



The Vergers Voice

The news blog of the Vergers Guild

Welcome to the [Vergers Voice](#), the official news blog of the [Vergers Guild of the Episcopal Church](#). Also known as the VGEC, we are located on the web at [vergers.org](#) and [facebook.com/vergerguild](#) the #1 online resources for vergers world-wide.

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Friday, March 13, 2015

The History of the Verger in North America



"Procession before the Eucharist," painting by Simon Vedder (1906) from "The Parson's Handbook" by Percy Dearmer

By Ken Holloway, News Manager of the VGEC with Bill Gleason and David Deutsch

VGEC Lifetime Member Bill Gleason recently noticed a plaque on the west aisle wall at [St. John's Cathedral](#) in Denver. It commemorates the life of [William Yardley](#), sexton and verger, for his 29 years of service. Mr Yardley died in 1918. Bill mentioned his discovery and a conversation ensued on the order of,

"There must be other evidence of verger history around the country. How can we discover and document it?"

Then last week, Lifetime Member David Seaman, verger at [St. Matthew's Episcopal Church](#) in Bedford, NY, wrote to us about having found reference to a Mr. Hicks-Beach as "The Church Sexton and Verger of the 1920s." He wondered if Mr. Hicks-Beach might have been the first verger in America? We suggested that Bill Gleason and David Duetsch respond to him. They did so and then continued talking about the concept of finding and documenting verger history in America. This summary of quite an involved multi-party conversation is inadequate, but wait, there's more! When one of the pivotal founders of the VGEC, Bill Gleason, teams up with David Deutsch, a verger and the retired TV director for the PBS NewsHour and author of, [Walk Softly and Carry a Big Stick—in Love: The Emerging Ministry of the Verger in the Late 20th Century to the Present](#), we listen.

Bill and David intend to develop a new VGEC-sponsored video and book, "The History of the Verger in North America." Their initial plan for this effort is the following letter to anyone, anywhere who has experience with, or knowledge of, vergers in their churches, cathedrals and dioceses.

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Past issues of the Printed Vergers Voice

From Bill and David:

The VGEC plans to produce a video and book tentatively titled, "The History of the Verger in North America." This project will document the history of the ministry of the verger in churches and cathedrals located in the United States and Canada from the earliest dates which can be discovered to the modern day.

This is large undertaking and the Guild needs your input.

Utilizing the questionnaire below, please send any pertinent information to history@vergers.org. Kindly note that the use of the term "verger" as we understand it today can be a bit different as understood in the past. The verger might have been called a "sacristan" or the corruption of that word which is "sexton." This means that the questionnaire not only pertains to vergers but to all who had a role in caring for the fabric of the church/cathedral and/or participated in strong lay leadership in organizing and stage managing worship. For the purpose of simplifying the questions, the term "verger" will be used, but do not let that hold you back! When in doubt, send us the information and please dig as deep as you can.

The Guild thanks you in advance. Without your help, this research would be an impossible task.

This is a summary of the types of questions that we are seeking to answer:

- If your church or cathedral has, or have had in the past, vergers, what is the earliest date that you can discover when that ministry began? What are your sources?
- Can you supply the names and dates of all the vergers who have served your church?
- What verger memorabilia do you have — photographs, documents, verges, etc. — that relate to the early history of the ministry of the verger at your church/cathedral? For example, do you have a verge that relates to the turn-of-the century, or, say, the 1920s? Do you have a photograph of your church/cathedral's first verger? Do you have photographs of vergers performing their duties behind the scenes or during services at your church?
- Please include your name, how we can best contact you (email address, phone number etc.) and the name and location of your parish when you reply to history@vergers.org.

Thank you,

William Gleason and David Deutsch

This project is supported by the Communication Committee of the VGEC through archives.vergers.org. The VGEC will be providing document storage and database support for the project. This is, first and foremost, a web-based archival project complemented with assembly of imagery of all of the resulting artifacts, documents, graphics, photographs and stories associated with the topic. As currently scoped, the products of this project will be:

1. A video production entitled, "The History of the Verger in North America."
2. A companion book.
3. A perpetual repository of historical data on the topic which will remain open for continuing data collection for the project for years to come.

We will of course be following their progress right here at the Verger's Voice so look forward to many interesting discoveries that they find along the way.

Our plan will be limited only by the research result. Why don't you look into verger history in your parish church, city and diocese and contact us at history@vergers.org with your findings?

By clicking on the big red button [register for the 2015 Annual Conference](#) being held October 1 to October 4, 2015 in St. Louis, Missouri :



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Abstract: Who was the first verger in America? Which church or cathedral has had vergers for the longest continuous period? The VGEC is beginning an exciting investigation into the origins and histories of vergers in North America. We are counting on your stories, information, documents and photos of the people and accouterments to unwrap and document the story of America's vergers.

Posted by [Ken Holloway](#) at 9:08 AM



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