VI</i> The Building of the Church - - - -	85
<i>Chapter VII</i> Rev. J. B. Fitzpatrick - - - - -	95
<i>Chapter VIII</i> Rev. Norman F. Marshall - - - -	101
<i>Chapter IX</i> Rev. John Shackleford Gibson - - -	119
<i>Chapter X</i> Rev. John S. Douglas - - - - -	133
<i>Chapter XI</i> Rev. Samuel Roger Tyler - - - -	139
<i>Chapter XII</i> We Are To Have an Assistant - - -	153
<i>Chapter XIII</i> The Long and Faithful Ministry - -	159
<i>Chapter XIV</i> Rev. Samuel Roger Tyler, Rector Emeritus - - - - -	169
<i>Chapter XV</i> Rev. Robert Bruce Hall - - - - -	177
<i>Chapter XVI</i> Rev. Robert Poland Atkinson - - -	197
<i>Chapter XVII</i> Trinity's Children — Grace, St. Peter's, St. John's - - - - -	211
<i>Chapter XVIII</i> The Vestrymen - - - - -	235
<i>Chapter XIX</i> The Women - - - - -	245
<i>Chapter XX</i> The Sunday School - - - - -	257
<i>Chapter XXI</i> The Music and the Musicians - - -	267
<i>Chapter XXII</i> A Glance Backward—A Look Ahead -	291
<i>Appendix A</i> The Parish Organizations - - - - -	295
<i>Appendix B</i> The Book of Remembrance - - - - -	301

