

Charles Minnigerode (1814–1894)

Contributed by [Steven E. Woodworth](#)

Charles Minnigerode was a professor of Latin and Greek and, for thirty-three years, the rector of Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in [Richmond](#). During the [American Civil War](#) (1861-1865), Saint Paul's was sometimes called "the Cathedral of the Confederacy," and its parishioners included Confederate president [Jefferson Davis](#) and Confederate general [Robert E. Lee](#). In 1862, Minnigerode, who immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1839, baptized Davis, and in 1864, he read prayers at the burial of Confederate general [J. E. B. Stuart](#). [MORE...](#)



Charles Frederick Ernest Minnigerode was born in Ahrensburg, Westphalia (in present-day Germany), on August 6, 1814. He grew up in the nearby city of Darmstadt, where he was confirmed in the Lutheran Church and received his first communion at the age of fifteen. He received a classical education and in 1832 entered the University of Giessen, where he studied law. He was much influenced by the revolutionary political ideas then circulating in Germany, particularly among young college students. In 1834, a month shy of his twentieth birthday, his radicalism caused him to be arrested and jailed. He spent the next four and a half years in various prisons. During his incarceration he was permitted no reading material but the Bible, which he read in its entirety eight times. Because he appeared to be critically ill, however, he was finally released to house arrest, first at his brother's home and then at his father's.

In 1839 he sailed for America, regaining his health during the voyage and landing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he learned English in three months, became a teacher of languages, and made the acquaintance of writers Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Washington Irving. In 1842 he accepted a position as a professor of humanities at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, where he taught Latin and Greek. Entering into the social life of the Virginia Tidewater, Minnigerode introduced the German custom of decorating an evergreen tree at Christmas at the home of law professor [St. George Tucker](#), one of many influences that prompted Americans to adopt the practice at about that time.

In 1843 Minnigerode married Mary Carter. The following year, he joined the Episcopal Church and in 1845 became a candidate for the ministry, being ordained to the priesthood in 1847. During the next nine years he served various small parishes before taking over Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond in 1856. He continued in that parish for the next thirty-three years.

Minnigerode always spoke with a noticeable German accent, but he used the English language skillfully and was much admired as a preacher. Services at Saint Paul's drew large crowds. In 1860 he preached to the Prince of Wales—the future King Edward VII—when that dignitary attended Saint Paul's during his visit to the United States. In 1858, when the body of United States president James Monroe, who had died twenty-seven years earlier, was moved from its previous resting place in New York and reinterred in Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery, Minnigerode presided over the burial ceremony.

Many of the first families of Richmond were regular attendees at Minnigerode's services, as were many within the leadership of the Confederacy, including Lee (when he was in Richmond) and Davis. The Confederate president acted on advice from Minnigerode in publicly invoking divine blessing on the Confederacy at his February 1862 presidential inauguration. In May of that year, Minnigerode baptized Davis and administered his first communion. In May 1864, Minnigerode read prayers at the burial of



[St. George Tucker](#)

fallen Confederate major general J. E. B. Stuart. On Sunday morning, April 2, 1865, Davis was in his pew and Minnigerode was said to have been preaching on the Last Supper when the sexton brought the president a dispatch from Lee stating that Union general-in-chief Ulysses S. Grant had broken his lines at Petersburg and that Richmond would fall.

After the war, during Davis's imprisonment in Fort Monroe, Minnigerode visited him from time to time to give spiritual encouragement and to serve communion, and on Davis's release, Minnigerode escorted him from the fort to Richmond's Spotswood Hotel. On the occasion of the former president's death, in 1889, Minnigerode delivered a memorial address at Saint Paul's.

That same year the rector, who by then was in poor health, resigned his position at Saint Paul's, moved to Alexandria, Virginia, and took up a life of semiretirement, serving as chaplain to the Virginia Theological Seminary. He and his wife celebrated their fiftieth anniversary in 1893, and Minnigerode died the following year, on October 13, 1894. He is buried in Hollywood Cemetery.



Jeff. Davis in Prison



General Fitzhugh Lee and Lieutenant Charles Minnigerode

Time Line

- August 6, 1814** - Charles Frederick Ernest Minnigerode is born in Ahrensburg, Westphalia, Germany.
- 1832** - Charles Minnigerode enters the University of Giessen, where he studies law.
- 1834** - Charles Minnigerode is arrested and jailed in Germany on charges of revolutionary political activism. He will spend the next four and a half years in various prisons.
- 1839** - Charles Minnigerode is released from prison in Germany and sails for America, landing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he studies English.
- 1842** - Charles Minnigerode accepts a position as professor of humanities at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, where he teaches Latin and Greek.
- 1843** - Charles Minnigerode marries Mary Carter.
- 1844** - Charles Minnigerode joins the Episcopal Church in Williamsburg.
- 1845** - Charles Minnigerode becomes a candidate for the Episcopal ministry.
- 1847** - Charles Minnigerode is ordained an Episcopal priest.
- 1856** - After several years spent serving small parishes in Virginia, Charles Minnigerode takes over Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond. He will stay in the position for thirty-three years.
- 1858** - Charles Minnigerode presides over the burial ceremony for the remains of President James Monroe, which are being reinterred in Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery.
- 1860** - Charles Minnigerode preaches to the Prince of Wales—the future King Edward VII of Great Britain—at services at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond.
- February 22, 1862** - On advice from Charles Minnigerode, head of Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Confederate president Jefferson Davis publicly invokes divine blessing on the Confederacy at his inauguration ceremony.
- May 1862** - Charles Minnigerode, head of Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, baptizes Confederate president Jefferson Davis and administers his first communion.
- May 1864** - Charles Minnigerode, head of Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, reads prayers at the burial of Confederate major general J. E. B. Stuart.
- April 2, 1865** - Charles Minnigerode is preaching on the Last Supper at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond when the sexton brings Confederate president Jefferson Davis a dispatch from General Robert E. Lee that the capital city will soon fall.
- May 13, 1867** - Charles Minnigerode, head of Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, escorts former Confederate president Jefferson Davis to Richmond's Spotswood Hotel after his release from a two-year incarceration at Fort Monroe.
- 1889** - Following the death of former Confederate president Jefferson Davis, Charles Minnigerode delivers a memorial address at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond.
- October 13, 1894** - Charles Minnigerode dies and is buried in Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond.

Categories [Civil War](#), [American \(1861-1865\)](#) [Religion](#)

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Further Reading

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Cite This Entry

APA Citation:

Woodworth, S. E. Charles Minnigerode (1814-1894). (2017, June 22). In *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Retrieved from http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Minnigerode_Charles_1814-1894.

MLA Citation:

Woodworth, S. E. "Charles Minnigerode (1814-1894)." *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, 22 Jun. 2017. Web. 29 Jan. 2019.

First published: July 29, 2009 | Last modified: June 22, 2017

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