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JOURNAL OF THE NEW BERN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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THE CHURCHES OF OLD JAMES CITY

Mary Baker

In his book *JAMES CITY: A BLACK COMMUNITY IN NORTH CAROLINA 1863-1900* Joe Mobley states that there were churches in James City from the time the first freedmen were settled there in 1863. This is not surprising as Vincent Colyer, the first appointed Superintendent of the Poor for New Bern, had established or reopened churches for blacks in 1862 shortly after the Union occupation. What could be more natural than that the first settlers of what eventually became James City would take their churches with them when they crossed the river?

Before we consider specific churches, we should understand something about black churches generally. When the first slaves arrived at Jamestown in 1619, church leaders realized they should reach out to these people in an attempt to Christianize them. While some blacks did not respond, most did. At first Christianity was probably little more than another layer of belief on top of the beliefs they had brought with them from their native land. In time, however, this changed. Black Americans soon embraced this "new" religion with true zeal.

In the beginning blacks were baptized into the local white churches, primarily the Baptist and Methodist churches. These two denominations were the most active in preaching to the blacks and were adamant in their opposition to slavery. However there were black members in all the established churches. For many years blacks and whites worshipped together without large-scale discrimination, but in the early 1800s there was a movement in the north to segregate whites from blacks during worship. In the south slaves usually sat in the

balcony, occasionally with their white families, or at the rear of the church.

At St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia the segregation was too much for some of the free blacks belonging to the church. They considered the church theirs as much as anyone else did. They had contributed money and labor for building the church and were still making their contributions. Richard Allen, one of these free blacks, walked out, and he was joined by three of his friends. Together they founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America.

In 1794 shortly after leaving Allen purchased an old frame building for the new congregation. Bishop Francis Asbury dedicated the building, and Richard Allen was ordained deacon. He later was elected bishop. From this beginning arose other black African Methodist Episcopal churches in other cities. During the early years the black churches were part of the Methodist Conference, but in 1816 some of the churches banded together to form the A. M. E. Church, a separate and distinct body. They were no longer part of the Methodist Conference.

The A. M. E. Zion Church had its beginning in New York City. At John Street Methodist Episcopal Church, the oldest Methodist Church in the United States, many blacks began separating themselves from the congregation in 1796. They said that they had a "desire for the privilege of holding meetings of their own, where they might have an opportunity to exercise their spiritual gifts among themselves and thereby be more useful to one another". Bishop Asbury granted their request. At one time Frederick Douglass was a minister in this denomination.

By the 1780s there were black Baptist churches organized in Williamsburg and Petersburg, Virginia, and Savannah, Georgia. During the early 1800s numerous camp meetings conducted by the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists reached out to black people. Doubtless many blacks were members of these churches in their own areas. By 1831 there were so many black members of Baptist churches in



JONES CHAPEL A. M. E. ZION. Photo by Conway.

the north that this is seen as the beginning of the black Baptist church. Beginning during the final days of the Civil War and continuing for the next few years black missionaries from Baptist, A. M. E. Zion, and A. M. E. churches came south to work with the freed slaves. They encouraged independent black denominations. Some of these missionaries no doubt visited New Bern, for about this time large numbers of black people left white congregations to form their own churches.

The Reverend James Walker Hood of Bridgeport, Connecticut, organized over 600 A. M. E. Zion churches in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. It was the result of his visit to New Bern in January 1863 that the congregation known as St. Peter's A. M. E. Zion Church became the first A. M. E. Church in the south. The Reverend Horace James, then Superintendent of the Poor and the man for whom James City was named, wrote that there were five churches in James City by September 1863.

Jones Chapel A. M. E. Zion, 513 Elder Street, one of the first churches established in James City, began that same year. It was first called Mosely Chapel. No one today seems to know why. Perhaps a Mosely family gave money or material for the building, or the first preacher was named Mosely, and it was called Mosely Chapel to distinguish it from other chapels. In a community where everyone knows the reason for something, no one thinks to write it down for those who come afterwards.