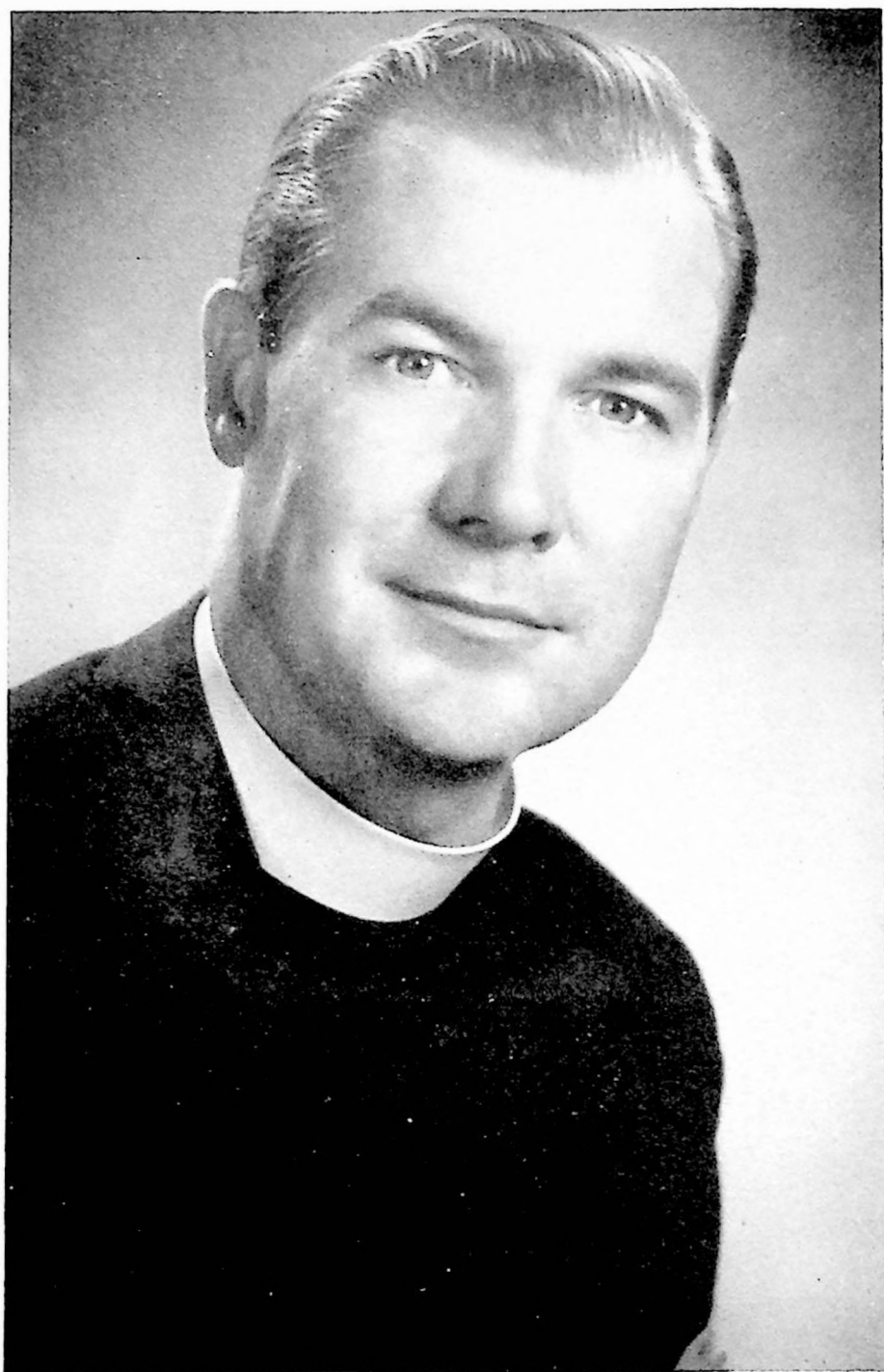
THANK YOU

The help of a number of persons, certainly including those older members of the congregation who read the manuscript of this book, is gratefully acknowledged.

Special thanks are offered to the Rector, Rev. Robert P. Atkinson, for sympathetic encouragement; to the Rev. Robert B. Hall for help and advice; to A. Hallam Christian, senior warden, and Miss Mary Fish for preparing much of the chapter on the Sunday School; to William W. Jones, parish registrar; to John W. Lea of Huntington for information about his grandfather, Rev. John W. Lea; to Colonel John W. Lea, United States Army, retired, of Scottsdale, Arizona, for permission to examine and copy portions of the diary of the Rev. Mr. Lea; to Mrs. George R. Snider for help in assembling facts for the chapter concerning the work of the women of the church; to Mrs. William F. Hite for permission to read the scrapbook of her mother, Mrs. Ely Ensign; to William N. Matthews, attorney, for research among courthouse records; to Mrs. William T. Smythe for personal recollections of Grace Church, Kenova; to Mrs. Helen Holt Connor for assistance in searching records in the Huntington Public Library, and to Mr. Abbot Low Moffat of 3317 Dent Place, N. W., Washington, D. C., for genealogical and other information concerning the Low and Pierrepont families.

Without their help this book might still have been possible, but its imperfections would have been more numerous.

James R. Haworth



Rev. Robert Poland Atkinson

CHAPTER XVI

REV. ROBERT POLAND ATKINSON

"And the Word of God increased." Acts 6:7

Again the search began for a rector.

On May 27, 1953, Dr. Tyler had suggested the name of Robert Poland Atkinson, then a senior in the Virginia Theological Seminary, as a prospect for appointment as assistant rector. In June, 1958, he was sought for the rectorship. A. H. Christian, chairman of a committee named to explore possibilities for the position, reported to the vestry that three groups of twelve persons visited Mr. Atkinson, then rector of Christ Church at Fairmont, West Virginia.

"All groups reported favorably," he told the vestry. "There was not a dissenting word, and all feel that we could do no better."

It was voted to extend a formal call to Mr. Atkinson. He accepted and became rector of Trinity Church September 1, 1958. In the five years Mr. Atkinson was rector, the congregation gave him its affectionate loyalty and has earnestly confirmed Mr. Christian's judgment when he told the vestry that "we could do no better."

Mr. Atkinson was formally installed as rector

September 24, in a service in which Bishop Campbell was officiant. Herbert S. Stevens, rector of St. John's Church, Huntington, preached the sermon and the Rev. Thomas C. Seitz of St. Peter's read the lessons.

Mr. Atkinson was born in Washington, D. C., and later moved with his family to New Rochelle, New York, and Martinsburg, West Virginia. He was a graduate of the University of Virginia, where he was a member of the track team and basketball squad, after which he entered the Virginia Theological Seminary at Alexandria from which he was graduated in 1953 with the degree of Bachelor of Divinity. In the same year he was ordained a deacon and in 1954 was ordained a priest and became assistant rector of St. Matthew's Church in Wheeling, West Virginia, where he remained two years.

In his senior year as a seminarian, Mr. Atkinson was a member of the Department of Christian Education of the West Virginia Diocese, was one of ten seminarians in the United States selected to do educational and other work for the Church in Mexico, and was for twelve weeks on duty in the Topeka State Hospital at Topeka, Kansas, to gain experience in psychological work related to the ministry.

