

Missionary District of Asheville ^[1]

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by E. T. Malone Jr., 2006

The Missionary District of Asheville ^[2], formed in October 1895, was the precursor of the Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina ^[3]. It consisted of approximately the western third of the state. Within the polity of the Episcopal Church, a missionary district is a geographical region large enough in land area to constitute a separate diocese but with too few churches and church members to be financially self-supporting. When the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina was organized in 1817, it included the entire state, but as population gradually increased during the nineteenth century, it became difficult for the bishop to visit each congregation annually. In 1883 the eastern third of the state became a separate diocese, the Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina ^[4], and elected its own bishop, locating his office in Wilmington ^[5].

The western part of the state, however, remained part of the Diocese of North Carolina ^[6], which had its headquarters in Raleigh ^[7]. After Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire Jr. ^[8] took office in 1893, it became clear to him that a new strategy was needed in the west, where outside of the city of Asheville ^[9] there were few communities large or prosperous enough to support congregations. Cheshire, noting the small proportion of his time that he was able to give to the western counties, requested and received approval of his own North Carolina diocesan convention in May 1895 to establish the district, to which six missionaries were then assigned. The General Convention of the Episcopal Church, meeting later in 1895, approved the anticipated constitutional change and ceding of this particular territory in North Carolina. Cheshire provided episcopal services for the new district for the following three years, until it had its own bishop.

Oxford native Junius M. Horner, a member of the diocesan Missionary Council and priest-in-charge of two small churches in Goshen and Stovall, was elected by the General Convention as bishop of the Missionary District of Asheville in 1898. He served in this capacity until 1922, when the district became the Diocese of Western North Carolina. The new diocese chose Horner as its first bishop, and he continued to serve in that capacity until his death in 1933.

Reference:

Norvin C. Duncan, *Pictorial History of the Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1701-1964*(1965).

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Authors:

Malone, E. T., Jr. ^[12]

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Asheville ^[14]

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