The original chapel located in old James City was a wooden building about 25 x 50 feet. The congregation moved to Meadowsville (new James City) in 1915 and built the present structure. This chapel has been renovated, and Sunday School rooms and kitchen facilities have been added. Nevertheless it retains the charm of an old building. The structure is of red brick with supporting buttresses. Of the two uneven towers on the front corners, one is a bell tower. The windows are of colored glass, and the predominating amber gives a happy feeling to the

interior on a sunny Sunday morning. The doors and windows are made with Gothic pointed arches and white trim emphasizing the upper portions. Entry is through a covered porch with semicircular steps leading up to it.

In 1878 Mr. B. A. Ball, a white jeweler in New Bern, gave a clock to the chapel in old James City. Sometime later the clock was lost, however its whereabouts have been discovered, and it is anticipated that the clock will be renovated and put in an honored place in the chapel.

From the time of the Civil War the blacks of James City and New Bern identified with U. S. presidents. When President Garfield was assassinated in 1881, the people were heartbroken. They remembered him as a strong antislavery man and a friend to blacks. Accordingly a memorial service was planned and held at Jones Chapel. Mr. Mobley writes, "The Reverend Holt, a James City minister, opened the ceremonies with an appropriate hymn. The Reverend Amos York from New Bern preached a sermon from II Samuel--'there is a prince and a great man fallen'." People came from both James City and New Bern.

Over the years, as people have left the area, membership has fallen. This places an ever increasing burden upon those who are left to maintain the church and its ministry. One novel fund raiser the members have used is what they term a mock conference. One member dresses in robes and pretends to be a bishop. Other members act as preachers and report on "their church's" giving. Usually they are told to go back to "their congregation" and raise more. There is a lot of joking and laughter as money is pledged or given, and the members vie with each other to raise the greatest amount.

Recently Peter Sandbeck of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History visited Jones Chapel to help the members decide how best to repair and preserve their historic building. It is hoped that within a year work will begin, and Jones Chapel will



PILGRIM CHAPEL MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH. Photo by Conway.

continue to show a lovely face to the world. The Reverend Timothy R. Jackson is the current pastor.

Pilgrim Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, 313 Elder Street, founded in 1863, moved from old James City to its present location in new James City in January 1915. The building was completely remodeled in 1958 under the guidance of the Reverend Dickerson. Today's church has towers of different heights on the front corners flanking the central entrance. Windows beside the entrance are rectangular, but the side windows have pointed arch tops. Leaded stained glass depicts scenes from the life of Christ. The brick, a soft red, is laid in American bond. The Reverend William E. Sinclair shares duties with Elder Wallace Grimes.

When the chapel was in old James City it was known as Slab Chapel. When questioned as to the unusual name, Mr. Aaron Boyd, a longtime member, replied that it was made of slab lumber and hence the designation.

Pilgrim Chapel has an active and ongoing ministry for all ages of the congregation. One occasion especially meaningful is the annual homecoming held on the third Sunday in August. As many as 200 people, including Deacon Moore and the Reverend William Moore from Philadelphia, may attend, and because of the numbers a catered meal is served away from the Fellowship Hall.

From its beginning the chapel has used the Neuse River for baptisms. While the congregation has discussed building an indoor pool for these, the Neuse continues to be used. June, July, August, and even September are baptismal months. The congregation gathers at the riverside in the morning for this service. Following the baptisms the congregation returns to the church.

Reform Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, 406 Plum Street, was organized in 1896 under the leadership of Elder Scott after a division with Mt. Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church. In the early 1900s the present property was purchased and the community hall located there was gradually changed into what



REFORM SHILOH MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH. Photo by Conway.

the members wanted in a church building.

By 1950 the congregation realized they needed a new building for worship. They kept the same location but built more to the front. The present church is a sparkling white frame building with a covered entry porch sheltering the front door. Identical windows on either side remind one of the Gothic style, but these have triangular rather than rounded heads.

In 1983 Fellowship Hall Annex was built near the church to house Sunday School, a kitchen for church dinners, and space for other activities. While the members formerly baptized in the Neuse River, they now use the facilities of a sister church in Jacksonville.

Mt. Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, Scott Street, can be seen to the right as one heads east through the James City interchange on U. S. Highway 70. The present church was built in 1924 when the Reverend H. B. Moore was pastor. A picture in the tower vestibule depicts the Reverend Hull Grimes, 1817-1888, who was the founder of New Bern Eastern Missionary Baptist Association in 1875.

