

“Mad Jack:” The Turbulent Life and Times of Bishop John Stark Ravenscroft (1772-1830)
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The title for today’s program, “An Elevated Position in the American Church,” is taken from a sermon delivered before the 1853 diocesan convention, as the convention gathered to elect a successor to Bishop Levi Silliman Ives, who had recently defected to Rome. The preacher, F. A. Olmsted, called on the diocese to return to the high church teachings of its first bishop, John Stark Ravenscroft, who served from 1823 to 1830. “Let us not then lose our hold upon those principles which, as Churchmen, we have hitherto cherished,” Olmsted declared. He continued:

This Diocese has occupied heretofore, in the American Church, an elevated position for true, sound, and high-toned Churchmanship. Let us not be willing that she should, in any way, fall back from it. Let us abide steadfast by those principles upon which alone it has ever flourished, turning aside from them neither to the right hand nor to the left. Let us hope that the impress stamped upon it by its first Bishop, the lamented Ravenscroft, will remain ineffaceable. Ever blessed be the memory of that true-hearted man and noble Bishop!¹

So, that is how our first elected bishop, John Stark Ravenscroft, was fondly remembered in 1853: as the figure who had indelibly stamped North Carolina as a high church diocese.

Now more than two hundred years have passed since Ravenscroft was elected and consecrated Bishop of North Carolina. Much has happened, and we look back at his legacy through a different lens. This much remains incontrovertible: under Ravenscroft’s leadership, North Carolina earned a reputation for being a high church diocese.

What, exactly, does that mean? Simply put, it means holding to a “high” doctrine of the church, one which places great emphasis upon apostolic succession and the office of bishop as the guarantors of valid ministry and sacraments. For Ravenscroft and other high church proponents, such as John Henry Hobart of New York, belonging to the Episcopal Church was not to be likened to membership in another Protestant denomination, because ours was the only church of the Reformation to retain apostolic succession, adherence to the faith and practices of the primitive church, and to possess a valid sacramental life.

Not all Episcopalians shared these high church attitudes. In contrast to the Hobart-Ravenscroft strategy of drawing a sharp line between Episcopalians and other Protestants, leaders such as Alexander V. Griswold of Massachusetts and William Meade of Virginia sought to renew the Episcopal Church principally through effective evangelical preaching. Episcopalians might worship in the distinctive voice of the Prayer Book, but their message would contribute to the overall harmony of American evangelical Protestantism. These two views define the High

¹ *Journal of the 37th Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of North Carolina* (1853): 78, 79. Hereinafter abbreviated *NCDJ*.

Church/Low Church split in the Episcopal Church in the second and third decades of the 19th century.²

The identification of Ravenscroft as a high church bishop and North Carolina as a high church diocese, is certainly valid, but is it the whole story? This morning I would like us to take a closer look at the totality of Ravenscroft's life and ministry.

Ravenscroft was born in Virginia in 1772, but his family moved to Scotland shortly after his birth, and it was there he received a classical education, including study of the bible. His father died in 1781, and his mother remained in Scotland and remarried. Meanwhile, the Ravenscroft estate in Prince George County, Virginia was left in the hands of an attorney who mismanaged it, and at age 16, young John Stark returned to Virginia to see whether he could salvage something of his inheritance. He arrived January 1, 1789. Soon the estate was returned to profitability, and Ravenscroft, an affluent young man of seventeen, went off to William and Mary to study law. It was here that his fellow students gave him the nick-name "Mad Jack" on account of "his vehemence of temper, speech, and manner."³ By his own admission, he frequented horse-races and on one occasion went to the track determined to horse-whip a fellow sportsman who had offended him and, if necessary, to shoot the man. Fortunately, the object of Ravenscroft's wrath was not present that day, and Ravenscroft later saw that as an act of divine providence.⁴

