

### #3 Telling the Nativity Story: “a name is chosen...The Church of the Nativity<sup>1</sup>” 1886

In 1881, by best sources, the Episcopal mission in Lewiston was referred to as Lewiston Episcopal --although some called it “Tuttle’s Church, a reference to Bishop Daniel Sylvester Tuttle, Bishop of Montana, Utah and Idaho. Bishop B. W. Morris of Oregon and Bishop Tuttle agreed that the mission was ready for a resident priest.<sup>2</sup> They called John McConkey from St. Paul’s Church in Walla Walla. The name Lewiston Episcopal Church became known as The Church of the Nativity circa 1886.

Rev. McConkey, born in Ireland in 1848, immigrated to America, and received his divinity degree from Episcopal Theological School at Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1876. John married Anna Joslin, an experienced teacher and Episcopal convert. While pregnant she endured the 1,600 mile journey with John, around the Horn from New York to Portland and on to Walla Walla. Our archives tell the story of their adventures around the Cape of Good Hope in 1878.<sup>3</sup>

The McConkeys arrived in Lewiston in 1881 to serve 18 years, after pastoring in Walla Walla for a year. In his unpublished record book of baptisms, marriages, and funerals, McConkey records over 162 baptisms. He baptized his son J. D. McConkey, Jr. while in Walla Walla. The McConkey window on the south wall memorializes young son J. D. McConkey who died in 1883 and infant son Henry Cook McConkey who died in 1884.

The new congregation lost several children who are remembered in our beautiful stained glass windows. Readers can recall the Nativity Window (Evangeline Vollmer 1881). John and Sally Vollmer commissioned the window which was created by the Mayer Company of Munich, German and transported to Lewiston around the “Horn” reaching Lewiston by river steamer. The Good Shepherd Window on the west end of the sanctuary memorializes children of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Kester, Clyde Sinclair and Claude Graham Kester. John Kester came to Lewiston in 1872, engaged in the dray, ice and dairy business.... A window on the north honors Kester son, Albert G. Kester born in 1877 while parents were in California during the Nez Perce Indian uprising of 1877.<sup>4</sup>

All the stained glass windows were temporarily removed from the church building when the building was pulled up the hill in 1920. More about the Ann D. Jacobs window, the Wiggin Window and the Butler Window next month.

Rev. John McConkey was community oriented, involved in education, civic affairs and circuit riding. For example, John’s hand can be seen in the city council’s passage of the ‘blue law’ in the ‘80’s. Only shops selling bread, fresh meat and drugs or hotels and restaurants could be open on Sunday...The statute stood but proved very unpopular and was finally repealed on October 14, 1895, only to be resurrected in April 1899. “<sup>5</sup>

John was productive in 1885—1888 despite missing Anna and Hattie who were in California for Anna’s health. He formed a new congregation in Moscow, Idaho, preached to the congregation in Mount Idaho, and visited the gold fields in Warren. Most importantly he began to raise funds for a permanent church; it was to be constructed at 11<sup>th</sup> and F streets. Building commenced in 1890. That first sanctuary, pulled up the hill to 8<sup>th</sup> and 8, is the same sanctuary in which we celebrate 150 years of Nativity.

One can read many McConkey stories in *Lost Lewiston* by author Steven Branting. Award-winning Branting will help us celebrate our 150 years at Nativity Episcopal this spring. He has more stories about the Vollmers, the McConkeys (and their unmarked burial site), the Kesters, as well as the miners, the merchants, and the whole community of women and men in *LOST LEWISTON IDAHO*. Our parish home, the church named “The Church of the Nativity in 1886,” is a continuation of those early Episcopalians feeding body, soul, and mind.

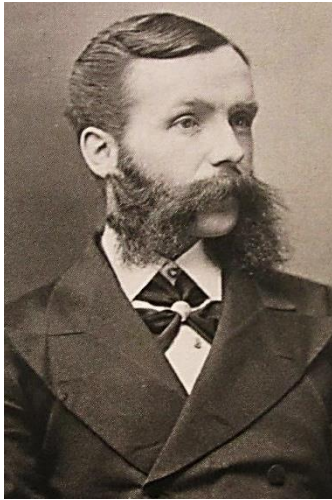
## End notes:

- 1) Boren, Charles P. and Campbell, Thomas W *The Centennial Booklet* p. 8
- 2) *Ibid.* p 4
- 3) McConkey, Rev. J. D. *From New York to Portland Oregon via Straits of Magellan...pp 1-80.* On page 75, McConkey describes the Walla Wallans: “...are by no means what their many spires [churches] would lead us to suppose. They are wholly bent on making money, they are not religious...They tolerate it as a good institution for preserving peace and for keeping their wives from prying into their business...”
- 4) Boren, Charles P. and Campbell, Thomas *The Centennial Booklet* p 25.
- 5) Branting, Steven D. *Lost Lewiston* p 74 [also see: McConkey’s journal of Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals ... records 162 baptisms, 368 marriages, and 244 burials . Unpublished journal in the Church of the Nativity archives.]

## Works cited:

- 1) Boren, Charles P. and Thomas W. Campbell. “The Mists of History.” *The Centennial Booklet* 1983
- 2) McConkey, Rev. J. D. *From New York to Portland, Oregon via straits of Magellan with a history of the voyage, scenes, places, incidents and notes of the Journey . Pp 1-80*
- 3) Branting, Steven *Lost Lewiston Idaho* History Press Charleston, SC 2014, p. 74-76

-- Deloris Jungert Davisson and Margaret A. Cole January 2015



John Douglas McConkey  
circa 1876



Anna Joslin McConkey  
Circa 1877  
Courtesy of DeLayne  
Whipple Brown



Daniel Tuttle  
Circa 1888  
Courtesy of the Episcopal  
Diocese of Idaho

Pictures found in  
Branting, Steven *Lost Lewiston* p 70, 71 and 74  
John Douglas McConkey p 70.  
Anna Joslin McConkey p 71.  
and Daniel Tuttle p. 74.