As Miss Gertrude Carraway says in the preface to her 1940 book, The Crown of Life: History of Christ Church New Bern, 1715-1940:

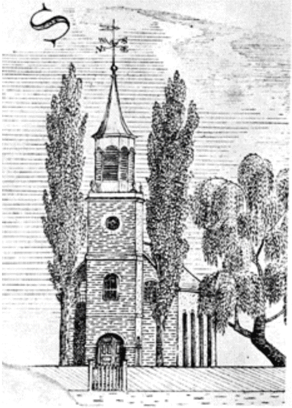
“For two centuries of service progress and inspiration, Christ Church has held an important place, literally and figuratively, in the heart of New Bern, second oldest town in North Carolina.

“Its spire, pointing skyward, higher than anything else in the city, is rimmed with a large crown, symbolic of everlasting life, not only for the Church triumphant but also for those stalwart Christians who try to further the Kingdom of God on earth.

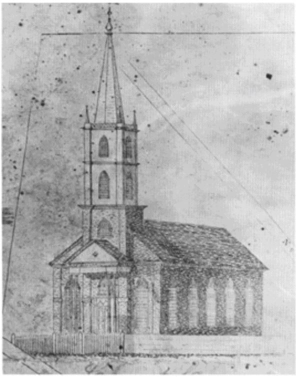
“The Twenty-six rectors, the assistant ministers and many members have exercised a vital influence on the history of the region. To a great extent the history of the local Church is a history of the community.

“These patriots of the Cross have bequeathed a priceless heritage for the Church and Church members of today and tomorrow – a tower of strength during the past, a beacon of light in the present, and a guiding star for the future.”

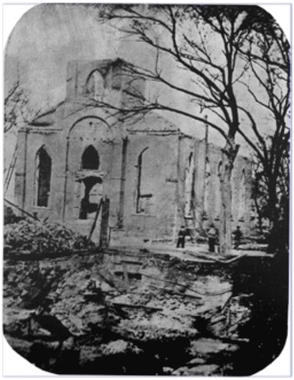
“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the Crown of Life.”-Revelations 2:10.



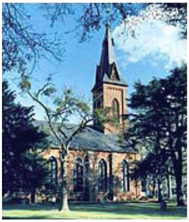
The first church was completed about 1750 and demolished about 1824 after the completion of the Second Church. The First Church site in the corner of the churchyard has been studied by archeologists. The present dwarf walls indicate the exact outline of the foundations as found. The presence of an apse is extremely unusual for the period, but is confirmed by the archeology and by the outline on the Sautier map of 1769. The appearance of the church is also documented by an engraving on the 19C Price’s Map of New Bern. A modern re-drawing of the Price’s Map image can be seen on bronze plaques near the site.



The “Second Church” was consecrated in 1824; this illustration is also from Price’s Map.



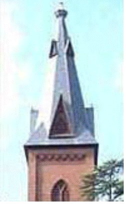
The “Second Church” burned in 1871. Only the walls survived, to be re-used in the “Third Church.”

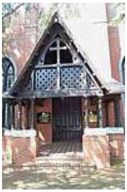


The present building, usually called the third church, was consecrated in 1875 and is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The fine Flemish-bond brick walls with their pointed-arch window openings that remained after the fire were used in the reconstruction. Aside from greatly embellishing the subdued gothic detailing of the 1824 structure, the buildings are very similar.

The Gothic Revival bell tower and spire of the present church, which soars 150 feet above the city, has dominated the skyline of the city of New Bern for more

than 125 years. The spire, embellished with a golden crown, was a prominent landmark on the charts of mariners in the nineteenth century. The Bell Tower contains a relatively new carillon (1996) that rings out over downtown New Bern once a day.





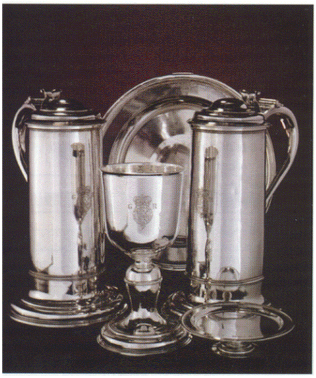
A Stick-Style entrance porch welcomes worshipers into a large narthex. Stairs on either side lead to the rear gallery and organ loft.

The organ was designed and built by W. Zimmer and Sons, third generation German organ builders. In the Baroque musical style, the instrument has 1397 pipes comprising 20 registers containing 25 ranks of pipes.

The nave, or the main body of the church, is finished in a conservative Gothic manner. Dark woods contrast with white walls. Both are complemented by the richly colored stained glass windows. In the chancel, or “stage” area, Gothic arches (ca. 1913) soar to meet the broad and unusual “Turtle Back” ceiling supported by a concealed heavy timber scissor-truss system in the attic.

The richly carved walnut altar sits below a stained glass window depicting Jesus blessing little children (“suffer the little children to come unto me”). The story behind this window is a reminder of the great effort and sacrifice necessary to rebuild our church during post-War impoverishment. During reconstruction, young girls in the parish raised money for this window by making and selling paper lamplighters, knitted garments, quilt squares, and other articles.

The marble font stands in the center aisle at the foot of the chancel steps. The font cover, used during Lent, incorporates an intricate brass design.



A silver communion service, consisting of a chalice, paten-cover, two flagons, and a bason to receive the offerings, all in a fitted walnut case lined with purple baize, was a gift to the parish from George II. All pieces are fully hallmarked for London, 1752. The maker was Mordecai Fox. The silver is in a secure display and can be seen when the church is open for tours.

The Cherished Memories Event at Christ Church provided the congregation with an opportunity to share memories of special moments and special people that have impacted their lives over the years. Notes were posted in the Ministry Center under the name of the rector, assistant, deacon or interim serving at the time. Several parishioners told stories. Memories seemed to beget memories that live on into the future of Christ Church. Click here to read more about people’s stories, and here to read long-time parishioner John Thomas’ stories. You can also read the history written by former rector Ed Sharp.

Graveyard Records— The churchyard of Christ Church served as the only public burial ground in New Bern until 1800; a large number of people, perhaps several thousand, are buried in the churchyard. During the Yellow Fever epidemic in 1799 it was necessary to bury many of the victims in mass graves, which were located near the present north property line. The Vestry declared the churchyard full as a result of these burials. In 1800 the parish opened Cedar Grove Cemetery to meet the ongoing needs of the community. Christ Church turned Cedar Grove over to the City of New Bern in 1853. The 1875 church and the parish house are believed to be on top of graves.

The parish registers listing churchyard burials were taken home for safekeeping and were destroyed in a house fire in 1818. The names of only 27 or 28 people are known, transcribed from surviving gravestones. These names were recorded over 50 years ago, when many more stones were legible. A booklet listing the inscriptions in full and plotting them on a map of the churchyard has been published by the ECW and can be purchased from the docents on duty or ordered by mail from the church office. For mail orders, enclose a check for $4.00 per copy.

Parish Registers– Parish registers covering most burials conducted from Christ Church from 1818 to 1900 are available in the Kellenberger Collection of the New Bern-Craven County Public Library.