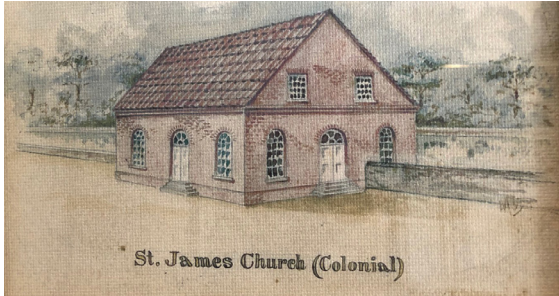


A BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. JAMES PARISH

In 1729, New Hanover County was created by the General Assembly of North Carolina, after North Carolina had become a separate part of the English Province of Carolina which originally included areas in NC, SC, Tennessee, and Georgia. St. James Parish was established as a district of New Hanover County, and land was deeded for the St. James Parish church. The parish church was an official establishment of the Church of England in those pre-revolutionary days. Before the church building was built, services were originally held in local shops, and later, in the courthouse located at Front and Market Streets.



THE ORIGINAL CHURCH BUILDING

Erection of the first church building was initiated on August 21, 1740 on land deeded for that purpose. The modest church structure, built with bricks which had been used for ballast brought by ships to the port of Wilmington, was eventually completed in 1770. It was located along Market Street, partially extending into Market Street between 3rd and 4th Streets (near the present Parish House). The building was used until March 1839 when it was demolished in preparation for constructing the new church building.

THE 1839 CHURCH BUILDING

Bricks from the first church building were used for construction of the present church building which was completed and consecrated on March 29, 1840. The new building was designed in a simple, academic Gothic Revival style by Thomas U. Walter. He was later appointed the US Capitol architect and is best known for his design of the Capitol expansion in Washington DC in the 1850s which included the House and Senate wings as well as the Capitol dome. Because the church had no central heating, the pews were enclosed by doors and hinges (which were later removed in 1884).



THE PARISH GRAVEYARD AND GARDENS

The parish grounds also include a graveyard dating back to the earliest days of the parish. It is a unique legacy, a tiny bit of colonial Wilmington and the only surviving part of the original St. James Parish site. The door of the original church building opened into the burial ground; and the 153 graves represent 175 people. Some of them were Anglicans who owned parish pews; some simply wanted a Christian burial. They were mariners, merchants, innkeepers, shipbuilders, planters, patriots, Revolutionary War veterans, militia from the War of 1812, little children, and mothers who died with their newborns. They came from England, Scotland, Ireland, and France, from the eastern seaboard and from the West Indies. The parish grounds also include a cloister garden dedicated to children, and the St. Francis Memorial Garden which provides a sacred area where parishioners' ashes are buried. The two large cedar trees in the front yard of the parish are Himalayan cedars (*cedrus deodara*) planted in 1850.



MOUNT LEBANON CHAPEL

Another important parish structure, Mt. Lebanon Chapel, is located several miles from the downtown church grounds, off Oleander Drive on Airlie Rd., adjacent to Airlie Gardens and close to Wrightsville Sound. Mt. Lebanon Chapel is a simple, rustic chapel, open to the wooded area surrounding it. It was originally built in 1835 on property owned by the Wright family, to serve parishioners and others vacationing at the beach because attending churches downtown would have required a round-trip of about 3 hours. The name, 'Mt. Lebanon', was chosen by Judge Joshua G. Wright, for whom Wrightsville Beach is named, because of the many cedar trees which suggested the fabled cedars of Lebanon from Old Testament history. The property on which Mt. Lebanon Chapel is situated, approximately six acres, was later donated to the parish in 1875. With help from our friends at St. Andrew's On-the-Sound, the chapel has been maintained and refurbished; and today the chapel offers a welcome location for summer chapel services, weddings, and other special events. In 2022, a labyrinth was added to the chapel grounds.

IMPORTANT DATES IN THE HISTORY OF ST. JAMES

1729 - St. James Parish was established as a district of New Hanover County, with land deeded for the St. James Parish church building.

1740 - Erection of the first church building was authorized.

1770 - The modest church structure, built with bricks which had been used for ballast brought by ships to the port of Wilmington, was completed.

1781 - Near the end of the Revolutionary War, Wilmington was occupied for 18 days by about 2,000 British soldiers under the command of General Charles Cornwallis. The St. James church building was turned into a stable for use by the British Troops, causing considerable damage.

1783 - 1839 - The period after the Revolutionary War was very chaotic and recovery took a long time. During this period, Sunday schools and Bible classes were instituted at St. James Parish, along with assistance for the education of poor children.

1835 - Mt. Lebanon Chapel was built.

1840 - The present church building was completed and consecrated on March 29, 1840. The building was designed by Thomas U. Walter who later was appointed the U.S. Capitol architect.

1865 - Near the end of the Civil War, Union forces seized the St. James church building. Services were halted; pews were removed from the church, and it was used as a hospital for several months.

1885 - The chancel (altar) area of the church was expanded, and the south transept was added, designed by the NY church architect, Henry Dudley.

1892 - Silas McBee completed carvings for the main altar and reredos of the church. Also in 18892, the Bridgers Memorial Building was completed honoring Robert R. Bridgers.

1923-24 - The Parish House was built behind the church building, providing a spacious parish hall (the "Great Hall") and classrooms. It was designed by Hobart Upjohn, a noted NY architect.

1941 - World War II. St. James provided space in the Parish House basement so that soldiers could spend Saturday nights in town. On Sunday mornings, the service men 'packed the pews' and parishioners hosted them for Sunday dinner.

1955-56 - Milton Hall, containing classrooms, the children's chapel, and St. James Day School, was built. Also the MacRae House at the corner of Dock and 3rd Streets was acquired. It now houses the church offices and was designed by the noted architect Henry Bacon who also designed the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC.

2000 - Perry Hall was completed and dedicated. Perry Hall is located on property previously utilized by the Wilmington Fire Department, at the corner of Dock and 4th Streets.

2011 - The MacRae house was completely renovated. The house was renamed and rededicated to the memory of Ann Moore Bacon.

2029 - In November 2029, St. James Parish will celebrate its 300th anniversary!

We invite you to join us in celebrating our Tricentennial.

TRICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE



On November 27, 2029, St. James Parish will officially be 300 years old!

This Sunday, November 24, our St. James Tricentennial Steering Committee will present an outline of ways in which our parish family can be involved, over the next five years, in planning and celebrating the 300 years of our parish history.

We invite you to consider volunteering to serve with one or more of our subcommittees in planning a very special Tricentennial celebration.

Below is a list of our current subcommittees and their contacts. Please feel free to reach out to any of the committees that interest you!

Community Engagement Committee -

Kay Dougherty
(Kdoughertyearly@gmail.com)

Events Committee -

Brandon Tully (brandoncandler@me.com) &
Porter Young (poyoung@ec.rr.com)

History Committee -

Bill Bivins (wpbivins@gmail.com)

Outreach Committee -

Brian McMerty (bmcmetry@arris.partners)

Speaker & Programs Committee -

John Jordan (jwjilm@aol.com)

Communications Committee -

Erin Becker (communications@stjamesp.org)

For more information, please visit our website
stjamesp.org.

We hope to see you soon at one of our services!