

Cupples, Charles ^[1]

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Cupples, Charles

by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1979

d. ca. 1785

Charles Cupples, Anglican clergyman, was born in Great Britain and sent to North Carolina as a missionary by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel ^[2] in 1766. Governor William Tryon ^[3] assigned him to St. John's Parish, Bute County ^[4], and in 1768 Cupples was recorded as a member of the Blandford-Bute Masonic Lodge. In his earliest known letter to the secretary of the Society in London on 9 Apr. 1768, Cupples commented on his labors and stressed a need felt by many colonial clergy for a resident bishop. He further reported that he had baptized many slaves and in some cases had assigned them godparents of their own race. In the summer of 1770 Cupples visited Rowan County ^[5], then without a clergyman, and performed ministerial duties there.

Cupples arrived in the colony at a difficult time as the resentment of many settlers in the back country to excessive taxation and unfair local officials was ready to boil over into what became known as the Regulator Movement ^[6]. As a clergyman, he was appalled at their violent reaction. As he wrote to his superiors in England on 25 Apr. 1771, some of these people had obstructed courts of justice, burned buildings, and whipped public officials. Sympathy for the Regulators was strong in Bute County, and Cupples observed that although the people there had a religious turn of mind, they did not agree when he preached the duty of a Christian to live in submission to government. Four years later, at the beginning of the Revolution, Cupples was obliged to appear before the Bute County committee of safety on complaint that he had said something favorable respecting Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia. After hearing him, the committee concluded that he was friendly to the country and the peace of society. As the war progressed Cupples became more fervent in his patriotism and at the revolutionary Assembly in the spring of 1779, meeting in Smithfield, he served as chaplain, a post he was to fill again the following year in New Bern.

In December 1785 the assembly awarded Ann Cupples £17, probably indicating that the Rev. Mr. Cupples was then dead and this was payment for his service as chaplain. This undoubtedly was welcome relief as Cupples had mortgaged his personal property, including a library, in February 1774 to Dinwiddie and Craufurd, merchants in Glasgow, to secure a debt. The surname of Ann, his wife, is not known. In May 1777 the Bute County court had apprenticed a five-year-old orphan, Sarah Dudley, to Charles and Ann Cupples to learn the art of housewifery. The Cupples appear not to have had any children; the only person of this unusual name in the state at the time of the 1790 census was one Elizabeth Cupples of Iredell County ^[7].

In an early letter to the Society Cupples reported that he had held services at five stations. While they were not identified, it is probable that some were in neighboring Granville Parish which then had no clergyman. His main station probably was Trinity Church in the Parish of St. John; its traditional location is near the site of old Bute County courthouse. The parish had a glebe ^[8], or farm, for the use of its clergy and a house existed on it during Cupples's lifetime; he probably was residing there at the time of his death. It was identified as late as 1823 on Tanner's map of the state, located in what became northeastern Franklin County ^[9] after the division of Bute in 1779 into two new counties.

References:

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William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vols. 7–8 (1890).

Additional Resources:

CSR Documents by Cupples, Charles, d. ca. 1785. Documenting the American South, UNC Libraries:
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/creators/csr10495> ^[10]

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