The building is an imposing one. The main floor is raised above ground level requiring eight to ten steps to reach the front door. Corbelled red brick walls are trimmed with white woodwork. On the southeast corner is an entrance-bell tower with doors on two sides. Across the front are two pairs of lancet windows with brick arches and three smaller windows in the gable end above, all of colored glass. Similar windows continue around the sides of the building. When the addition was built for a kitchen, Sunday School rooms, office, and pastor's study, the rear windows were covered on the outside but remain visible inside near the altar.

The interior color scheme is one of blue, almost a periwinkle, and white. The raised altar area takes up the front and is divided into three sections: the outer two contain room for the choirs, piano, and organ; the center portion contains the pulpit and four chairs below for the deacons. Across the top of this



MT. SHILOH MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH. Photo by Conway.

area is a painted scroll containing the words: "One Lord--One Faith--One Baptism". The church is currently without a pastor.

All of these churches moved from old James City to their new properties in order to stay alive. Today these active congregations continue their long-standing ministry to the community with programs for the young and old.

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The author expresses thanks to the following individuals for sharing their knowledge: Mrs. Emma Boyd Bell, Mr. Aron Boyd, Mrs. Ernestine Clemmons, Mrs. Myrtle Downing, Mrs. Grace George, and the Reverend Edward F. Hill, II.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

An interview with Donald Paul
whose father owned a general store

Paul Zuttel

Editor's note: Paul Zuttel is a sixth grade student at Grover C. Fields Middle School and the son of Carolyn and Beat Zuttel of New Bern.

Zuttel: How much did the merchandise cost?

Paul: Drinks were a nickel each. Drinks, candy bars, and gum sold for a nickel, but at wholesale they cost 40¢ for a dozen or 80¢ for a case of two dozen. The crackers were not salted and were twice as big as crackers today. They sold for a nickel a box. A pack of cigarettes was 10¢. Gasoline was 14¢ a gallon.

Zuttel: How much did employees get paid?

Paul: There were no child labor laws back then, so the first job I had, besides working for my father, was when I was 13 or 14. It was for Joshua Myers Pickling Company for 15¢ an hour in the summer packing cucumbers into baskets and putting brine to them. It was just summertime work. The Jewish people who owned the company would come down from New York and hand me a \$10 tip if I was working hard. The employees worked all day and night from 7 A. M. until ten, eleven, twelve, and past midnight. If the work wasn't done, they would stay until it was done. They didn't pay overtime then.

Then I went to work for Coca-Cola. I was a sign painter for 15¢ an hour.

Then I went to work at Maola. I was also a sign

painter, and I made \$25 a week in 1935. That was a lot of money back then. I made more than my father who had the grocery store.

(Mr. Paul worked for Maola for 57 years beginning in 1935. He was general manager for 47 years and retired as a major stockholder.)

Zuttel: How did you get paid?

Paul: They paid cash in envelopes, not by checks. I never put any of the money in the bank. I saved my money in a shoe box under my bed. I lived off the store, and for several years I never even opened the envelopes. The banks went broke in '29.

Zuttel: What did you do with the money you saved under your bed?

Paul: I bought 35 acres of land from the county with \$100 down at two percent interest. Payments were a hundred dollars a year. At the end of the first year, I went back to the county and offered them \$300 for the note--they took it--so I actually got the 35 acres of land for \$400. The land is where the old motel is on the other side of Bridgeton. I cut the timber from the land to build a house. I built the house before I was ever married and before I was 25 years old. That house with the chimney on the front is still there.

Zuttel: What did you do for transportation?

Paul: I bought a new '32 Chevrolet with \$600, and later I bought a new '37 Ford Deluxe for \$800.

GENERAL FOSTER'S BIG CELEBRATION--1863

Fred Sloatman

David L. Day of the Massachusetts Twenty-Fifth Regiment wrote home about New Bern, North Carolina. "It's a rather pretty city." He then went on to describe the wide, treelined streets, quaint wood-framed homes with rose gardens and flowering vines.

