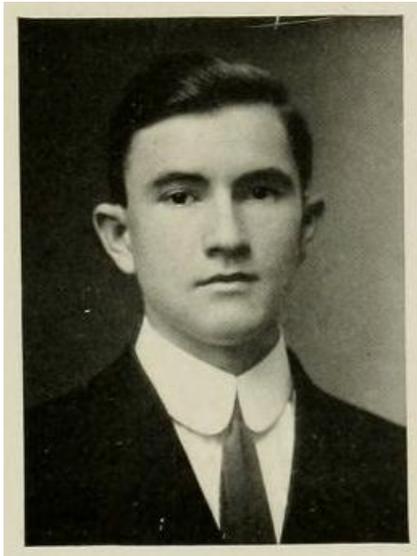


Rights, Douglas LeTell ^[1]

Rights, Douglas LeTell

by Anna Withers Bair, 1994; Revised December 2021

11 Sept. 1891–1 Dec. 1956



Douglas L. Rights picture from the 1913 issue of *Yackety Yack*, the UNC Chapel Hill yearbook. Image is courtesy of the North Carolina Collection, UNC Chapel Hill.

^[2]Douglas LeTell Rights, bishop-elect of the Moravian church, historian, and author, was born in Salem, the son of George Hanes and Emma Jones Rights. George Rights was an editor for the locally published *Union Republican* newspaper. Douglas Rights was graduated in 1905 from the Salem Boys School, where his grandfather had taught, and in 1913 he received the A.B. degree from [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[3]. In 1915 he was graduated from the Moravian Theological Seminary at Bethlehem, Pa. After a year of further study, the Divinity School of Harvard University granted him the bachelor of sacred theology degree in 1916.

In October 1916 Rights was ordained and called to the First Moravian Church in Greensboro and served until entering the U.S. Army as chaplain in 1918. In 1919 he became pastor of the [Trinity Moravian Church](#) ^[4], in Salem, where he remained until his death thirty-seven years later. During his tenure the church grew from about 200 to more than 850 members. In 1947 Moravian College and Theological Seminary conferred on him the honorary doctor of divinity degree. On 15 Nov. 1956 Rights was elected bishop of the Moravian church while he was in the hospital recovering from a heart attack. He died unexpectedly a few days later before he could be consecrated.

When he was a child, Douglas Rights found an arrowhead and this began his abiding interest in Indians. His very large and comprehensive personal collection of Indian artifacts, part of which was placed in the Wachovia Historical Museum in Winston-Salem and part at The University of North Carolina, plus years of study on the subject gained him an international reputation as an authority on North Carolina Indians. Several articles and two books grew out of this interest: [A Voyage Down the Yadkin-Great Peedee River](#) ^[5] (1929) and [The American Indian in North Carolina](#) ^[6] (1947). Another result was that he helped to organize the Archaeological Society of North Carolina and was its first president. He also served as a director of the Eastern States Archaeological Foundation.

Rights's linguistic ability led him to translate church articles and books by German and French authors. His most important undertaking in this line was editing and translating, from German script, volume 8 of [The Records of the Moravians in North Carolina](#) ^[7]. In 1950 Rights was named archivist of the Moravian Church, Southern Province, a position he filled until his death six years later.

A deep concern with the horrors and waste of war prompted Rights, a month before his death, to suggest to the dean that Harvard Divinity School offer a course entitled "War: Its Causes, Prevention, and Cure." The dean recommended that a lectureship be established to bring outstanding world leaders to the campus who should propose ways in which Christianity could aid the cause of peace. Rights concurred and sent a check for a thousand dollars to start the fund. "The purpose of the contribution," he wrote, "is to try to provide a way of helping people to be conscious of a recurring danger and to study war as physicians do a dangerous disease." After Rights's death his family added to the endowment fund

and the first Douglas L. Rights Peace Lecture was given at Harvard Divinity School on 5 May 1960.



Dr. Douglas L. Rights, image

from NC Museum of History. [8] Rights was known throughout the area for his friendliness to all people, his enthusiasm, and his twinkling dark brown eyes which attested to his delightful sense of humor. For these qualities as well as his scholarship he was in demand as a speaker. He was a member of many organizations, including the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association [9], and sat on the board of editors of the North Carolina Historical Review [10]. He joined the local American Legion Post, which he served as chaplain and commander; the Forty and Eight; the Red Cross; and the local Kiwanis Club, of which he was a charter member. At the time of his death he was lieutenant governor of the Piedmont Colony, Society of Mayflower Descendants in North Carolina [11]; president of the Wachovia Historical Society [12]; and vice-president of Old Salem, Inc. [13], an office he had held since its organization. Rights had been the first chairman of Old Salem's committee on antiquities and archives. He was a Mason and served as grand historian of Salem Lodge.

Active in the Boy Scout movement, he received the Silver Beaver Award for approximately twenty years of service. Rights served on many provincial and interprovincial boards of the Moravian church, was a trustee of Salem College [14], and at one time taught history at Salem Academy and College. [15] He wrote several hymns, perhaps the best known being "Veiled in Darkness Judah Lay," written in 1915 and included in the hymnals of several denominations. He also published two pieces for band, "Tar Heel March," based on The University of North Carolina alma mater, and "Salem Square March."

On 15 June 1920 Rights married Cecil Leona Burton, and they had five children: Burton Jones and Graham Henry (both of whom became Moravian ministers), Eleanor (Mrs. Gerald W. Roller), Douglas LeTell, who died in infancy, and George LeTell, who died in the Korean War. Rights was buried in the Moravian Graveyard [16], Winston-Salem. An oil portrait of him hangs in the Douglas L. Rights Memorial Chapel, Trinity Moravian Church, Winston-Salem.

Additionally, the American Indian artifacts Rights collected are now held in the collection of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Museum of Anthropology at Wake Forest University.

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Additional Resources:

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Images, Digital Forsyth. Douglas LeTell Rights. <http://www.digitalforsyth.org/photos/browse/people-individuals-rights-douglas-letell-1891-1956> [18].

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"[Douglas L. Rights] Photograph, Accession #: H.1957.65.5 [8]." Circa 1950-1957. North Carolina Museum of History.

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Subjects:

Biographies [19]

Religious Leaders and Clergy [20]

Historians [21]

Authors:

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Origin - location:

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