Biography of Edward Bass (1726-1803)

The Reverend Edward Bass was the first American Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Bass attended Harvard University, graduating in 1744. He taught and preached in Congregationalist churches, then went to England to be ordained by the bishop of London in May 1752. He had been appointed assistant at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1749 by the new rector, Matthias Plant, whom he followed as rector in 1753, serving until his death in 1803. Massachusetts and the second Bishop of Rhode Island.

He served as Rector of St. Paul's for 51 years, prior to, during, and after the American Revolution.

Thanks to his efforts St. Paul's was one of only two Anglican churches in Massachusetts to remain continuously open during the Revolutionary War, the other being Trinity Church in Boston.

By his leadership during these tumultuous times, Bishop Bass ensured the survival of this church and played an important role in the transition of the Church of England in America to the Protestant Episcopal Church of America.

In 1797, The Reverend Edward Bass, D.D. Rector of this church was consecrated Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and held the offices of Bishop and Rector until his death. St. Paul's church was the first Bishop Church in Massachusetts.

Bass considered himself neutral during the American Revolution, but since he omitted from the church service all reference to the royal family and the British government, he was accused by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts of supporting the colonists and lost his financial support. In May 1789, the first convention of the Diocese of Massachusetts, meeting in Salem, elected Bass bishop of Massachusetts and Rhode Island but his parish rejected the election because lay delegates did not participate.

In 1796 in Boston, Bass was unanimously re-elected bishop of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Maine, with lay participation, and was consecrated in Philadelphia on May 7, 1797. He also oversaw the churches in New Hampshire and is listed by the Diocese of Rhode Island as its second bishop. Edward Bass was the 7th bishop consecrated for the Episcopal Church. Aged 71 at the time of his consecration, he is the oldest person consecrated bishop in the Episcopal Church.

In 1800, that first building for St. Paul's was replaced by a larger structure. On April 27, 1920, the building was consumed by fire. The cornerstone of the present church was laid August 17, 1922.

His wives, Sarah Beck Bass 1732-1789 and Mercy Bass 1755-1842 are buried on either side of his mausoleum which contains a long inscription of his virtues in Latin.

Bass died on September 10, 1803, just before he was to travel to Portland, Maine. James Morss in his diary, wrote of him, "He felt ill on Saturday and felt he could not preach Sunday night and was concerned about my conducting the service without him as I had not done so before, but he was dead before Sunday."