

In Memoriam

We are deeply indebted to Elizabeth Francenia McKoy, a local historian. In 1939 when most of the markers were still legible, she copied the inscriptions and created a map of the graveyard. Without her work we would know almost nothing about the people buried here. She also made a model of the early church which is kept in the Parish Hall. *Miss Elizabeth was a tiny, intense person and the beloved niece of Henry Bacon, architect of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.*

Sources

Block, Susan Taylor. *Temple of our Fathers: St. James Church (1729-2004)*, Wilmington, NC: Artspeaks, 2004

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Little, M. Ruth. *Sticks and Stones, Three Centuries of N.C. Gravemakers*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

We are grateful to Lizzie Broadfoot and Betsy Fensel for their dedication to the restoration and preservation of the graveyard and to Virginia Callaway for organizing this leaflet and for posting the information on the church's website www.stjamesp.org.

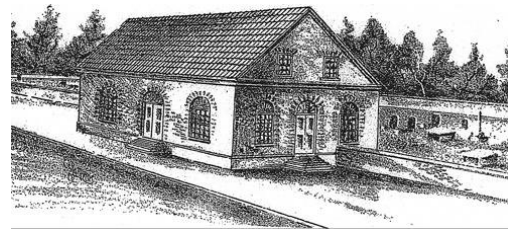
St James' graveyard is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Buried Treasures

This graveyard is a unique legacy - a tiny bit of colonial Wilmington and the only surviving part of the first St. James Church. The south door of the 1771 nave opened into the "burying ground." The 153 graves represent 175 people, some Anglicans who owned pews, some who simply wanted a Christian burial.

They were mariners, merchants, innkeepers, builders, planters, patriots, Revolutionary War officers, a poet, a doctor of physic, a sea captain, little children, mothers young and old who died with their newborns.

They came from England, Scotland, Ireland, and France, from all along the eastern seaboard and the West Indies to start new lives, creating a new town and ultimately a new nation. Many are mentioned in the earliest town records. Come meet a few of them.



St James Church 1771- 1839

Near the corner of 4th and Market St is the sandstone marker of our super-patriot Cornelius Harnett. A commissioner of the colonial town and leader of the 1766 Stamp Tax Rebellion, he read the Declaration of Independence for the first time in N.C. to a cheering crowd and was elected to the 1777 Continental Congress. "Most Wanted," he was brought home to his plantation, *Hilton*, from a roofless British prison and died at 58, three days after Lord Cornwallis left Wilmington for Yorktown. The Deist inscription reflects the 18th century Enlightenment belief, embraced by many of our Founding Fathers, in the God of Nature.

Turn around to the end wall of the Parish Hall and find the 1771 raised box grave of Dr. Samuel Green, town commissioner and alderman, doctor of "Physic and Surgery" for 30 years. His plantation, *Greenfields*, is now Greenfield Park.

Note the marker of Mary Baker Eddy's first husband, victim of the 1844 yellow fever epidemic. The Masons of St. John's Lodge provided funds and an escort for his pregnant young wife to her home in New Hampshire. She later founded the Church of Christ, Scientist.

Turn down the brick walk alongside the building. At the end and around the corner lies John Cholwell,

periwig maker. His pew was in the gallery of the 1771 church.

Next is an elegant slate stone with a neoclassical motif of urn, weeping willow, and fluted borders popular in Salem, Mass circa 1808, where it was probably carved for Capt Ephriam Symonds, who was born there. Sunk beneath the sand is this verse:

*Come hither all ye tenderest souls that know
The heights of fondness & the depths of woe
Two happy souls made intimately one:
And felt a parting stroke 'tis you must tell
The smart, the twinges, and the racks I feel
The soul of mine that dreadful wound has
bourne
Off from its side its dearest half is torn,
The rest lies bleeding and but lives to mourn.*

Sandstone building fragments on the ground nearby may be from the 1771 church.

Just east of the circle of benches is the oldest stone here, the 1757 grave of William Hunt, 19. An angel with graceful wings fills the tympanum. The border has stylized tulips. *Price engravor* is inscribed in a scalloped arch below, for Ebenezer Price, a recognized stonecutter of Elizabethtown, N.J., the boy's hometown. This very special marker, whose story one longs to know, was well preserved in the 1970s. Pollution will soon erase it completely.