Almost a year had elapsed since General Burnside, with his 11,000 Federal troops, had fought a five-hour battle with the defenders of New Bern. By afternoon of that fateful day, March 14, 1862, the Rebel force had been routed, retreating over the Trent River bridges to the safety of the city. The pursuing boys in blue arrived at the river's edge to find the bridges in flames.

Meanwhile across the river, a once tranquil port city was in a state of panic. Civilians as well as soldiers were scrambling to flee the enemy, leaving behind their worldly possessions. At the same time blacks from the surrounding countryside poured into the city seeking freedom and protection. What ensued was looting and civil disorder.

Yankee gunboats, circumventing obstacles in the Neuse River, eventually arrived to ferry the Union troops across the Trent. Black acrid smoke from a burning turpentine factory filled the nostrils of the advancing men. Yellow tongues of fires consuming warehouses along the edge of the river licked the evening sky. At first the northern soldiers joined the rowdy pilferage. Eventually orders were passed down the line, and the looting ceased. By day's end peace was restored and the Union Army began its occupation of the Old North State's second largest city.

The presence of Federal troops in North Caro-

lina was more than an irritation to the Confederacy. New Bern's strategic location allowed the Union force to control inland waterways, the rail line from Morehead City, and a rich fertile countryside that produced much needed food. Enemy troops at Jefferson Davis's back door were a constant threat to Lee's vital supply line to Virginia. Lastly, the presence of Federal troops tied down many southern regiments so badly needed by General Lee.

The Confederate army, garrisoned at New Bern prior to the invasion, had built an elaborate ring of fortifications around the city and, in addition, a half dozen camps to billet their men. They of course were taken over by the invading force. In the months which followed 15 or more camps were built by the Federals. At year's end Union troops within a five to six mile radius of New Bern numbered close to 20,000. This was a larger force than all the combined Confederate troops in North Carolina. The Yankees dug in deep to stay, building more forts and blockhouses, and extending picket lines eight miles beyond the city limits. The waterways were guarded by a fleet of gunboats standing ready to come to the aid of besieged fortifications. The captured Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad linked New Bern with reserve troops in Morehead City. It was no wonder that Major General John D. Foster, now the commanding general, felt somewhat secure deep in enemy territory.

When March 1863 arrived, it was only fitting that General Foster announced plans for an enormous celebration on the fourteenth, commemorating their victory at New Bern just one year before. There would be a grand review of the whole army corps before General Foster's quarters, followed by various entertainments, a banquet, and formal dinners.

Wives and sisters of officers were now permitted to visit New Bern. One of them, a Miss Susan B. Messenger from Massachusetts, wrote home, "Tomorrow we are to have a great day for we celebrate the taking of New Bern." She continues, ". . . all of

the ladies will come and we mean to wear all of the red white and blue we can find." Little did she know that Major General D. H. Hill, assigned to command all Confederate troops in North Carolina, was planning a strong movement against New Bern and other Federal positions along the coast.

Hill's command included infantry brigades headed by Daniels, Pettigrew, and Garnett, cavalry by Robertson, and a small detachment of artillery led by Major Haskell. In all the troops numbered close to 13,000.

The orders received in February from General Longstreet outlined their objectives: protect the supply lines in eastern Carolina, gather provisions from that fertile area, and confine the enemy to their bases.

The first move had been intended against "little" Washington. Heavy rains and high tides changed plans. Hill, instead, would make strong demonstrations against New Bern. Simplified, the attack would be a three-pronged spear launched from Kinston. Daniels would move toward New Bern on the lower Trent Road; Robertson's cavalry would proceed on the south side of the Trent River and disrupt rail service. General Pettigrew's men, along with Haskell's artillery, would approach on the north side of the Neuse River and shell Fort Anderson and any enemy gunboats in sight.

The raid began on March 13 by Daniels's forces ten miles outside of New Bern. There he encountered pickets and drove them back to their line of defense at Deep Gully. Later that morning they retreated back to New Bern. Pettigrew's force had moved to within two miles of their objective on the thirteenth but were too exhausted to attack. After a day's rest they began their assault with a heavy barrage on Fort Anderson.

Miss Susan Messenger was awakened that morning by the distant sound of artillery cannon. She later wrote, "The 14th was indeed celebrated, but not as we intended. New Bern was attacked and we were to witness a real battle."

