

# ST. JAMES GRAVEYARD

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places

## Colonial Wilmington in 1757

The Market Street gate into the graveyard today is about ten paces south of the west door of the first St. James Church, which opened directly into the nave. One entered under the gallery, just as one enters the present church, looking east up the aisle to the pulpit. The oldest memorial stone in the graveyard was placed here in 1757 before the church was finished.

The Wilmington Town Bill had been passed in 1740, largely through the machinations of the second Royal Governor chosen by King George II to oversee the running of the crown colony of North Carolina. He was Gabriel Johnston, a Scots Highlander. His sponsor was Spencer Compton, a prime minister of England and the Earl of Wilmington, hence the town's name.

Governor Johnston wrote promotional tracts about the Cape Fear area as well as letters to his friends in Scotland, encouraging them to join him in investing here. By 1770 more than seventy thousand Highlanders are estimated to have immigrated to the Cape Fear Valley - on the coast and in the sandhills. After their rout on the Culloden moor in 1745, the clans, the wearing of family tartans, the playing of bagpipes, and even the speaking of Gaelic were declared criminal offenses by the British. America offered a chance to start anew. Among the owners of pews in the 1771 church and families filling the pews at St. James today, Scots names predominate. Industrious, entrepreneurial, thrifty, and fiercely independent, Scots have positively influenced the quality of life in Wilmington.

The brick walls of the first church stood twelve feet high with door and window openings, but there were no doors, windows, or roof until 1771. Even when finished it had no steeple or tower. One-third of the building was on its lot, while two-thirds stood on what is today the sidewalk and the street. Michael

Higgins, one of the town's four founders, had donated a half-acre lot for a church. So much of the tract had been sold for burial plots, to raise the funds to build it, that the town commissioners permitted the vestry to extend the church into the sixty-six feet designated for Market Street, then just a white sand path that ran through scrub oaks and pine trees to the coast and turned north to New Bern. The church would not be in use for another fourteen years. When the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts could supply a clergyman, religious services were held at the courthouse which had been built in the intersection of Front and Market streets.

To see the town as did those who brought their loved ones here for burial in the decades just before and after the Revolutionary War, mentally clear away all the nearby buildings. Imagine walking the block that runs from Princess to Market between Front and Second streets. Most of Wilmington's sixty or so houses were there. The notable exception was a three-story brick house at Front and Orange streets, the oldest and finest residence in the town. A planter from Charleston, S.C., had built it in 1739 in the Single House style so popular there. It faced Front



Model by Miss Elizabeth McKoy.  
Housed at Cape Fear Museum.

Street. Today it faces Orange street and is known as the Smith-Anderson House. All the surrounding houses burned in fires that periodically raged through the area near the docks, where so much pitch, tar, turpentine and lumber were stored.

Only the ballast stone *goal* stood at Third and Market streets. Near this intersection were the stocks, whipping post, pillory, and an iron cage where any slave appearing in town without a letter of permission to be there was held until his owner claimed him. Down on the riverbank was a ducking stool, which must have produced many a confession, true or false.



Market Street dipped much more precipitously to Second than it does today. That was the site of the *Mud Market*, so named because the ground was always wet. A spring emerged from underground, ran southwest across the block to Dock Street and on to the river. Small boats could be paddled up the stream to bring fresh

produce from outlying farms to be sold in open stalls.

The town wharf ran up Dock almost to Front, allowing boats to load and unload goods to and from the shops and warehouses doing business alongside. The naval stores so vital to Britain's sea hegemony were shipped out from there, as well as locally distilled rum and other spirits. Two rival periwig makers had shops on Dock, and mercantile stores offered eagerly awaited imported goods. The riverfront was the business center of the growing town. Lawyers and agents handling sales of half lots, quarter lots, and even smaller ones were prospering, often in later years signing themselves "Esq."