In 1792, Ravenscroft married Anne Spotswood Burwell and settled on 610 acres in Lunenburg County, sold to him by his father-in-law for a nominal sum of five shillings. By 1810, Ravenscroft had expanded his holdings to 2,127 acres with an enslaved labor force of thirty. This expansion reflected the growing prosperity of Southside Virginia, which was rapidly becoming the chief tobacco-producing region of the state—and the area with the highest concentration of enslaved persons.⁵

By his own account, Ravenscroft had forsaken his sporting lifestyle and settled into a comfortable life as a Virginia planter. Still, he continued to battle his temper and his use of profanity, and he had no interest in church. This changed, however, in 1810, when Ravenscroft came to the realization that his efforts at self-reformation were ineffectual and that he must turn instead to God and rely solely on Christ's righteousness to effect a lasting change in his behavior. In that surrender to God, Ravenscroft found release from his besetting sin of profane swearing.

As a sign of his new life, Ravenscroft joined an evangelical denomination, the Republican Methodist Church, becoming a lay elder in his local congregation and conducting worship in the absence of an ordained minister. What difference did this new-found embrace of Christianity make in Ravenscroft's life? At this point, Ravenscroft was still a planter and a slaveholder. Did it change his attitudes and practices with respect to those he enslaved?

² Robert Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church*, revised edition (New York and Harrisburg: 1999), 118-123. On Hobart, see R. Bruce Mullin, *Episcopal Vision/American Reality: High Church Theology and Social thought in Evangelical America* (New Haven, 1986).

³ Bishop [William] Meade, *Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia*, Two Volumes (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1857): I, 489.

⁴ Marshall Delancey Haywood, *Lives of the Bishops of North Carolina* (Raleigh: Alfred Williams, 1910): 45; William Mercer Green, "Bishop Ravenscroft" Copy in the North Carolina Collection, Chapel Hill: 2,3.

⁵ National Register Nomination Form for Spring Bank, Lunenburg County, Virginia. 2007: section 8, page 12.

The answer is: perhaps. Republican Methodism was an offshoot of the Methodist movement. The founder, James O’Kelly, an itinerant minister in Southside Virginia, was notable for his outspoken antislavery views and his commitment to evangelizing Black Virginians.⁶ O’Kelly also rejected the office of bishop and the hierarchy of the Methodist Episcopal Church, preferring a radically egalitarian understanding of Christian community.⁷ Not surprisingly, Blacks who were drawn to Methodism were more likely to gravitate toward the congregations served by O’Kelly, though by 1810 southern evangelicals of all denominations, including the Republican Methodists, were becoming reconciled to the practice of chattel slavery.⁸

Chattel slavery necessarily carried with it the power of coercive control over the behavior of the enslaved, and wide discretion was accorded to slaveholders with respect to how corporal punishment might be inflicted.⁹ Ravenscroft, as we know from his own account as well as others, was possessed of a violent temper. Thus, it is highly suggestive that stories persisted regarding Ravenscroft’s conversion, saying that it was occasioned by his remorse upon overhearing prayers on his behalf from a Black man who had received an unmerited beating at Ravenscroft’s own hands. These stories were hotly denied by Ravenscroft’s early biographers, and Ravenscroft himself offered a denial of sorts when he said near the close of his life that he “was not conscious of any peculiar incident or circumstance, that first led me to consideration of [my unawakened state].”¹⁰

In the memoir of Ravenscroft’s life published in the first edition of the bishop’s works, Walker Anderson offered the following appraisal of Ravenscroft’s relationship to those he enslaved:

In the character of a master, Bishop Ravenscroft mingled the care and affection of a parent, with that authority which Providence had placed in his hands, as a means for the good of those who served him. His domestics he regarded as a part of his family, and he was frequent and careful in expounding to them the way of life, and regular in calling them around his domestic altar.