Early in his ministry Mr. Atkinson let it be known that he wished his assistant to be John Brownfield, then a senior at Bexley Hall whom he had known for many years and, in whose personal and spiritual qualities he had confidence. The vestry was in agreement. Mr. Brownfield was graduated from the Seminary in June, 1959, and came to Trin-

ity as assistant rector on July. He was ordained to the priesthood in Trinity Church December 19. On April 27, 1962, Mr. Brownfield resigned to become minister of Trinity Church at Sutter's Creek and Galt, California. The resignation was regretfully accepted.

Two outstanding achievements, among others, have marked Mr. Atkinson's ministry. One was carrying on the church's building extension and improvement program, and the other institution of a new and successful plan for financing the work of the church — the tithing plan.

A new Long-Range Committee was appointed October 24, 1958. C. A. Hamill was named chairman and members were William W. Jones, Lee S. Ainslie, Eugene Elliott, Hugh D. Stillman, A. H. Christian, James R. Haworth and James A. Gwinn. This committee considered, among other objectives, enlargement of the church building but no immediate action was taken.

The annual meeting of the congregation was held after a dinner in the parish house January 25, 1961 with 287 present. Mr. Atkinson in his address, said enlargement of the church and construction of an addition to the parish house should be begun without further delay according to plans theretofore drawn by Albert F. Tucker, architect. The congregation agreed in resolutions adopted for the record. The action was followed by a meeting of the Long-Range Planning Committee with somewhat altered membership but with C. A. Hamill still chairman, when it outlined the church's objectives to begin razing of

the old rectory, extension and improvement of the nave of the church, building of an addition to the parish house, creation of more facilities for use of the youth and their work, amortization of the church debt and perfection of plans for a new parish to be formed by Trinity Church out of the present congregation.

A contract for enlargement of the church and parish house was awarded to the Dial Construction Company July 24, 1962, on its bid of \$162,600. The work was begun soon afterward and completed in time for use of one building on Easter Day, 1963.

Other physical improvements were being carried on at the same time. On June 29, 1959, Mr. Gohen told the vestry that a friend of the church whose home was in another city desired to make a gift to Trinity and would like to help, along with others, give the church an air conditioning system. The cost was estimated at \$15,000. In the course of the ensuing discussion, Mr. Atkinson told the vestry that one family would contribute \$8,000 and another \$600. Albert Tucker, the architect, prepared the plans and the work was done at a total cost of \$17,666.48.

At the same time the Altar Guild told the vestry it wished to give a reredos behind the baptismal font at a cost of about \$425. The project also was approved and the work done.

The Altar Guild had presented another idea to the vestry that found immediate acceptance. On November 28, 1958, Mrs. Ruth Simon Boyd appeared before the vestry to propose a memorial to

Dr. Tyler "in the form of a plaque or tablet to be placed in the church to commemorate the many loving and tireless years of service he has given here." She said she was sure many would contribute to such a memorial.

"We feel," Mrs. Boyd said, "that this is an opportunity now to express our love and appreciation by giving him his flowers while he is living."

The vestry agreed and J. H. Christian was appointed chairman of a committee to raise the money. It was soon done, and it was announced to the vestry on February 27, 1959, that the tablet had been installed. Its inscription reads:

"To the Glory of God, And In Grateful Tribute To The Ministry Of The Rev. S. Roger Tyler, L. L. D., Rector of Trinity Church, Huntington, 1916-1953 And Thereafter Rector Emeritus. Founder of St. Peter's and St. John's Episcopal Churches, Huntington. His Rich, Full Life Glorifies God's Presence. A Shepherd, Priest and Counsellor, Faithful In His Ministrations, Godly In His Admonitions, Untiring In His Service To All Peoples. This Parish Is Infinitely Richer By His Presence. Erected 1959 By Those Who Love Him."

On December 29, 1961, Mr. Atkinson was ready to present his tithing plan for financing the program of the church, explaining it first to the vestry for approval. This was given, and the plan went before the congregation at its annual meeting held January 10, 1962. It called for each family to give to God out of love and gratitude five per cent of its net income annually, another five per cent to be given

for God's work in the world. The plan was explained to be in lieu of employment of professional help in raising funds for the church. The congregation approved the idea, and it went into effect.

