

Hughes, Nicholas Collin ^[1]

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by Lawrence F. London, 1988

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Nicholas Collin Hughes, Episcopal clergyman and teacher, was born near Gulph in Lower Merion Township, Montgomery County, Pa., the son of John and Hannah Bartholomew Hughes. Descended from early Swedish and Welsh settlers in Pennsylvania, he was named for the Reverend Nicholas Collin, the last clergyman sent to America by the kings of Sweden to serve the churches founded in New Sweden during the seventeenth century. Young Hughes entered the University of Pennsylvania in the sophomore class of 1836 and was graduated in 1839. After graduation from the General Theological Seminary in the class of 1844, Hughes was ordained a deacon in St. Thomas Church, New York City, by Bishop Benjamin T. Onderdonk on 30 June 1844.

Almost immediately after his ordination, Hughes moved to North Carolina where his brother, Dr. Isaac Wayne Hughes, had settled in New Bern to practice medicine. On his arrival in the state, he was assigned as missionary in Lenoir, Wayne, and Pitt counties. On 17 Oct. 1848, he was ordained a priest by Bishop [Levi S. Ives](#) ^[2] in Christ Church, Raleigh. In 1850 Hughes founded Trinity School at Chocowinity, [Beaufort County](#) ^[3]; the school was associated with Old Trinity Parish, established by the Reverend [Nathaniel Blount](#) ^[4] in 1775. Hughes was connected with this school at intervals until the end of his life, and it proved to be his most important contribution to his adopted state. Although Trinity School was never large, it exerted a great influence in eastern North Carolina. Its religious instruction was of such a high order that over the years twenty of its students entered the ministry.

In January 1857, Hughes became rector of St. Bartholomew's Church, Pittsboro, and priest-in-charge of St. Mark's, Gulf. Occasional services were held at Egypt on Deep River. Resigning the rectorship in Pittsboro in December 1859, he was for the next five years in charge of St. James' in Hendersonville and Calvary Church in [Henderson County](#) ^[5]. At the close of the Civil War Hughes returned to Beaufort County. From 1865 to 1869 he attempted unsuccessfully to revive Trinity School, serving at the same time as priest-in-charge of St. Paul's Mission in Greenville. From 1869 until the summer of 1873 he was rector of St. Peter's Church, Washington; the present church building was erected during his tenure. At the diocesan convention in 1873, Hughes was appointed to conduct a canvass to raise funds for a permanent Episcopal endowment fund. His efforts were markedly successful. For the next year he was master of the grammar school at the University of the South at Sewanee, Tenn. Returning to North Carolina early in 1875, Hughes was for several months in charge of missions in Winston, Reidsville, and Durham. Later that year he returned to eastern North Carolina where, until his retirement in 1883, he was rector of [St. Paul's Church, Greenville](#) ^[6], and missionary in the counties of Pitt, Beaufort, and Craven. In 1878, with the help of his son, Nicholas Collin, Jr., Hughes reopened Trinity School, which operated successfully until 1908.

In recognition of his services as priest and teacher, [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[7] awarded Hughes a doctorate of divinity in 1884. He was the author of a book, *Genesis or Geology*, published in Chocowinity in 1887, and of a popular sermon he delivered in 1878, entitled *Is Christ Divided?* which later appeared in pamphlet form.

In 1848 Hughes married Adeline Edmunds Williams, the daughter of Dr. Robert Williams of [Pitt County](#) ^[8] and his third wife, Elizabeth Ellis. They had five children: Nicholas Collin, Jr., Isaac Wayne, John, Mary (Mrs. Nathaniel Harding), and Hannah (Mrs. Charles C. Calvert). Of their sons, Nicholas and Isaac became Episcopal clergymen. Hughes was buried in Trinity Parish churchyard, Chocowinity.

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