Beneath the courthouse was another open *shambles* selling meat, fish, and more perishable goods under cover of the meeting hall on the floor above. An old woman was paid to ring the town bell daily at 8 am, noon, 6 pm, and whenever the townspeople needed to be summoned to hear important news. Word was circulated to the nearby bars and taverns requesting quiet during religious services and when court was in session.

Wide sand "streets" ran only from the river up Market to Front, north halfway to Princess, south along Front to Dock, up to Second and, completing the square, back to Market. The rest of the town was traversed by narrow paths leading out in all directions. At the top of the hill above the church a path

called *the boundary* - now Fifth Avenue - ran along the crest of the hill. Beyond it were the gallows. Boys who lived in that area were called *gallows hillers* and were probably proud of their notoriety.

To the north beyond *Boundary* were an Indian burial ground and a Quaker graveyard. A potters' field was to the south on the hill above the church. How often we seek high ground for burying our dead. Historian Elizabeth McKoy wrote, in *Early Wilmington Block by Block from 1733 On*, "The hill beyond the church must have been a pleasant spot, high and airy, looking off over the church to the river and its traffic... sailing ships in those days." By 1771 Governor Johnston enthusiastically reported that at least a hundred ships annually lay at anchor in the Cape Fear River.

During the hundred years of burials in St. James' graveyard, the church was in use for only sixty-eight years, from 1771 through the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Revolutionary War, and the decade following, which was a time of transformation for Wilmingtonians. Adventurous pioneers, who courageously left behind everything they had ever known to risk their lives a world away in the wilderness of the royal province of North Carolina, had to learn to think of themselves as citizens of a newly created democracy called the United States. They did not yet think of themselves as "Americans". That name was a derogatory one the British press used to disparage "second class" people without the rights British citizens enjoyed. Change was coming!

Wilmingtonians continued to worship in the modest little church, renamed the Protestant Episcopal Church in America, until April 1838. Parishioners who had decried its decrepitude watched and wept as it was demolished. The bricks, which had come by ship from England, were reused in the foundation of the Early Gothic Revival style church dedicated on April 4th, 1840.

A few more grave plots became available after the church was torn down. The latest stone in the graveyard is dated 1849, but burials must have continued here until Oakdale Cemetery opened in 1855. Its founding proprietors were headed by Dr. Armand John deRosset, III. Sadly, his six-year-old daughter, Annie, was the first person interred there.





## The Graveyard

“For these are deeds which should not pass away... And names that must not wither.”

Lord Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III

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 and others who owned pews, some who simply wanted a Christian burial. They were mariners, merchants, innkeepers, carpenters, shipbuilders, sea captains, planters, patriots, Revolutionary War veterans, militia from the War of 1812, a poet, doctors of *physic*, little children, and mothers young and old who died with their newborns. They came from Scotland, Ireland, England, and France, from all along the eastern seaboard and from the West Indies, to start new lives, creating a new town in this coastal pine forest and ultimately a new nation. Most are mentioned in the earliest town records.

Near the corner of Fourth and Market streets, where the brick walk into the graveyard turns south, is the red sandstone marker of our superpatriot Cornelius Harnett. He was an Irishman of small stature, charming manners, and devotion to justice and independence. His sense of duty led him to give lifelong service to his developing town and emerging nation, even though he relished

home life with his wife Mary at their plantations *Poplar Grove* and *Maynard*. The latter was built on the bluff above the river north of town, which was the site of the “World’s Largest Living Christmas Tree” beloved by local children of the 1950s - 90s.

Royal Governor Gabriel Johnston appointed Cornelius Harnett justice of the peace when he was only twenty-five years old. He was responsible for seeing that Wilmington’s laws were fairly administered and enforced - that every household regularly swept its chimneys and had a fire bucket, that pigs were not allowed to wander in the streets, nor young men to ride wildly through the town. Elected a commissioner for eleven years, there were few committees he did not serve on. He organized the Committees of Correspondence and Safety to keep the thirteen colonies informed of what each other and the British were doing.

