

"The White Robe" – On Rev. John Roberts

While traveling throughout Wyoming, it is such a privilege to visit churches that were founded by Rev. John Roberts, who with a feast day on February 25 in the liturgical calendar of The Episcopal Church.



Rev. John Roberts was born in Wales in 1853, and while training for Anglican ordination felt called by God to serve among our Native American sisters and brothers. His call led him to Wyoming in 1883, where he ministered for 66 years among the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes on the Wind River Reservation, and other white settlers within 150 miles. As a missionary-priest, he was well ahead of his time, as he encouraged Native American expressions of Christian faith, embracing and honoring tribal culture, and traditional indigenous rituals and customs. He cultivated close friendships with tribal leaders, including the renowned Chief Washakie and Chief Black Coal, and was referred to with deep affection as "The White Robe" and "Elder Brother." His work led him with the assistance of tribal leadership, to establish two schools, one of which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. He lived a truly remarkable life and left a legacy that continues to have great influence today. Each time I visit with our Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho sisters and brothers on the Wind River Reservation, it has been moving to hear the love and respect they have for him. Rev. Roberts also established white settlement churches, including among many others, the Episcopal churches in Lander, Riverton, Thermopolis and Dubois.

Rev. Roberts died in 1949 at the age of 97, and is buried at Mount Hope Cemetery in Lander. It was a profoundly meaningful experience visiting his gravesite, high on a hill that looks out over the Wind River Range. Today, Wyoming's state flag is flown in the National Cathedral in his honor.

Each year, starting in 2022, we will host an annual *John Roberts Festival* on the Wind River Reservation on the weekend closest to February 25.

I leave the last words about Rev. John Roberts to The Rt. Rev. Ethelbert Talbot, the first Bishop of Wyoming & Idaho, and the 15th Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church.

"A man more devoted to his work cannot be found in the whole Anglican Church today. Mr. Roberts is a man of culture, a man of apostolic devotion. He is doing a work worthy of the past heroes of the



Church utterly unconscious of doing anything great. His name will live on as a...pioneer of the faith. He holds a very unique place in the hearts and affections of the people of Wyoming. He is known from one end to the other of [this] great state, for there is scarcely a place where, at one time or another, he has not gone to lend the ever helping hand to those in trouble or distress. Distinguished people all over the state do him honor. Such pioneering as John Roberts has exemplified can never be duplicated in Wyoming. The volumes that can be written of such a life!"

A Prayer

Almighty God, who raised up your servant John Roberts to be a witness among the Shoshone and Arapaho peoples: May we, inspired by his example and prayers, invite all people to the riches of your grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.