

Cooleemee priest to be honored

Francis Murdoch built mills, ministered to residents of Rowan

BY JIM RUMLEY
For the Salisbury Post

A giant in the history of Salisbury known as "the priest who built mills" will be among those featured in the centennial celebration at Cooleemee's Church of the Good Shepherd Sunday at 1:30.

The Rev. Francis Murdoch, who founded Good Shepherd, was pastor of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Salisbury for 37 years, and he is credited with leading the push for cotton mills here and elsewhere in the state to help alleviate poverty left by the Civil War.

History indicates Murdoch was one of the first company people to reach

the construction site of the future town of Cooleemee and may have helped choose the site.

In part, his interest was to look after his friend William A. Erwin's investment, and in part he was there to plant his church's banner among the cotton mill hands that would soon follow the town's construction.

And to those who didn't know him, that might sound like two missions, but from his perspective it was one: fulfilling what he believed to be the church's historical role to spread the Gospel and teach people that they are to unite in Christ.

Building a southern cotton textile industry was one way to accomplish that.

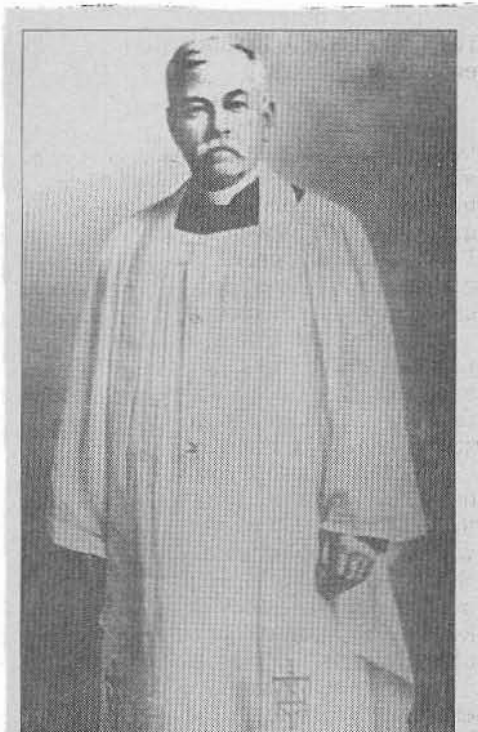
In a 1893 letter, Murdoch argued that his work promoting and directing cotton mills was more important to the church than becoming its bishop, which is a matter that cannot be taken lightly given his nomination for as-

sistant bishop of the North Carolina church that year.

Murdoch was born near Asheville in March 1846, fourth son and 10th child of William and Margaret Murdoch. His parents reached America from Ireland around 1843. Like thousands of Scot-Irish before them, the Murdochs were soon on the Great Wagon road heading south from Pennsylvania and taking up the life of herdsman in North Carolina's back country.

William Murdoch was known for his fine line of cattle. Today, one hears only of the plantation economy in the South, overlooking the far greater economy of livestock raising. In 1860, hogs and other southern livestock were valued at better than half a billion dollars, more than twice the value of that year's cotton crop. It could

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BELOVED MINISTER, FRIEND:
The Rev. Francis Murdoch is remembered fondly in Cooleemee.

PRIEST

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be said that America's first cowboys practiced their trade in the Carolina back country before the America Revolution.

The young Murdoch received his first education in the school of Stephen Lee in Asheville. In 1861, at age 15, he enlisted in the First North Carolina Volunteers who were among the first troops to reach a Civil War battlefield. In February 1865 at Charleston, he became a lieutenant for special services performed in the war. After his death, the Vestry of Saint Luke's noted in minutes from its June 24, 1909, meeting that he "was a brave Confederate soldier and was passionately devoted to the cause of the Confederacy."

After the war, he graduated from the Citadel in South Carolina, taught school and studied at the Ravenscroft school under Rev. Buxton in Asheville. On Sept. 17, 1868, he was ordained a deacon at St. Luke's. He served in mission work at High Shoals and other stations in the western part of the state and was ordained to the priesthood in 1870. Two years later, he became rector at St. Luke's, where he stayed for 37 years.

Between 1883 and 1900, the Episcopal Church of North Carolina experienced one of its greatest periods of growth, erecting 58 new churches and chapels and sending 25 missionaries into the field. Murdoch played a central role, working tirelessly to expand the church's mission role. Pivotal to this work was the Evangelistic Brotherhood started by Murdoch and joined by William J. Bynum and Charles J. Curtis. Some 20 men were brought into

the ministry by this work. Sixteen of these new churches were "industrial missions," and Cooleemee was one of the first.

Murdoch's interest in cotton mills was directly tied to his concern for the poverty and hardships North Carolinians faced after the Civil War. From his perspective, the best help was not hand outs but jobs and education, and Murdoch threw himself into the push for cotton mills in Salisbury in the 1880s.

In 1881, J.C. Foard and a Mr. Lindsay from the South River Community had proposed construction of a cotton mill on the South Yadkin River. Nothing came of that first effort.

Then in 1887, the churches of Salisbury banded together and held a revival in a tobacco warehouse. Large crowds attended. Some accounts say as many as 1,500 people were there one night. On the last night of the revival, the Rev. R.G. Pearson closed the meeting with a call for the construction of cotton mills to help the hard-pressed people in the countryside. The very next day, in the same tobacco warehouse, Murdoch, the Rev. Jethro Rumble and a number of local businessmen met and decided to get Salisbury's first cotton mill underway. The work was undertaken by the Salisbury Improvement Association, in which Murdoch was secretary.



MEMORY: Francis Murdoch helped establish Cooleemee's Church of the Good Shepherd.

In less than a year, the Salisbury Cotton Mill was up and running.

This effort was followed by the organization of the Rowan Knitting Mill, Vance Cotton Mill and the Yadkin Falls Manufacturing Co. Murdoch was secretary and treasurer in the first two and president in the last two.

He was also instrumental in bringing the first electric-power company to Salisbury and helped found cotton mills in Greensboro and Milledgeville.

Perhaps the greatest tribute was paid to him by St. Luke's Vestry in 1909 following his death. Their minutes, unanimously adopted, read: "He was a good man and was continually and

quietly going about doing good. Not even his family knew how much he was always doing to help his fellowmen. In rendering aid, he knew no distinction of race or creed. Those of us who were intimately associated with him knew of many of his good deeds; but God alone knows the whole extent of them."

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Jim Rumley is president of the Cooleemee Historical Association and author of "Cooleemee: The Life & Times of a Mill Town," available at the Literary Book Post in Salisbury and Davie Discount Drugs and the Zachary House in Cooleemee. Price: \$38.