

## **Wetmore, Thomas Cogdell** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by Artus Monroe Moser, 1996

**22 Aug. 1869–3 Aug. 1906**

Thomas Cogdell Wetmore, clergyman and educator, was born in [Lincolnton](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, the son of the Reverend William Wetmore, rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Lincolnton, and Mary Bingham Wetmore. There is no evidence that the son attended or was graduated from college. In March 1886, at age seventeen, he and his brother, L. C. Wetmore, started a small weekly newspaper, *The Trumpet*, which they published until September 1888. There are accounts that he later traveled to the foothills and mountains of western North Carolina on business or missionary work. In 1893 he married Susan Boone Allen, and they had two children.

Wetmore was ordained deacon in the Episcopal church by the Right Reverend Joseph B. Cheshire at St. Luke's Church in Lincolnton on 14 Feb. 1894 and priest by the same bishop in 1899. For a while he represented the [Missionary District of Asheville](#) <sup>[3]</sup> as a general missionary and aroused much interest in the mission work of the mountain region. Apparently, however, he was much more drawn to the educational side of his ministry. At this time the few schools that existed in rural western North Carolina were open no more than three months a year. Wetmore wanted to establish a school that provided at least an eight-month term.

In 1894 he became rector of St. James's Church in [Hendersonville](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, and his first report the following year showed a considerable increase in communicants. In his report for 1897 he noted that "a suitable and attractive church" in the community of Upward would soon be completed. For 1898 he said that "the many people here from the South during the summers take a great interest in the Church, which had not been the custom here-tofore." Previously there had been much prejudice towards St. James's, "but it is gratifying to know that now there exists a kinder feeling toward it."

In 1897 Wetmore left his parish duties to found [Christ School at Arden](#) <sup>[5]</sup>. Begun as "a work of love, faith, and high vision on eight hundred dollars," the school was established in 1900 by the Reverend and Mrs. Wetmore. Because it was intended for mountain boys whose education was being neglected, Thomas Wetmore became known as the founder of "The Rugby of the Mountains." Young and energetic, he made many friends who contributed financially to the school. His friends in the New York Stock Exchange on one occasion stopped the bidding for five minutes while the members gave a fairly large sum for the work of Christ School.

For six years Thomas and Susan Wetmore worked together, sharing the vision, the labors, and the hardships to make the dream a reality. But in 1906 he died following an operation for appendicitis, leaving his wife to carry on their work. With high courage she accepted the responsibility, and for many years the entire burden rested on her. The school prospered and grew with a large campus, new buildings, and an increasing enrollment. A portrait of Wetmore hangs in the library at Christ School, Arden.

#### **References:**

Arden, *Christ School News*, March 1946.

*Asheville Citizen*, 4 Aug. 1906.

*Charlotte Daily Observer*, 4 Aug. 1906.

*Historical Sketches of the Diocese of Western North Carolina* (1941).

*Journal of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the Missionary District of Asheville* <sup>[6]</sup> (1907).

Thomas C. Wetmore Diary, 14 Feb. 1894–1897 (Pack Memorial Library, Asheville).

#### **Additional Resources:**

Wetmore, Thomas Cogdell. 1872. *Thomas Cogdell Wetmore papers, 1872-1908 (bulk 1872-1908)*. [http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/w/Wetmore,Thomas\\_Cogdell.html](http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/w/Wetmore,Thomas_Cogdell.html) <sup>[7]</sup> (accessed June 18, 2014).

#### **Subjects:**

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[Religious Leaders and Clergy](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

Educators <sup>[10]</sup>

**Authors:**

Moser, Artus Monroe <sup>[11]</sup>

**Origin - location:**

Asheville <sup>[12]</sup>

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