General Pettigrew called a cease-fire and sent one of his officers to Fort Anderson under a flag of truce, requesting their surrender. Lt. Col. Hiram Anderson, Jr., of the 92nd New York Regiment played for time. He and his small command numbering 450 men had no artillery pieces. On each flank was a swamp; to their rear was the Neuse River. Just 60 yards in front of their earthworks the enemy had set up 16 pieces of artillery supported by a couple of thousand infantrymen. Anderson said that he would contact his superior and then let Pettigrew know. The Lt. Colonel had no intentions of surrendering. When this became obvious to General Pettigrew, he continued his bombardment. The men in the fort pressed against the earthwork as the shells burst all around them. Then, almost as in a movie when the cavalry appears on the horizon, help arrived. It was not horsemen but gunboats moving up the river. Their guns returned the fire and squelched the Rebel artillery attack. Haskell's four large Parrott guns that were capable of reaching the gunboats literally turned out to be duds: One exploded, killing four of his men, another had a broken axle, and of the other two, a malfunction of the timing device caused the shells to explode a few feet from the muzzle of the gun. With that, General Pettigrew gave the command, and his troops withdrew.

General Robertson's endeavor was also a failure. He was only able to sever a part of the railway line. General Daniels and his troops were recalled, and thus General Hill's attack was recorded as no more than harassment.

During the operation Miss Messenger and four other ladies were placed in a carriage and, with escort of horses, were driven close to the scene where gunboats were shelling the enemy. Then they drove to the 44th's camp, where they could see reinforcements from the 85th New York crossing the Neuse River on flats. After the troops had landed, the ladies learned that they were standing on the very spot where an enemy shell had exploded that

morning.

The unsung heroes of that day had to be those courageous defenders of Fort Anderson. Vastly outnumbered, separated from their army by a river and without artillery, they bravely held their ground. As history later reveals, this was not the last time that Fort Anderson would be attacked by the Confederates.

As for General Foster's celebration, I could find no mention of all that good food which was to be served at the banquet. We can be sure it was consumed under a less festive atmosphere than originally planned. Miss Messenger's letter to the folks back in New England could have ended with: "The General's celebration was a blast!"

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The author expresses sincere thanks to Will Gorges, New Bern's own Civil War authority, for his

time spent pointing out on a current map the locations of fortifications, army camps, and Union earthworks. His bringing nineteenth century sites to present day locations added interest and reality to the research.

BOOK REVIEW

THE IMPACT OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION ON NEW BERN, NORTH CAROLINA--FROM TRYON PALACE TO THE COOR-COOK HOUSE, by Colin W. Barnett. (Winston-Salem, N. C.: Bandit Books, 1993. Illustrations, footnotes, bibliography, appendices and index. 137 pp. Paper \$12.95.)

The record of historic preservation in New Bern is lengthy but only fragmentally recorded in published form until now. In view of the number of societies, boards, authorities, and organizations involved, this cannot be surprising. Assembling the research and data into a cohesive entity and presenting conclusions logically is not an easy task. Colin Barnett, historian with degrees from the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, and East Carolina University, undertook the task and published the resulting text and data himself. We are provided with a concise and well-researched volume which will prove of value to historians and preservationists with a desire for quick reference or for the casually interested reader. In any case this book will prove a useful adjunct to *THE HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE OF NEW BERN AND CRAVEN COUNTY* by Peter Sandbeck. The text in eight short chapters comprises two-thirds of the book, and the remaining third contains historical data, research sources, and lists of preserved structures. While a little larger than pocket size (approx. 6" x 9"), the book is handy enough to be carried while touring New Bern's downtown historic district.

Focus is mainly on the New Bern Preservation Foundation and the successes it has achieved in rescuing abandoned and about-to-be-abandoned residences. This year is an appropriate time to review

the record: Just 20 years ago in 1973 the NBPF was established. Founded by a nucleus of Historical Society members, it was spun off in order to concentrate on the primary role of preservation. Operating as a "revolving fund"--monies continually recycled and reinvested in new projects--NBPF gave impetus to the rescue of threatened structures.