It was a triumphant success. On April 27, 1962, Mr. Atkinson announced that pledges had been made for the year amounting to \$156,403.90, an increase of sixty per cent over the previous annual sum. A final report on May 25 showed the total had reached \$160,430.92.

When he became rector, Mr. Atkinson carried on the program of the Healing Services that had been begun by his predecessor, Mr. Hall.

On October 20, 1960, Mr. Atkinson told the vestry that he had been invited to attend, as a fellow, the College of Preachers in Washington in the following spring. For the second time in less than three years a Rector of Trinity Church Huntington had been chosen for this honor. The vestry was more than pleased and necessary arrangements for Mr. Atkinson's leave of absence were made.

The vestry was impressed by a small but significant parish statistic when, at its meeting on January 27, 1961, it was announced that the culinary department of the church had served 6,948 meals in 1960 at a total cost of \$3,882, an average of fifty-nine cents per meal.

At the same meeting, it was stated that Charles M. Gohen was approaching his fiftieth year as a vestryman. A committee was appointed to present to Mr. Gohen the vestry's congratulations and compliments in the form of resolutions to be framed in

gold and presented to him. Members of the committee were Mr. Atkinson and Vestrymen Ainslie, Elliott and Vinson. The scroll was handsomely engrossed on parchment by Mrs. James A. Gwinn, and a duplicate, less elaborately framed, was hung in the parish house with Mr. Gohen's portrait.

A. H. Christian, junior warden, moved on September 28, 1962, that "Mr. James R. Haworth of the parish be authorized by the vestry to proceed with the writing of the history of Trinity Parish." The motion carried unanimously.

Don Burns resigned from the vestry November 30, 1962, explaining that he planned to leave the city. Dr. R. K. Steiner was elected to succeed him.

These events were a part of the fabric of Trinity's history in the early 1960s, but there were three projects whose importance, held first place.

First was liquidation of the current debts of the parish; second, development of the tithing plan as the source of income of the church conceived and proposed by Mr. Atkinson, the rector; third, rebuilding of the church and parish house.

At the annual parish meeting on January 25, 1961, Atkinson stated his belief that the time had come to undertake the rebuilding program, and to act on the proposal of the planning committee to study means of enlarging and beautifying the nave, creating a memorial garden, providing more room for activities of the youth of the church and amortizing the \$40,631. debt. The congregation took affirmative action, and the committee proceeded.

Mr. Elliott presented the program as worked out by the committee at the vestry's meeting October 27, 1961, and F. A. Macdonald moved that it be presented to the congregation at its annual meeting in January, 1962, and that a capital funds drive be undertaken to raise \$225,000. to put it into effect, the date of the campaign to be determined later. The vestry approved, and so did the congregation when it was presented at the parish meeting the following January.

The committee's recommendations were as follows:

1. That the nave of the church be extended twenty-eight feet, six inches according to plans drawn by Albert F. Tucker, architect, to include a balcony seating sixty-three persons, and ten additional pews in the nave to seat seventy.

2. To utilize the old rectory lot as a formal memorial garden and parking area of 40 x 135 feet, resurfaced with asphalt.

3. To construct a ramp to the east transept entrance.

4. To extend the parish house to cover an area 32 by 60 feet to the east.

5. To renovate the present church building, including installation of twenty-two new pews and kneelers padded with foam rubber, along with numerous other improvements.

6. To amortize the debt.

7. To install a public address system.

Mr. Atkinson presented his tithing plan to finance the committee's program at a vestry meeting December 19, 1961.

The vestry voted unanimously to recommend the plan to the congregation and the congregation enthusiastically agreed, both to the planning committee's program and to Mr. Atkinson's tithing plan at the annual parish meeting in January, 1962.

The tithing plan worked. On April 27, 1962, after all the remittances and pledges had been scrutinized, Mr. Atkinson announced that it had yielded \$156,403.90. It was by far the largest sum the parish had ever raised for a year's budget.

At its meeting, the vestry gave Mr. Atkinson a rising vote of whole-hearted thanks.

On December 28, 1962, Robert J. Payor, chairman of the finance committee, reported to the vestry that all old parish debts had been paid, and the balance due on the parking lot would be paid off before the January meeting.

He followed this announcement by telling a happy congregation assembled at the annual parish meeting January 27, 1963, that the old debt of \$38,000 had been liquidated during the previous year, and that the parking lot debt had been paid two years ahead of the original payment plan.