His friend Archibald Maclaine Hooper wrote of him, “He practiced all the duties of a kind and charitable and elegant hospitality....Easy in manner, affable, courteous, with a fine taste for letters and a genius for music, he was always an interesting, sometimes a fascinating, companion. He had read extensively for one engaged so much in the bustle of the world, and he read with a critical eye and inquisitive mind.... In conversation, he was never voluble. The tongue, an unruly member in most men, was in him nicely regulated by a sound and discriminating judgment(sic),... for what was wanting in continuity or fullness of expression, was supplied by a glance of his eye, the movement of his hand, and the impressiveness of his pause. Occasionally, too, he would impart animation by a characteristic smile of such peculiar sweetness and benignity as enlivened every mind and cheered every bosom within the sphere of its radiance.” (Quoted from Connor, p. 203.)

The Deist inscription Harnett chose for his grave, from Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man*, reflects the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment belief, embraced by many of our founding fathers, that all beings are part of the creative force evident in the laws of the universe. Many ask if Cornelius was an atheist. Belief in God was

a prerequisite for membership in the Masonic Order. Harnett was a Grand Master, meeting with local members to discuss matters of the day. He was also a vestryman. Enlightenment ideas informed his way of relating to his civic responsibilities and to God.

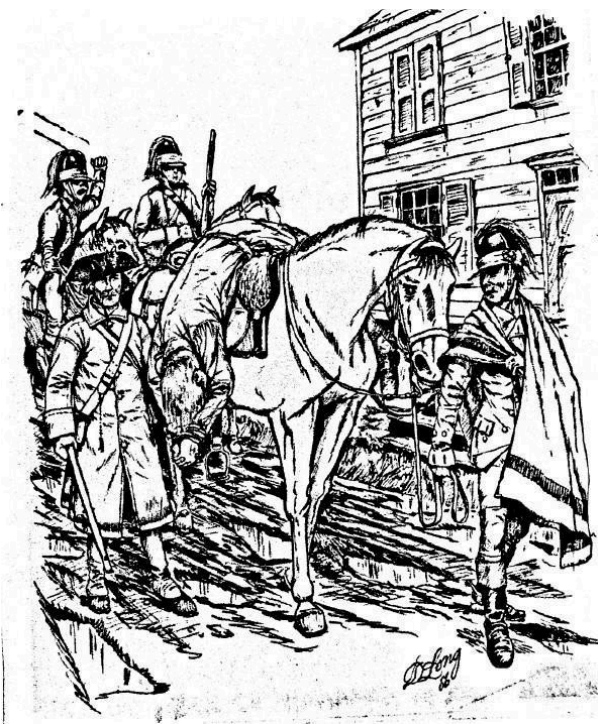
In 1776 Harnett was President of the Provincial Congress meeting in Halifax. As de facto governor of the colony, when the Declaration of Independence arrived from Philadelphia, he read the words for the first time in North Carolina to a cheering crowd. In 1777 he was elected to the Continental Congress and reluctantly set out on the long journey to Philadelphia and months of separation from hearth and home.

British forces entered Wilmington unopposed in 1781 under the command of the pompous hothead Major James Craig. Harnett was *Most Wanted*. He was

captured, forced by Craig's marauders to walk tethered behind a horse until he fell from exhaustion, then bound hand and foot, thrown over the back of the horse "like a sack of meal" and into a roofless prison. Dr. Armand John deRosset, II, then a boy of fourteen, witnessed this cruelty to a kind man who had sacrificed everything for his beliefs. He said the memory haunted him for the rest of his life.