Then Anderson made the following concession:

Whether or not the trials of temper to which [the bishop] makes such frequent reference, in speaking of his early life, had any connexion with the relation in which he stood to his

⁶ Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2008): 74-76

⁷ Elizabeth Georgann, “‘That Unhappy Division’: Reconsidering the Causes and Significance of the O’Kelly Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, v. 120, n. 3 (2012) pp. 210-235; p. 223.

⁸ J. Timothy Allen, “‘Some Expectation of Being Promoted’: Ambition, Abolition, and the Reverend James O’Kelly” *North Carolina Historical Review* v. 84; n. 1, (January 2007) pages 59-81: 61; Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Knopf, 1997): 68f, 155. Georgann, “That Unhappy Division” 233 (n. 37).

⁹ James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1982): 22-25.

¹⁰ [Walker Anderson] “Memoir,” *The Works of The Right Reverend John Stark Ravenscroft, D.D.* Two Volumes. (New York: Protestant Episcopal Press, 1830): I, 14. For other accounts of the alleged incident, see John N. Norton, *The Life of Bishop Ravenscroft* (New York: General Protestant Episcopal Sunday School Union and Church Book Society, 1859) Published online by Project Canterbury. Chapter 17; Green “Bishop Ravenscroft,” 5. Haywood, *Lives of the Bishops*, 45.

slaves, is not known, but it is certain that in the latter years of his life, if he erred at all in his treatment of them, it was decidedly on the side of indulgence.¹¹

Thus, Anderson left open the possibility that Ravenscroft's behavior towards those he enslaved did change as a result of his conversion. It certainly did so with respect to embracing the practice of evangelizing them—at least those who served him domestically.¹²

In 1815, Ravenscroft underwent another sea change in his religious practice. He left the Republican Methodists and joined the Episcopal Church, moving from a denomination that rejected bishops to one that embraced them. By his own account, he made this change as he came to take seriously a call to ordained ministry. At this juncture he undertook to examine more carefully the underlying theological basis for Christian ministry and determined that an inward call to serve was insufficient and required a demonstrable outward validation. This requirement of outward validation could be found in the Episcopal Church through the laying on of hands by a bishop in apostolic succession. So, Ravenscroft had an audience with Bishop Moore of Virginia, and the bishop accepted him as a candidate for holy orders.¹³ Ravenscroft was ordained deacon and priest in the spring of 1817—coincidentally the very time that the Diocese of North Carolina was being organized.

Upon ordination, Ravenscroft received a call to serve St. James' Parish in Mecklenburg County, Virginia—just south of his home in Lunenburg County and just north of the North Carolina state line. He moved to Mecklenburg County and tried, for the first time, to sell his land holdings. The *Richmond Enquirer* of May 20, 1817 ran a page one advertisement for the sale of 2127 acres in Lunenburg County. The advertisement went on to note that the purchaser could also be furnished with some “prime negroes and [live]stock.”¹⁴ Evidently, Ravenscroft's indulgence toward those he enslaved did not extend to those he put up for sale. In moving, Ravenscroft did not intend to give up planting altogether. He purchased land in Mecklenburg County that he named “Makeshift.”¹⁵

The 45-year-old Ravenscroft quickly developed a reputation as a pulpit orator. By all accounts he was a striking figure with a commanding voice. His sermons were emotive, but well-reasoned, and he was called upon to preach outside his parish, including at diocesan conventions. The *Alexandria Gazette* ran a laudatory account of Ravenscroft's preaching in May 1820. The author noted that Ravenscroft was “late to the pulpit,” but commended him for treating his auditors as “men enlightened by reason, and accountable for its exercise to the Good Being who

¹¹ [Anderson], “Memoir” *Works* I, 55.

¹² The one documented occasion on which Ravenscroft baptized an enslaved member of his own household took place at Christ Church, Raleigh, on August 5, 1825, when “in the presence of the Congregation [I] baptized Fanny, a slave, the child of one of my Servants on the undertaking of the Rev'd. C. C. Brainerd and Lavenia Brainerd as sponsors.” Charles P. Blount, Compiler, *Christ Church, Raleigh, North Carolina Registers I and II (1821-1874)* (Raleigh, n. p.: 2013): 6.

