

**GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH 2009
ARCHIVES' RESEARCH REPORT**

RESOLUTION NO.: 2009-C006
TITLE: Commemoration of Brother William West Skiles
PROPOSER: Diocese of Western North Carolina
COMMITTEE: Prayer Book, Liturgy & Church Music

Directly Related: (attached)

None

Indirectly Related:

None

In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions of General Convention for the period 1976 through 2006, selecting "direct" resolutions that have a substantive bearing on the proposed legislation. Committee members who are interested in obtaining copies of "indirectly related" resolutions, legislative history before 1976, or who require other research assistance should contact the Archives at 800-525-9329 before Convention or at Convention in the General Convention Secretariat.

TOPIC/TITLE: Church Calendar: Commemoration of Brother William West Skiles

PROPOSER: Diocese of Western North Carolina

C&C PAGE:

BB PAGE:

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That The Episcopal Church Calendar be
 2 revised to include the Commemoration of Brother William West Skiles, Deacon, Monk
 3 and Missionary, on December 8.
 4

EXPLANATION:

The first person in the Anglican Communion since the English Reformation to persevere in the dedicated life under the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, William West Skiles was born Oct. 12, 1807, on a farm in eastern North Carolina. Young Skiles grew up in an Episcopal family before there was a diocese or bishop. As a young adult he became a successful farmer and overseer of a lumber mill. In 1842 the Rt. Rev. Levi Silliman Ives, the second bishop of North Carolina, held services in a valley of the Blue Ridge Mountains, which he later names "Valle Crucis" from the shape of a cross formed by three creeks flowing into the valley). He established a mission to spread the Gospel, to teach agriculture and to train clergy for the diocese. In 1844 William West Skiles, at 37 years old, known to be a simple, kind man and to have sound practical judgment, was appointed to over see the mission farms and livestock and to teach such skills to boys enrolled in the school. In 1847 Bishop Ives encouraged the mission to form themselves into a religious community, taking the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, with the Rev. William G. French as superior. Skiles, impressed by the religious life of the mission, took the vows and also prepared himself for holy orders. On August 1 of the same year he was ordained to the diaconate. For two years the community flourished: Prayer Book offices were said daily, there were eight men preparing for holy orders, missions were formed at Upper Watauga, Lower Watauga and Valle Crucis. Mountain people were strengthened by the reverence of the liturgy and unable to read, loved to hear the scriptures read aloud. A school was established to teach the children the catechism as well as reading and writing. As successful as the mission was, and as sincere the devotion of the brothers was, there was dissension within the diocese between the bishop and those who believed the rumors that the Valle Crucis community was a "hotbed of Romanism" (the chief objection being the use of sacramental confession). In 1849 the bishop, dissolved the Valle Crucis religious community and the dioceses cut off all support. The superior and the brothers left, leaving only Brother Skiles, the faithful deacon and shepherd, who could not abandon his scattered flock. For thirteen years Brother Skiles was indeed the shepherd to the mountain people. He walked or rode on horseback, often in severe weather, to read and answer letters for those unable to do either, to explain legal documents and settle disputes, to pray with his beloved flock and to teach them catechism. He continued to live in poverty, never married and gave his obedience to his bishop and to the priests who came to administer the sacraments. He delighted in the growth of the mission on the Lower Watauga River and aspired to help the faithful to build there own chapel. With contributions of labor, lumber and small financial gifts, he designed and supervised the construction of a simple, but architecturally beautiful chapel, dedicated to St. John the Baptist. On Aug. 22, 1862, Bishop Atkinson consecrated the chapel, with Brother Skiles taking his part in the glorious liturgy. The holy desire of his heart had been granted, but failing health did not permit him to enter this fair and lovely chapel again. He died of cancer on Dec. 8, 1862. His remains were buried near the entrance to the crown of his ministry, The Church of St. John the Baptist.

In his tribute to Brother Skiles at the diocesan convention the following spring, Bishop Atkinson stated, "He was loved and honored for his humility, self-denial, diligence, affectionate temper towards his fellow men and his unwearied zeal in the service of his Master." Suggested Propers Collect:

Almighty and everlasting God, we give thanks for the life and ministry of William West Skiles, who served your church as a farmer, monk, deacon and friend. Teach us so to follow his example of humble service, that we too may persevere in our various callings and become servants to the servants of God, you long for us to be. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

The Old Testament: Isaiah 52:7-10
Psalm: 121
The New Testament: Peter 5:1-4,10-11
The Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:7-16

Brother Skiles Hymn: For Brother Skiles your servant, Our gratitude we bring. For the holy man of the mountains, Our praises we now sing. For that humble monk who offered His life to do your will. We pray that his example May strengthen our hearts still.

Words: Ralph Tilden and Jeff moylan
Music: King's Lynn (vs. 2, hymn 231)