When it became obvious that Harnett was dying of exposure, the townspeople - patriots and loyalists alike - appealed to the British for his release. He died at

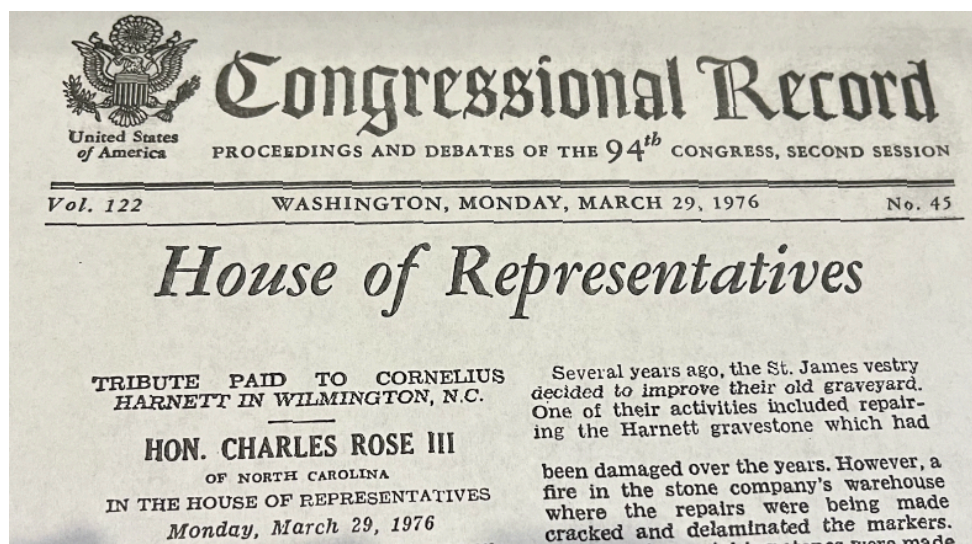
Maynard three days after Lord Cornwallis left for Yorktown, the only man buried in this graveyard who sacrificed his personal wealth and his life in the cause of independence.



In a modern-day story of devotion, Mrs. Betsy Fensel and Mrs. Lizzie Broadfoot, finding Harnett's gravestone damaged beyond repair, resolved to honor him by replacing it with an exact copy of the original. Unable to find the red sandstone required, they appealed to architect Leslie N. Boney, Jr. He contacted firms in several states, finding the quarry in Massachusetts that had produced the original stone only to learn it had closed long before. His search for a match reached a former head of the Royal Institute of British Architects, who got in touch with London's Royal Geological Museum. Samples were reviewed, but none was right.