¹³ [Anderson], “Memoir” *Works*, I, 18-20.

¹⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, 20 May 1817, 1.

¹⁵ Henry Lewis, “The Formation of the Diocese” in Lawrence F. London and Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, eds. *The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1701-1959* (Raleigh: The Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, 1987), 120.

bestowed it.” The reviewer continued, “That one fitted like this orator [Ravenscroft] to advance the progress of religious truth, so able to inspire repentance . . . to urge the thoughtless to consideration and give activity to conviction, should have associated himself to the Episcopalians, is a circumstance in which it argues no bigotry. . . . all may listen with complacency because none are outraged by intolerance.”¹⁶

Another measure of Ravenscroft’s rapid acceptance as a minister was his election as a deputy to the 1820 General Convention and the support shown him by his own parish. During his tenure, St. James’ Parish built a new church building and experienced a pronounced increase in membership. Much of that numerical growth was among the Black population. Ravenscroft listed in his 1820 parochial report having baptized 36 persons, of whom 19 were Black.¹⁷

In tracing Ravenscroft’s ministry as a priest in Virginia, there is nothing to suggest that he was out of step with his bishop or his diocese, and certainly nothing to suggest a decisive break with evangelicalism. His preaching was in keeping with evangelical precepts, and he enjoyed a cordial personal relationship with one of the leaders of the evangelical party in the diocese, William H. Wilmer.¹⁸ Indeed, at the time of his election as bishop in North Carolina in the spring of 1823, Ravenscroft had just agreed to leave his parish and join his bishop, Richard Channing Moore, at Monumental Church in Richmond, so that Moore could devote more time to his episcopal duties.¹⁹

Especially intriguing in light of subsequent events in North Carolina is the fact that Ravenscroft took a hand in organizing and supporting a local branch of the Bible Society in his Southside parish. In his final parochial report in the Diocese of Virginia, which was read one month after his election as bishop, Ravenscroft wrote: “The state of this parish continues to improve. Since the last convention a Bible Society has been formed and gone into operation, with hope of considerable extension.”²⁰

This brings us to Ravenscroft’s election as Bishop of North Carolina on April 12, 1823. The more likely choice for bishop was Adam Empie, rector of St. James’, Wilmington, and the priest chiefly responsible for organizing the diocese in 1817 and overseeing its early revival. It fell to young William Mercer Green, then serving in Williamsboro, to make a nomination, and he instead put forward Ravenscroft’s name.²¹ No other nomination was forthcoming, and after

¹⁶ *Alexandrian Gazette* 23 May 1820, 2.

¹⁷ See convention journals for the Diocese of Virginia included as an appendix to Francis L. Hawks, *A Narrative of Events Connected with the Rise and Progress of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia* (New York: Harpers & Brothers, 1836): 141. See also Edward Bond and Joan Gunderson, *The Episcopal Church in Virginia, 1607-2007*, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 115, No. 2 (2007): 228.

¹⁸ On Ravenscroft’s evangelical preaching, see Green, “Bishop Ravenscroft”: 18. Green states: “As a Preacher he [Ravenscroft] was justly entitled to be called *evangelical*.” On his friendship with Wilmer, see Norton, *Life of Bishop Ravenscroft*, Chapter 6.

¹⁹ [Anderson], “Memoir” in *Works* I, 33,34.

²⁰ Hawks, *A Narrative*; Appendix, 163.

²¹ Green acknowledged that it was “painful” for him to pass by Empie, his teacher, and nominate Ravenscroft instead. “Bishop Ravenscroft,” 6.

some discussion among the delegates, Ravenscroft was elected unanimously by the clergy present and ratified unanimously by the laity.