What was more, he said, the costs of the new building program could be paid at the rate of \$40,000. a year, for an over-all indebtedness of \$240,000.

The new addition to the church was occupied for the first time at the services on Easter Sunday, 1963. By May 12, all the work had been done, and the

new building and other improvements were dedicated by Bishop Campbell at Morning Prayer, to the accompaniment of much rejoicing. A large class was also presented for Confirmation at the same Service. Areas separately dedicated were the nave and narthex, the Zeller, Payor, Scherr, Wallace and Hamilton memorial windows, the east transept walking ramp and the additions to the Parish House and new dining room.

As a part of the general program the congregation visited each area and a reception for the bishop was held after the service.

Rev. Hugh E. Cuthbertson became assistant rector of Trinity Church in April, 1963. Mr. Cuthbertson, a native of Vermont, came to Huntington from Tampa, Florida, where he had been vicar-in-charge of St. Cecelia's Church. Mr. Cuthbertson was educated for the ministry at Nashotah House, Nashotah, Wisconsin. After his graduation he went to New York City and was on the staff of St. John's Episcopal Church for four years. The parish embraced the Greenwich Village area. Mr. Cuthbertson was awarded a special citation by the City of New York for his work among the youth of the parish. In 1955 he went to the mission field in the Diocese of Southern Florida. For seven years his work was in the Cape Canaveral area during the period of its rapid expansion and population growth accompanying its development as launching center for the nation's rocket and space program.

At Trinity, besides assisting the rector in the services and other ministerial work, he devotes much

time and thought to the youth programs of the church and at Marshall University.

Charles M. Gohen resigned as senior warden April 14, 1963, his letter to the Rector, Mr. Atkinson, explaining that considerations of age and ill health had influenced his decision. The resignation was accepted with regret by the vestry on April 26, and he was formally given the honorary title of Senior Warden Emeritus.

"The office of senior warden emeritus is not provided for by the canons of the Church," Mr. Atkinson explained in his announcement to the congregation, "but it is created by the rector and vestry of Trinity Church to pay due honor and respect to a faithful steward and man of God."

Mr. Gohen died August 20, 1964.

He had been elected to the vestry in 1912, and was made junior warden in 1938 and senior warden in 1941.

A. Hallam Christian was elected senior warden and Charles A. Hamill junior warden.

Mr. Christian had come to Huntington from Virginia in 1920 and was elected to the vestry February 1, 1929. A month later he was elected assistant treasurer because of the illness of Henry O. Aleshire, then treasurer. He was elected treasurer March 5, 1932, succeeding John W. Ensign, was named registrar in 1940 and junior warden December 19, 1941. Mr. Christian was superintendent of the Sunday School from November 1, 1942, until June 18, 1950, and is a trustee of Trinity Church. Besides his service as superintendent, he was a teacher

in the Sunday Schools of Trinity and St. Peter's Churches for twenty years, from 1922 to 1942. He has been honored by the church by being elected delegate to fourteen diocesan conventions, three general conventions and three provincial synods, and was a member of the board of trustees of Virginia Theological Seminary at Alexandria, Virginia, for five years, his term expiring in 1962.

Mr. Hamill was elected to the vestry May 24, 1946, when he was chosen to fill the vacancy caused by the death of C. C. Rand, and was re-elected as often as the rotation-in-office rule permitted. He was chairman of the Long-Range Planning Committee and chairman of the Building Committee during the planning and execution of the re-building and extension programs of the church and parish house.

Mr. Hamill died unexpectedly of a heart attack on June 25, 1963, and Eugene F. Elliott was elected to succeed him as junior warden.

On June 16, 1964, Mr. Atkinson submitted his resignation to accept a call to Calvary Church, Memphis, Tennessee, to be its rector effective September 16. His letter to the vestry expressed his sorrow and that of his wife at the prospect of leaving Huntington and Trinity Church.

"It is simply a matter of divine compulsion that moves me to leave you at this time," he wrote.

The vestry accepted Mr. Atkinson's resignation with regret and adopted resolutions expressing its and the congregation's "sorrow at the parting but with admiration, praise and thanksgiving for his ministry."

Once more Trinity Church began a search for a new rector. A. Hallam Christian was appointed chairman of the committee for that purpose. Rev. Mr. Cuthbertson, assistant rector, was asked to continue, at least for a time, to be in charge of the services if a new rector could not be found by the time of Mr. Atkinson's departure.