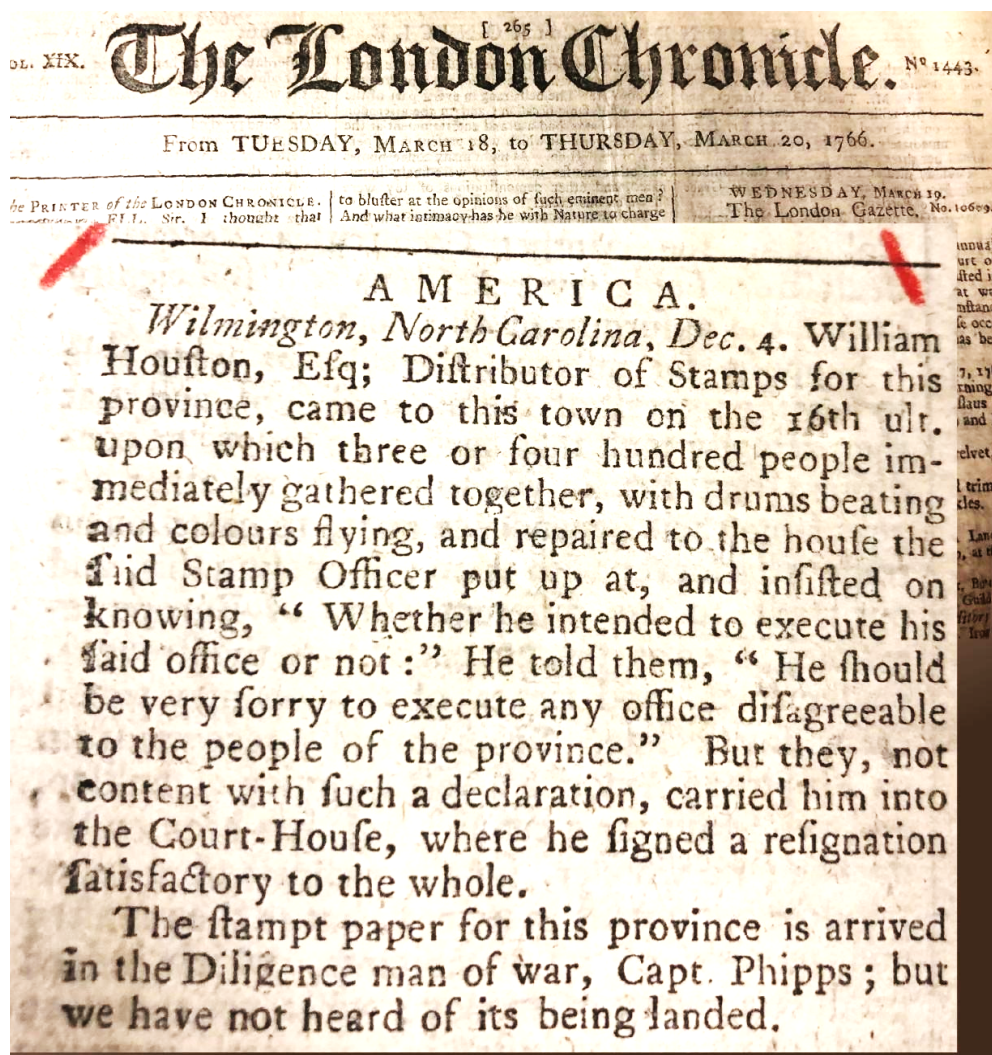
Then Mr. Boney turned to N.C. Congressman Charlie Rose. He contacted the Speaker of the House, Thomas O'Neill, who was from the East Long Meadow area where the original quarry was located. They learned that some of the stone had been saved and was available in a contractor's shop in Newark!

Rubbings of Harnett's ruined stone were sent to New Jersey. A new stone was quickly cut, expertly carved, and placed where the first one had stood. It should be good for another three hundred years, given the advances that have been made in caring for gravestones. The story was told before the House of Representatives by Mr. Rose and was written into the Congressional Record for March 29, 1976, to "reaffirm, in our bicentennial year, the spirit of cooperation among the states evident during the early days of our country."