Green and Ravenscroft were neighbors in adjoining parishes across the Virginia-North Carolina border, and they occasionally held services in each other's congregations. Thus, Green could speak of Ravenscroft from personal experience. But why Green's nomination of Ravenscroft was accepted without dissent has never been fully explained.²² Perhaps it reflects the fact that Ravenscroft's reputation as an outstanding preacher and parish priest were known in the larger church.²³ The Cameron family certainly would have known of Ravenscroft; the bishop-elect was serving a parish previously served by the Rev. John Cameron, Duncan Cameron's father.²⁴ That reputation, however, would not have highlighted the uncompromising high church views that Ravenscroft was soon to make the hallmark of his episcopate.²⁵

This much is certain. Ravenscroft himself did not expect to be chosen as bishop; he had already accepted a call to join Bishop Moore in Richmond. Nevertheless, when Green brought him the certification of his election, Ravenscroft took it as a sign from God and consented to serve. Ravenscroft accompanied Green to the upcoming General Convention in Philadelphia, and Ravenscroft was duly consecrated on May 22, 1823.²⁶

The new bishop, still accompanied by Green, conducted his first visit to his diocese in June and July of 1823, making his way from Williamsboro to Raleigh, where he would serve as rector of Christ Church in addition to his episcopal duties. In his private journal of that initial visit, we first glimpse indications of how Ravenscroft regarded the task ahead of him. Upon arriving in Hillsborough, he noted with displeasure that the Presbyterians had built a church on the site of the colonial Anglican church. When he got to Chapel Hill, he commented that the University

²² Green stated that he did not believe Empie had the support of the laity, but he declined to state the reason. "Bishop Ravenscroft", 6. Richard Rankin asserts that Ravenscroft's selection reflects "a carefully orchestrated triumph by and for sporting churchmen." Rankin, "Why the Bishop Knew All About Racehorses: Traditional Recreations, Moral Compromise, and Cultural Persistence in Antebellum North Carolina's Protestant Episcopal Church," *The North Carolina Historical Review* v. 100, no. 2 (April 2023): 141. It is certainly true that Ravenscroft, as a Virginia planter and former sportsman, shared a background and sensibility with a number of prominent Episcopal families in North Carolina. Whether these affinities are sufficient to explain his unanimous election, especially in the clergy order, is debatable. It is just as likely that his reputation as an effective preacher and able parish priest, and his close relationship with Bishop Moore, helped seal his election.

²³ Norton, *Life of Bishop Ravenscroft*, Chapter 11; Henry Lewis also underscores Ravenscroft's reputation as an emerging influential church leader. Lewis, "Formation of the Diocese," 121.

²⁴ Meade, *Old Churches*, I, 487, 488.

²⁵ Had the Rev. William Hooper and the Rev. Robert J. Miller known that Ravenscroft would be an uncompromising high churchman, it is unlikely that either would have voted to elect him their bishop. Hooper's objections to Ravenscroft's views were so strong it led to Hooper's departure from the ministry of the Episcopal Church. Miller had close ties to the Lutheran Church in North Carolina and had facilitated cooperation between the two denominations. Ravenscroft put an end to that cooperation, stating "In the immediate neighborhood of the Rev. Mr. Miller, they have commenced retracing their steps, and will in time, I trust, recover from the paralyzing effect of trying to amalgamate with the Lutheran body." *NCDJ 9th* (1825): 10. Unlike Hooper, Miller acceded to Ravenscroft's views.

²⁶ Green, "Bishop Ravenscroft", 7.

was dominated by Presbyterians and lamented the fact that the site had once held an Anglican chapel, from which it derived its name.²⁷

For the remainder of 1823, Ravenscroft was preoccupied with winding up his affairs in Virginia and moving to Raleigh. So, it was really in 1824 that Ravenscroft stepped fully into his role as bishop. In a carefully prepared address, he used his inaugural diocesan convention in May 1824 to put forward his commitment to high church views and his expectation that the clergy and laity of North Carolina would follow suit.

