

The formal presence of the Episcopal Church began when Fort Laramie became a military fort in 1849. The **Reverend Richard Vaux** was assigned as Chaplain for the soldiers and their families stationed there. He was also Wyoming's first schoolteacher, as he established a school on the fort in 1856. He served in this capacity for 12 years.

In 1869, under newly-elected President Ulysses S. Grant, the Peace Commission assigned all Indian Reservations to a particular denomination. This "Peace Policy," gave South Dakota and the Wind River Reservation to the Episcopal Church in order to establish schools and religious instruction to the American Indians located there. The first pastoral visit was made to the reservation by Bishop George Randall, who served as Bishop of Colorado and Wyoming at that time. The first church building on the Wind River Indian Reservation is a small building, which now serves as the maintenance building for Sacagawea's Gravesite.

The **Rev. John Roberts** arrived in 1883. His assignments included the spiritual needs of the Indians at the Wind River Reservation, as well as the establishment of a school on the reservation. He was a Welshman who requested the assignment, due to his health. He thought the drier Wyoming air would be good for him. He learned the dialects of the Shoshone and Arapaho tribes, and came to be called their "Big Brother." He was much respected by Chief Washakie, as well.

One of John Roberts' associates was the **Rev. Sherman Coolidge**, an Arapaho priest. Rev. Coolidge was the son of a warrior who had been killed in a battle with the whites. He was taken by Captain Coolidge and educated for holy orders, eventually graduating from Seabury Divinity School as a priest. He is said to have had a "commanding and dignified presence," and was a great asset to John Roberts and the Wind River Indian Reservation.

The first church edifice in Wyoming was built in Cheyenne in 1868. The first appointed priest was **Reverend Joseph Cook**. The Methodist Church was already established at this time, but they did not have their own church building.

According to the 1890 Wyoming Census, there were 467 Protestant/Episcopal church members in Wyoming. Churches were established and built along the route of the Union Pacific Railroad, which ran across the southern part of Wyoming. They later followed the routes of other railroads, before moving in toward the more remote areas of Wyoming.

THE FOUNDING BISHOP - At the General Convention, which met in Chicago in October, 1886, the Missionary District of Idaho and Wyoming was created by the House of Bishops. The **Rt. Reverend Ethelbert Talbot** was elected as Bishop at that time, and was consecrated in 1887. This was a transition year for Wyoming, as it moved from territory to statehood, and immense changes were taking place in the state. Bishop Talbot was the "People's Bishop," serving them where they were, and visiting saloons and mining camps to bring people to services when he arrived in town.

He spoke fondly of the people and experiences he had in his book My People of the Plains, Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1906. Bishop Talbot served from 1887-1898, and later went on to become the Bishop of Central Pennsylvania.

INTERIM BISHOPS - The interim period, following Bishop Talbot's term, was managed by two Bishops: **Bishop Graves**, from Colorado and **Bishop Fundsten** from Boise. Bishop Fundsten was significant in helping to establish several churches along the railroad lines in Wyoming at this time. Their focus was visitations to communities for the purpose of baptisms and confirmations, as well as helping to help new churches develop an understanding of the liturgy of the Episcopal Church.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL BISHOP - In June of 1909, **Rt. Reverend Nathaniel Thomas** arrived in Wyoming. He was instrumental in organizing the many churches that were springing up across the state of Wyoming. He developed many building projects to increase membership and serve the people of the state. During this time, the Cathedral Home in Laramie was built, as well as two Episcopal Hospitals in Wyoming. His name can be seen on many cornerstones throughout Wyoming. He served as Bishop for 18 years, until 1927.

THE CARETAKER BISHOP - **Rt. Reverend Elmer Nicholas Schmuck** began his term as Wyoming's Bishop in 1930. Though his term in Wyoming was relatively short, he was best known for his compassion for the people during the Depression. He encouraged membership in the church, and during the last Religious Census taken in the United States in 1936, the Diocese of Wyoming had grown to 6,280 members. Church records today show about that same number of members in 2009. Bishop Schmuck died as Wyoming's Bishop in 1936, and is buried at the Cathedral in Laramie.

THE SALESMAN BISHOP - The arrival of **Rt. Reverend Winifred Ziegler** in 1936 brought many structural changes to churches in Wyoming. Bishop Ziegler has connections in New England and in Europe, and found financial support for his mission projects in Wyoming. He was able to purchase stained glass windows, furniture, and materials from churches that were re-building in those areas, and many Wyoming parishes benefited from his ability to acquire funds. During Bishop Ziegler's term, a Mission Church was established at the Heart Mountain Japanese Relocation Camp. Lay Reader, Luke Yokota, became a priest for that congregation, and a plaque in his honor is hung at the Cathedral in Laramie. Bishop Ziegler served until 1949.

THE FRIENDLY BISHOP - Also known as the "Feel Good Bishop," **Rt. Reverend James Wilson Hunter** began his term in 1949. During his service to Wyoming, he established a policy of meeting the people in a non-threatening manner. He believed in remaining very "Low Church" in every way, often encouraging priests to dress more casually in public and during services. He felt this would help parishioners view clergy as more accessible to them. Bishop Hunter served until 1969.

THE SOCIAL CONCERNS BISHOP - Wyoming's first ELECTED Bishop was Rt. Reverend David Thornberry, who began his term in 1969. Bishop Thornberry's father was the Dean of the Cathedral in Laramie, and was a huge influence in his life. Bishop Thornberry spoke out in favor of the University of Wyoming athletes during the famous "Black 14" issue in October of 1969. He became involved in many of the social issues of the late 60s and early 70s across the state of Wyoming. He served in Wyoming until 1977.

THE FLYING BISHOP - When the Rt. Reverend Bob G. Jones began his term as Bishop in 1978, he recognized the need to reach the people in every part of the state in a timely manner. He therefore requested the purchase of an airplane to assist him in more efficient transportation across this vast state. He is credited with helping the diocese become more financially stable, and was instrumental in gaining the status with the National Church as an Independent Diocese. The concept of Wyoming as a Missionary Diocese was now a thing of the past. He strengthened the Renewal Movement in Wyoming as the church was seeking to find its own identity. He went on to be the Dean of St. George's College in Jerusalem after his retirement in 1996, and is currently living in Wyoming.

THE NEW MODEL BISHOP - When the Rt. Reverend Bruce Caldwell was elected to serve Wyoming in 1997, he sought ways to strengthen the smaller parishes who were struggling to survive. He introduced the Mutual Ministry format to the Diocese in hopes that those churches could use the resources from within their parish to serve the congregation. He has promoted education within the diocese, and is highly respected in the National Church. Bishop Caldwell announced his retirement at the Convention (October 2008) for the Diocese of Wyoming.

This abbreviated version of the vast history of the Episcopal Church in Wyoming was created as an overview, and is in no way a complete account. We encourage parishioners to seek deeper understanding of their local parish through personal interviews, utilizing the references listed below, and looking through church archives readily available to you. We cannot know where we are going, as a Diocese, if we don't know where we've come from.

God's Peace, The Education Sub-committee for the Bishop Search

References:

- Rev. Warren Murphy, Wyoming Association of Churches, April 10, 2009 interview
- My People of the Plains, By Bishop Talbot, Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1906
- In Search of Butch Cassidy, by Larry Pointer, (references to Bishop Talbot p. 55-56, and p. 172-174) University of Oklahoma Press, 1977
- Walk Softly, This is God's Country: 1883-1849 Among Shoshone and Arapaho Indians/Wind River Reservation, by Beatrice Crofts, Elinore Markley, and John Roberts, Mortimore Publications, 1977