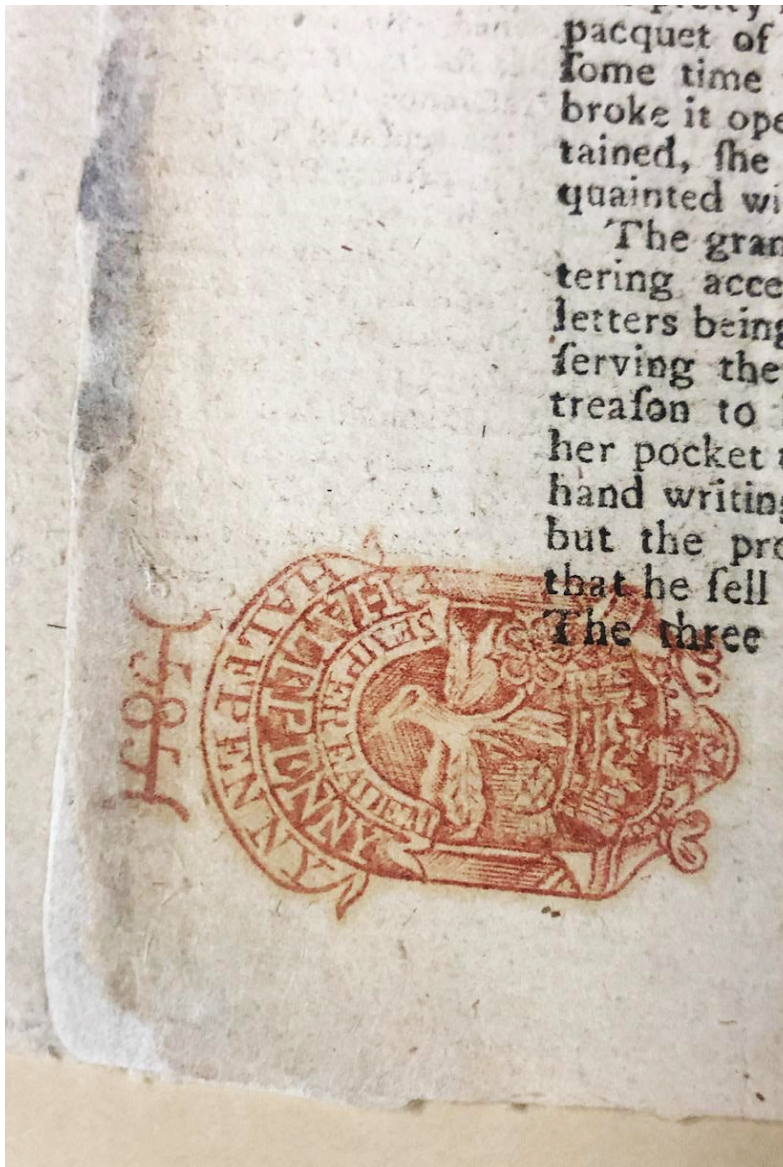


The obelisk in the nearby intersection honors Cornelius Harnett and commemorates the first open and armed defiance by American colonists of the British monarch's authority manifested in the detested Stamp Act. Harnett's Irish spirit was angered at the violation of colonists' rights by taxation without representation. They saw no reason why they should be taxed to pay for unwelcome British soldiers housed in their homeland. When the stamp paper arrived in Wilmington Harnett was surely in the midst of the defiant crowd of several hundred men who gathered, forced the stamp officer to resign, and burned an effigy of "Liberty", symbolizing its death at the hands of Parliament. This was so shocking to the British mind that events in a tiny town four thousand miles from London were reported in their paper when the news reached England three months later.



By then, three ships had been seized in the port of Brunswick for not having stamped papers showing that the tax had been paid. Enraged, a thousand "Sons of Liberty" from Wilmington and the surrounding area armed themselves, some with only pitchforks and shovels, and marched with Harnett sixteen miles south to the home of Royal Governor William Tryon at Russellborough, near Orton Plantation. They confiscated the stamp paper and required the Port

Collector to swear an oath that he would not interfere with trade and commerce by enforcing the Act. THAT WAS ON FEBRUARY 21, 1766 - EIGHT YEARS BEFORE THE BOSTON TEA PARTY! Boston had the better press agent!



The Troublesome Stamp



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At the Fourth Street corner of the graveyard is a granite marker for Thomas Godfrey, a budding poet and playwright. He was visiting on Masonboro Sound with Brigadier General Hugh Waddell, Caleb Grainger, and other friends he had made while serving in the French and Indian War. Godfrey finished his classical tragedy, *The Prince of Parthia*, shortly before succumbing to a fatal fever. His friends preserved the manuscript and encouraged its production by a professional theater company in Philadelphia, his hometown. The play has been performed here at Thalian Hall and by the UNCW Players.

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Set against the east wall of the Great Hall is the 1771 box ledger of Dr. Samuel Green. It is noteworthy that he was buried the year the original church building was finished. The location of his grave helps determine the colonial church's footprint. In the lower right corner of the stone are the letters, "R Hart...NY," for Richard Hartshorne, the best-known stonecutter of Connecticut and N.Y.. His style featured elegant lettering with no flourishes or decorative images.