Ravenscroft began by proclaiming the Church to be of divine origin, with a visible and verifiable character, the hallmark being the presence of bishops in apostolic succession.²⁸ He then lamented the long absence of the ministrations of the Church in North Carolina following the American Revolution, which had allowed the pernicious notion of “equal safety in all religious denominations” to take root.²⁹ He proposed to counter it by calling the clergy to “a steadfast and uniform adherence to the liturgy and offices of the Church” and to make known to their congregations the distinctive character of the Church and to underscore the surpassing spiritual privilege of receiving authorized ministrations and valid sacraments.³⁰ Ravenscroft then called upon the laity to restore family use of the Prayer Book and to reserve their financial support exclusively “for the wants of our own communion.”³¹ The bishop anticipated that his views would arouse resistance, but he was resolute in his conviction that only “as the distinctive character of the Church is understood in its principles, applied in its use, and regarded in the hearts of its members, will it be cherished and will flourish.”³²

Resistance was not long in coming. The rector of St. John’s, Fayetteville was a young Princeton graduate named William Hooper. Hooper, who was raised in a Presbyterian household, took exception to Ravenscroft’s denigration of other denominations. Both men stood fast in their convictions, with the result that Hooper renounced his ministry in the Episcopal Church and was subsequently deposed.³³

Ravenscroft was also prepared to proclaim his position publicly in the state at large. He did so in December of the same year, when he was invited to address the annual gathering of the North Carolina Bible Society. Once again, the bishop did not mince words as he attacked the very premises upon which the Bible Society was based. By his lights, promoting bible reading without at the same time providing the ministrations of the Church was to suggest that individuals could come to salvation without authoritative guidance. So, Ravenscroft announced that he could not in good conscience approve of this enterprise which otherwise enjoyed broad-based interdenominational support. Needless to say, his position was an affront to Bible Society

²⁷ John Stark Ravenscroft, Episcopal Journal entry for July 9, 1823. Ravenscroft Papers, 1818-1830. Microfilm in Wilson Library, Chapel Hill.

²⁸ John Stark Ravenscroft, “A Sermon on the Church: delivered before the Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of North-Carolina,” in *The Works of the Right Reverend John Stark Ravenscroft*, I, 97.

²⁹ *Ibid.* I, 103.

³⁰ *Ibid.* I, 110, 111.

³¹ *Ibid.* I, 112-116.

³² *Ibid.* I, 116.

³³ Lewis, “Formation of the Diocese,” 127-130.

members, and a number of prominent Presbyterian ministers—including Elisha Mitchell and John Holt Rice--rushed to offer rejoinders in print.³⁴

Why did Ravenscroft pursue this course? Was he really dead-set against interdenominational bible societies? His endorsement of such societies as a priest in Virginia indicates he was for them before he was against them—an inconsistency which Presbyterian John Holt Rice raised in his repudiation of Ravenscroft’s high church views. Rice suggested that Ravenscroft’s new-found position had more to do with his having become a bishop than any deeply-held personal theological convictions.³⁵

Were leading members of his own church persuaded by the bishop’s arguments? Duncan Cameron was already a First Vice President of the American Bible Society at the time of the controversy, and he remained so until his death.³⁶ Thomas Ruffin tried, unsuccessfully, to prevail upon Elisha Mitchell and Bishop Ravenscroft to end their public bickering, contending that it was injurious to the cause of religion to have the leading Episcopalian and the leading Presbyterian in the state conducting a pamphlet war. Ruffin was successful in getting Mitchell to go see Ravenscroft on a peace mission, but Mitchell was subsequently so offended by Ravenscroft that he broke off all communication with the bishop.³⁷

If Ravenscroft can be taken at his own word, his actions were deliberately provocative because he thought it the best way to put our church on the North Carolina map, to generate public knowledge of the church, and to instill a sense of loyalty to the church on the part of its adherents. Above all else, Ravenscroft wanted Episcopalians to know why they were members of this church and not some other denomination.