Over its life span NBPF has attracted wide support in the community and become a major force in the role of encouraging the preservation efforts of other organizations and individuals. Without the care and concern of interested and dynamic people in the historical movement many structures would have passed out of existence summarily as development overtook the downtown historic district. The success of the tremendous efforts made by NBPF and its members is attested in an appendix listing all the buildings which have passed through the hands of this invaluable organization. The impact of NBPF has spurred a restoration movement resulting in major improvements in the appearance of the entire downtown historic district. Many privately restored residential structures are also listed in an appendix.

Other organizations which have played a role in preservation are also given coverage for their part in the revitalization of rundown buildings and districts. The lengthy list includes Swiss Bear, the Historic District Commission, the Tryon Palace Commission, and various governmental authorities which have adopted legislation to provide benefits for preservation. Rebuilding and restoration of Tryon Palace is properly described as the keystone in the city's historic revitalization. Opening of the Palace in 1959 saw New Bern transformed from a city with a vaguely historic past to a city that knows and understands the enormous value of the historic assets it possesses. The economic benefits which preservation and the subsequent tourist influx have brought are almost beyond measure. Just over a decade later the interest roused by Tryon Palace resulted in formation of the NBPF.

Commercial and business interests particularly in

the retail section of New Bern's central core also play a preservation role through Swiss Bear, downtown redevelopment organization. Storefront and streetscape restoration and planning are an important component of any program to attract business, and the economic results are impressive. Historic preservation has been economically satisfactory for New Bern as measured by a number of factors, and these are presented in appendices.

Over the past 30 to 40 years many changes have preserved and enhanced New Bern's status as an important site in American history. Organizations and authorities encouraging the preservation process are complimented in this volume, but the author also draws attention to certain downside events. Two points are given as examples of regressive planning. First, the widening of Broad Street, which brought highway traffic with all its noise and fumes through the central city. Few vehicles stopped to admire the scenery as had been hoped. At the stroke of a pen a beautiful tree-shaded southern thoroughfare was transformed into a thruway which split the historic district into two parts. Second, the wholesale sweeping away of all the old buildings and wharfs in riverfront areas to create Bicentennial Park. The colorful aura of a busy small harbor with fishing boats and tiny restaurants was lost. Surely it was unnecessary to destroy everything to promote redevelopment. In both instances the full impact of a political decision made in haste with little historic or public input was not fully understood at the time. The outcome has not been entirely satisfactory. Some of the historic aspects of New Bern were lost, not improved, and it is unlikely they will ever be restored.

Colin Barnett has added to the literature of New Bern a small volume worthy of inclusion in any library. It will be particularly valuable to members of the various associations, societies, boards, and to everyone who guides visitors through New Bern's historic district.

Copies of THE IMPACT OF HISTORIC PRESER-

VATION ON NEW BERN, NORTH CAROLINA are obtainable from the Historical Society, 510 Pollock Street, 638-8558, or from Saints Creations, 809 Pollock Street, 638-6775.

Jim Gunn

CORRIGENDA

After the Spring 1993 issue of the JOURNAL was printed, errors were discovered in "Streets and Roads of New Bern Linking Us with the Past" by Fred Sloatman. The second paragraph on page 12 concerns the relationship between supporters and opponents of the Revolution.

Although New Bern did not actively engage in battle with the British, the populace was a source of irritation to the Crown because of numerous blockade runners from this port city. At the same time Revolutionists, troubled that not everyone supported their cause, began to harass the Tories.

Patriots forced fleeing loyalists through the streets of New Bern in 1777 to board a ship bound for New York. British soldiers marched over the King's Highway from Wilmington and invaded New Bern on August 19, 1781, with hardly any opposition to their two-day occupation. Their purpose was to destroy the rigging on the ships in port and stop the privateers from running the British blockade.

In the fourth paragraph on page 12 a line was inadvertently omitted. The paragraph should read:

New Bern was growing at the turn of the century. The Price-Fitch map, based on the first formal survey made in 1809-10 by Jonathan Price, shows the expansion. What is now First Street was then End Street. What we know today as Bern Street was then called Muddy Street. I was disappointed not to find a Dusty Lane or a Ruddy Road.