

Christ Church

During the late nineteenth century, every major Maine summer colony from York Harbor to Grindstone Neck included a distinctive Episcopal chapel. In July and August worship moved from the massive stone Romanesque and Gothic churches of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia to picturesquely designed summer chapels. Their architects freely blended medieval and Shingle Style features to create a New England coastal version of the British country church. Christ Church at Dark Harbor is a classic example.

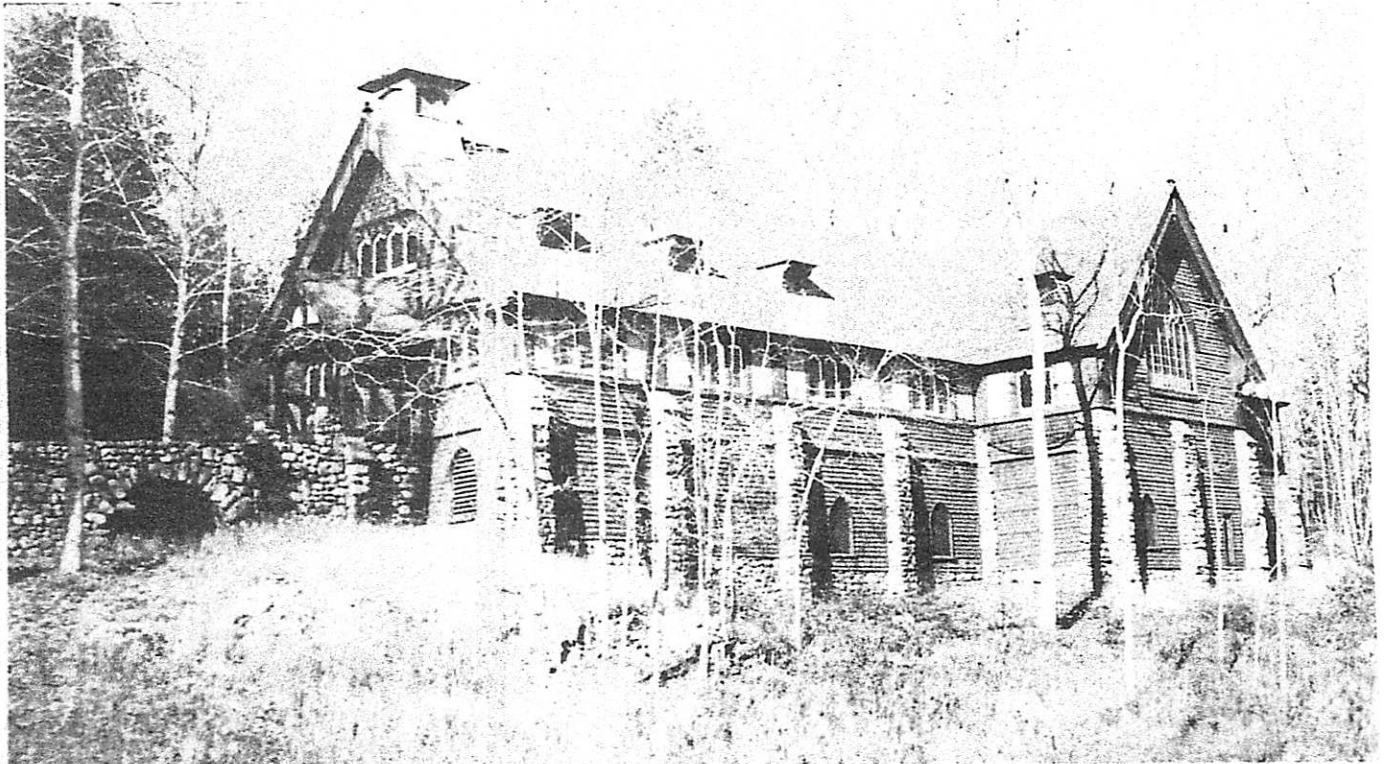
During the first seasons that the Islesboro Inn attracted visitors, Episcopal services were held in the ballroom. The Rev. William Prall expressed the concern that there should be a chapel, and the Islesboro Land and Improvement Company provided a site for a token five dollars in November of 1891. Summer residents raised \$2,800 to build a small church, in which the first service

was held on August 6, 1893. In August of 1894, the Bishop of Maine, Rev. Henry Adams Neely, officiated there for the first time. There is no record as to who designed this building or how it appeared.

As the Dark Harbor summer colony added more residents, the original Christ Church was outgrown. By early 1901, the trustees had secured plans from the Boston architect Francis R. Allen to expand the chapel. On February 28, 1901, the *Belfast Republican Journal* announced:

For the past two years the seating capacity of the Episcopal church has been wholly inadequate, and the building will now be enlarged. The edifice will be moved back from the street, and an addition built in front. The mason work will be done by George H. Wilbur.

Construction began in March, 1901, with a report by the *Journal* that "seven teams have been hauling rocks for the foundation of the Episcopal Church". At this point W. H. Glover and Company of Rockland was selected as the general contractor,



Christ Church (Maine Historic Preservation Commission).

and the local master mason Frederick A. Lee joined with Wilbur to undertake the masonry. However, the project then halted for a year, probably in order to raise the necessary funding. The spring of 1902 saw a renewed effort to complete the church. Work resumed in March and was sufficiently advanced by July that services could be held there. The building was finished by the end of 1902 at a cost of \$14,840.

In its January 2, 1904, issue, the *American Architect* devoted a page to photographs of the "Chapel at Islesborough, Me". The publication of the new Christ Church in a national architectural magazine reflects the success of Francis Allen's design. The architect located the 120 foot long building on an elevated site with its south facade and east side fully exposed to view from the road below. The foundation is of local rubblestone, which is also used to create the curving bridge-like approach to the south entrance as well as the series of buttresses on the ground story of the east wall.



Facade of Christ Church (Richard Cheek).

The main body of the church consists of a long gable roofed nave which intersects at the north end with a transept that incorporates the original chapel. Aside from the stonework, the exterior is shingled except for a stuccoed half-timbered panel on the south portico and stuccoed window panels on the east and west walls. While its shingles give the building a rustic New England flavor, its overall form as well as such details as vergeboarded gables, pointed arch windows, and diamond paned glass are clearly British in derivation.

Inside the church, an English spirit prevails. While the broad nave provides an early twentieth century openness to the interior, its elaborate scheme of exposed roof framing makes a dramatic medieval statement. This feeling is enhanced by the rich dark woodwork which is ornamented with Gothic carvings or fashioned into delicate tracery. As in British country chapels, the walls are covered with brass memorial plaques, in this case in remembrance of past summer residents rather than local nobility.

In composing a hymn about Christ Church, Jeffrey R. Brackett wrote, "O God, beneath Thy feet We've placed this simple shrine". In actuality, Dark Harbor's Episcopal chapel is an offering of enduring beauty for the island.



Interior of Christ Church, circa 1905 view (Maine Historic Preservation Commission).