Here Ravenscroft was following in the footsteps of Bishop John Henry Hobart, who had launched a similar critique of the Bible Society in New York, with similar results.³⁸ Ravenscroft said as much in a candid letter to Hobart written at the height of the Bible Society controversy, in which he justified his actions:

The situation of this southern country, surrendered for the last forty or fifty years to the exclusive influence of the Dissenters, left me no alternative, but to increase that [dissenter] influence by adopting half-way measures, or, by a decided course, to call into action what was left of predilection for the Church to rally her real friends around her

³⁴ John Stark Ravenscroft, “A Sermon preached before the Bible Society of North-Carolina, on Sunday, December 12, 1824,” in *Works*, I, 163-178. On the controversy, see Lewis, “The Formation of the Diocese,” 130-133.

³⁵ John Holt Rice, *Review of the ‘Doctrines of the Church Vindicated from the Misrepresentations of Dr. John Rice,’ “And the Integrity of Revealed Religion Defended Against the ‘No Comment Principle’ of Promiscuous Bible Societies: By the Right Rev’d. John Stark Ravenscroft, D.D., Bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina”* Originally published in the *Literary and Evangelical Magazine*, (Richmond: Franklin Press, 1827): 10, 11; 182-187.

³⁶ Notice of Duncan Cameron’s death appeared in an account of the meeting of the American Bible Society in the *New York Daily Times* January 8, 1853. For notification of Cameron’s election, see S.S. Woodhull, Secretary of the American Bible Society, to Duncan Cameron, 5 August 1820. Cameron Family Papers. Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Chapel Hill. See also Richard Rankin, *Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen: The Religion of the Episcopal Elite in North Carolina, 1800-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 138-141.

³⁷ Elisha Mitchell to John Stark Ravenscroft. July 18, 1825; August 1, 1825. Matthias Murray Marshall Papers. Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Chapel Hill.

³⁸ Mullin, *Episcopal Vision/American Reality*, 50-59.

standard, and to strike fear into her enemies by the unqualified assertion of her distinctive character; and I have cause of thankfulness beyond expression, that it has pleased God to give success so far to the little I have been enabled to do. . . . [B]ut I did not anticipate that the wily Presbyterians would have swallowed the bait so readily. . . . Their opposition has done more for the cause in a year, than without it could have been done in ten.³⁹

Ravenscroft made a calculated determination that the most pressing need in North Carolina was to gain the exclusive loyalty of Episcopalians to their own church. Other strategies might add numerical growth or produce quicker results, but the bishop noted that “the numerical is not always the real strength, either of the Church or of an army.”⁴⁰ What was paramount, in Ravenscroft’s estimation, was exclusive and faithful commitment to the Episcopal Church. And in his view, if the Presbyterians were offended by this attitude, so much the better.⁴¹ Ravenscroft even risked offending members of his former diocese, when he pointedly refused to consent to the consecration of William Meade as assisting bishop of Virginia.⁴²

This uncompromising high church stance certainly made Bishop Ravenscroft memorable. His lasting impact on the diocese is harder to measure. With respect to issues of slavery and race, Ravenscroft commended, but did not appreciably alter, the practice of slave evangelism, which was already well established in the diocese prior to his election. In 1826, Richard Sharpe Mason, then rector of Christ Church, New Bern and later rector here at Christ Church, Raleigh, offered Ravenscroft a rare opportunity to do something quite significant, namely, to pursue ordaining a Black man to minister in New Bern. Nothing substantive seems to have come of Mason’s suggestion,⁴³ but at least one Black Episcopalian in New Bern continued to think highly of Ravenscroft. Among the free Black artisans of New Bern was one Rigdon Green, who moved to Cleveland Ohio in 1859 but “clove to the Episcopal church, and at his death at age ninety-one, in 1887, the preacher recalled that his ‘churchmanship was that of the school of the great Bishop Ravenscroft, of North Carolina, for whose memory he always expressed the most profound veneration.’”⁴⁴

