Sill, James Burges [1]

Sill, James Burges

by William F. W. Massengale, 1994

2 Apr. 1871–18 Nov. 1958

James Burges Sill, Episcopal [2] priest, was born in New York but grew to love the land and people of western North Carolina. From a family of divines, his father, Thomas Henry, served a Manhattan parish for forty years, and his brother, F. H. Sill, was a member of the Order of the Holy Cross and founded the Kent School in Connecticut. His mother was Jane Burges Miller. James Sill entered the priesthood after graduation from Columbia University (1892) and General Theological Seminary in New York (1897). After spending his early ministry in New York City, he was called in 1911 to North Carolina, where he remained for the rest of his life. He served churches in Rutherfordton, Fletcher, Shelby, and Asheville [3].

When he retired in 1944, Sill had the longest record of service of any priest in the diocese. At the time of his arrival in North Carolina, the Episcopal church in the mountains was a missionary church; after it became a self-supporting diocese in 1922, Sill became its historiographer and recorded the early struggling years of the church in the region. He prepared parish histories and collected biographical information on church leaders, which appeared in a series of columns printed in the diocesan paper. After his formal retirement, he collected and expanded these vignettes and published them as *Historical Sketches of Churches in the Diocese of Western North Carolina*[4]. Each entry of a parish or person was about two pages long and focused on the early days of the Episcopal church in the area. Sill provided vivid accounts of Episcopal clergymen who were said to have braved mobs of Baptists [5] at Beaver Creek or who forded frigid mountain streams to serve their followers.

Described as a rugged man, Sill never learned to drive a car and walked from Tryon to Asheville, even in winter weather, rather than bother a friend to drive him. While serving parishes at Craggy or Chunn's Cove, he spent his days walking to and from parishioners' homes. Sill was regarded as a model for pioneer clergymen who served in frontier regions. He died in Tryon at age eighty-seven.

References:

Asheville Citizen-Times, 19 Nov. 1958.

J. B. Sill, *Historical Sketches* (1955).

Stowe's Clerical Directory of the Protestant Episcopal Church(1953).

Additional Resources:

Sill, James B. *Historical sketches of churches in the Diocese of Western North Carolina Episcopal Church.*Asheville: Publishing Office, Church of the Redeemer. 1955. https://archive.org/details/historicalsketch00sill [4] (accessed May 6, 2014).

Jenkins, Mark. *Historical sketch of Calvary Episcopal Church.*Fletcher, N.C.: Calvary Parish. 1959. https://archive.org/details/historicalsketch00jenk [6] (accessed May 6, 2014).

Image Credits:

Subjects:
Biographies [7]
Religious Leaders and Clergy [8]
Authors:
Massengale, William F. W. [9]
Origin - location:
Buncombe County [10]
Asheville [11]
Henderson County [12]
Fletcher [13]
Rutherford County [14]
Rutherfordton [15]
Cleveland County [16]

Shelby [17]
From:
Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.[18]

1 January 1994 | Massengale, William F. W.

Source URL:https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/sill-james-burges