Midway in the long straight row to your right is the marble marker of Frances Wilkinson, 18, and her son,

8 days old. This is one of three 1788 markers here by Josiah Manning, the most successful stonemason in eastern Conn. They have a rather humorous winged soul head with tightly coiled hair, fried egg eyes, and “Geneva collar”, the preaching tabs of a cleric. Can you find the other two?

By contrast Joseph Gautier’s marble marker farther along the row, signed *Witzel and Cahoon, N.Y.*, with an urn draped in deeply carved folds of fabric, is the height of neoclassical refinement typical of turn of the century gravestones.

There are two other Gautier family graves. One bears a French inscription, another says the deceased was born in England. Were these Huguenots who, like the locally prominent DeRossett family, left France for England and later immigrated to America?

At the end of the row, turn around toward the SW corner of the yard. Note in passing the red sandstone marker of William Millor, *an honest & inoffensive man*. Look familiar?

A small stone south of the joined brick vaults marks the grave of Grainger Wright, 2 mos old, died 1795, and his brother Joshua, 15 mos old, in 1797. The boys’ Quaker grandfather was one of Wilmington’s founders in 1740. Wrightsville Beach is named for their father, Bradley Creek for their mother’s

family. Susan Bradley and Joshua Grainger Wright lived in the Burgwin-Wright House (3rd and Market) and are the great grandparents of Bishop Robert Strange, who is buried under the chancel of the present church.

Some 61 children under the age of 5 are in this small graveyard. They died of measles, whooping cough, scarlet fever, brain fever (meningitis or encephalitis), and putrid throat (diphtheria).

Behind the three brick vaults, in front of the obelisk, is the grave of Christopher Dall. A native of Nova Scotia, he was head carpenter of the 1840 church, working with his son. The cause of his death at 49 was listed as bilious fever, a euphemism for mosquito-borne malaria or the dreaded yellow fever. His plain stone reads:

This monument is erected by an affectionate Son the only member of his family privileged to be near him in that trying hour when in a land of strangers, far from wife and children he was suddenly called from all that bound him to earth. He was a kind husband, an affectionate father, an honest man, and has left his family the imperishable patrimony of a good name.

St. James Parish Register of burials for 1829 lists adults dying of consumption (T.B.), apoplexy (stroke), dropsy (congestive heart failure) lockjaw, dysentery, sea sickness, childbed, gunshot, a fall from a horse, intemperance - *a tragic death*, and influenza. It is a wonder

that Sarah Bowdish lived to be 84, and John Nutt buried his second wife, Martha, half his age, before dying at 87 in 1810.

Turn around to find the grave of Elizabeth Brice. She died in 1796, two days after her newborn son. Her husband Francis was the tax collector and Secy of the Committee of Public Safety, but he joined the British and left with them in 1781, headed for Yorktown. After a failed effort to regain his citizenship, he was banished from N.C. and his property confiscated. Elizabeth was the only daughter of Marmaduke Jones, Esq., a member of Royal Gov. Arthur Dobb’s Council and later attorney general of N.C. William Hooper, signer of the Declaration of Independence, said, “I have met him, and he is the greatest coxcomb alive!”

Under the wide window of the building’s end wall is the sunken Toomer/Jewkes vault. Henry Toomer, owner of pew 32 in the 1771 church, served on the Safety Committee and was commissioner for N.C. units during the Revolution. He died in 1799, leaving a large estate. He built a “mansion” on Toomer’s Alley and two plantations, owned 45 slaves and Dorsey’s Hotel on Front St where George Washington dined during his Southern Tour in 1791.

Charles Jewkes was the business partner of John Burgwin. When Burgwin returned to England before the war, Jewkes moved into his new house (3rd and Market) to protect it from confiscation. His summer home, Shandy Hall, still stands on Greenville Sound.

Handmade-brick vaults were quite the thing in the ante-bellum period for those who could afford them. They were said to better protect the body in the coastal plain, with its low elevation above sea level and high water table.

In the middle of the straight row east of the brick vaults is the 1787 grave of Mary Bleakley and her newborn son. Due to the date, the lettering style, and a partially legible signature, the plain sandstone ledger is attributed to Richard Hartshorn Sr., stonemason of Rhode Island and New York. Her inscription:
*In grateful memory of thy virtuous life
And all the sweet endearments of a wife
Oh let me raise this monumental stone
At once the tribute to a wife and son
Accept these rites, these tears, this verse receive
Tis all a husband, father, friend can give.*

Enroute back to the gate, near the obelisk, you may see the third 1788 marker with the wide-eyed soul’s head and fanciful border designs incised in red sandstone. It is pure American folk art.