Ravenscroft was also hampered by personal circumstance. He was deeply affected by the death of his second wife in January 1829, and he did not enjoy good health for the last several years of his life. Indeed, in his 1828 address to diocesan convention, he said that he considered it the last he was likely to give, on account of frequently recurring disease.⁴⁵ Compounding his distress

³⁹ Bishop Ravenscroft to Bishop Hobart 18 March, 1826, in John Henry Hobart, *The Posthumous Works of the Late Right Reverend John Hobart, D.D., Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New York, with a Memoir of His Life*, vol. I (New York, 1833), 365, 366.

⁴⁰ *NCDJ* 9th (1825): 22.

⁴¹ See Walker Anderson’s comment that Ravenscroft expressed his convictions about ‘distinctive principles’ more strongly than would have been his preference under other circumstances. “Memoir” in *Works*: I, 38.

⁴² Lewis “Formation of the Diocese,” 167.

⁴³ Richard Sharpe Mason to John Stark Ravenscroft. January 9, 1826. Ravenscroft Papers, Chapel Hill. See also Lewis, “Formation of the Diocese,” 165.

⁴⁴ Catherine W. Bishir, *Crafting Lives: African American Artisans in New Bern, North Carolina, 1770-1900* (Chapel Hill: 2013) 140.

⁴⁵ Ravenscroft, *Works*, I, 466. See also Haywood, *Lives of the Bishops*, 70: “Seldom a well man for any length of time after his arrival in North Carolina.”

was the evident failure of prosperous diocesan laity to provide adequate financial support for the clergy.⁴⁶ So, it would be hard to say that Ravenscroft's episcopate ended on a happy note.

Ravenscroft did, however, retain the abiding affection of close friends, and these included two young priests with whom he had established personal relationships prior to becoming bishop: George Washington Freeman and William Mercer Green.⁴⁷ Ravenscroft died on March 5, 1830. Two months later, on May 2, 1830, Freeman traveled to Hillsborough and there baptized the infant son of Green and his wife, Sarah. The boy's name: John Ravenscroft [Green].⁴⁸

In 1844, Freeman would become the missionary bishop for "Arkansas and the Indian Territory;" in 1850, Green would become the first bishop of Mississippi. It is to their continued influence, and to other Ravenscroft admirers, such as Green's close friend, James Hervey Otey, the first bishop of Tennessee, that we chiefly owe the enduring legacy of Bishop Ravenscroft.

⁴⁶ Ravenscroft to George Freeman 18 February, 1828 and 24 March, 1828. Ravenscroft Papers, Chapel Hill. Ravenscroft wrote: "Indeed I begin to fear that even the more wealthy stations in the Diocese will be left vacant owing to the pressures of the Times or to the parsimony of Christian principle in the people." He went on to lament that people were spending on personal extravagances and not the church. In October 1828, Ravenscroft instructed William Mercer Green not to raise funds for any purpose outside the mission of the diocese.

⁴⁷ The relationship between Green and Ravenscroft dates to Green's letter to Ravenscroft of August 27, 1819; Ravenscroft wrote to Freeman on October 15, 1822: "[convey?] word to Mr.Green from me . . . I shall depend upon his help the Saturday before the 1st Sunday in next month, and more if he can give it -- something on Christian Love Union etc etc will be very apropos." Ravenscroft also wrote both Green and Freeman on January 19, 1829 to notify them personally of the death of Ravenscroft's 2nd wife. Ravenscroft Papers. Wilson Library, Chapel Hill.

⁴⁸ Charles P. Blount, Compiler, *Christ Church, Raleigh, North Carolina Registers I and II (1821-1874)* (Raleigh, n. p.: 2013):8.