

Gurley, Joseph ^[1]

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by James Elliott Moore, 1986

12 Oct. 1751–ca. 1816

Joseph Gurley, episcopal ^[2] priest, was born in Southampton County, Va., the second child and oldest son in a family of ten children. His father, the Reverend George Gurley, was an Anglican priest stationed in Southampton County. Details of Joseph Gurley's early life are unknown. After he was ordained by Bishop William White of Pennsylvania on 25 Mar. 1788, he became assistant priest at St. Luke's Parish, Southampton County, where his father had served as rector since 1773. Gurley remained at this post until the death of his father in 1792.

The following year he appeared in nearby North Carolina. Settling at Murfreesboro, Gurley assumed the duties of rector of St. Barnabas' Parish whose boundaries were coterminous with those of Hertford County ^[3]. Whatever church organization had existed in Murfreesboro in the colonial period had collapsed as a result of the American Revolution ^[4]. In fact, at this time there were only ten Episcopal clergymen in the entire state. Nevertheless, Gurley took an active role in efforts to secure a bishop for North Carolina. He was one of the three ministers and three laymen who attended the abortive Tarboro convention in 1793. When North Carolina Episcopalians convened again in Tarboro on 28 May 1794, the attendance was more gratifying, and Gurley served as one of six clergymen on the Standing Committee. This convention selected the Reverend Charles Pettigrew ^[5] as bishop-elect of North Carolina, although he was never consecrated.

Gurley also opened Murfreesboro's first school in 1793. An advertisement in the nearby Halifax newspaper proclaimed that the school's curriculum was evenly balanced between the classical and practical, with instruction being offered in writing, arithmetic, measuring, surveying, Latin, and Greek. Unfortunately, this educational venture does not seem to have lasted for more than a term or two.

In addition to his religious and educational interests, Gurley was active in Masonic ^[6] affairs and frequently preached to lodges in the area. He was Master of Royal Edwin Lodge at Windsor and a charter member of Davie Lodge at Lewiston.

There is no record of Gurley after 1816, and it is assumed that he died around that time in Bertie County ^[7]. He had married Martha Peterson and left at least two sons, John and Peterson.

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