Dr. Green emigrated from Liverpool before 1748, when he treated burn victims of the Spanish privateers' attack on Brunswick. A town commissioner, he "*practiced Physick and Surgery*" here for thirty years. His plantation *Greenfields* is today Greenfield Park, and his plantation *Pine Savannah* is the Pine Valley subdivision. His summer home, *Green Hall*, stood on a hill above Greenville Sound, which was also named for him.

Dr. Green's grandson was ordained at St. James Church in 1823. When the Rev. William Mercer Green was chaplain at his alma mater, Chapel Hill, he asked Thomas U. Walter, designer of the 1840 St. James Church, to draw a plan for the first Chapel of the Cross, built adjacent to the campus. It is part of today's larger building, designed by Hobart Upjohn, who designed our Great Hall in 1924. As the first Episcopal Bishop of Tennessee in 1867, the Very Rev. Dr. Green founded, named, and was chancellor of the University of the South at Sewanee.

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South of Dr. Green's grave is an upright granite marker for Mary Baker Eddy's first husband, a victim of the 1844 yellow fever epidemic. Major (not a military title) George Washington Glover, recently arrived from finishing construction work in Savannah, Ga., lost all his building supplies in a warehouse fire. The Masons of St. John's Lodge arranged for their fellow Mason's burial in St. James' graveyard. Grand Master Thomas Brown, a silversmith, escorted his penniless young wife, who was expecting their first child, to her home in New Hampshire. She later founded the Christian Science Church. This memorial was erected in gratitude for the kindness shown to her by the Masons in her time of great need.

St. John's Masonic Lodge was the first in North Carolina, chartered in 1754. By 1803 the Masons had built a new lodge on Orange Street. In their membership were the "Who's Who" of colonial Wilmington. Their gatherings often took place at members' summer homes on the sound. That area came to be called Masonboro.

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Next to Glover's memorial lies Colonel Thomas Lloyd, a Philadelphia native, another of the twenty-four *physics* in the town before 1778. This was an amazing number considering that there were fewer than three thousand residents in the area, two-thirds of whom were slaves. Illnesses brought into the port by sailing vessels kept them busy. Lloyd treated smallpox in the 1776 epidemic. He also served as justice of the peace, refused to sit on Royal Governor William Tryon's Council, and marched with Harnett in the Stamp Tax Rebellion.

Most of the early practitioners of the medical arts were not trained in medical schools. They spent three to seven years in an apprenticeship with an established *physic* - watching, assisting, and studying his few medical tomes, as books were rare and treasured. With mortar and pestle, lancets, and jars of leeches, the apprentice learned to compound medicines from local plants, dress wounds, set bones, pull teeth, and bleed patients. He often began as an apothecary. Every



home had a medicine box that was kept supplied by the *physic*.

In 1735 Wilmington was blessed to have the first classically trained doctor in North Carolina, Armand John deRosset, II, M.D. His 1720 diploma from the University of Basel, Switzerland, is in the UNC library in Chapel Hill. Forty years later there were two hundred “physicians” in the thirteen colonies. Only fifty-five were M.D.s. Four of those were deRossets, all dedicated members of St. James Church.

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There is a stone bench where the walk turns down the side of the Great Hall. Beside it is a bronze plaque placed by the Fayetteville Independent Light Infantry to commemorate their service in the War of 1812. They joined militias from many towns to protect North Carolina’s most important port. Many attended services at St. James during their deployment here. When they returned home, they were instrumental in founding Saint John’s Episcopal Church in Fayetteville.

The FILI placed markers on the graves of four War of 1812 veterans. Just across the walk lies Richard Lloyd, a Wilmington dry goods merchant and grocer. 4th Corporal of the New Hanover Militia Company, he was called to active duty in July and August 1813, in response to the British invasion of Ocracoke Island. His pay voucher for \$16.50 is in the FILI Museum in Fayetteville.

At the west end of the brick walk is the grave of Joshua Winslow Cochran. His family moved here from Fayetteville when President Thomas Jefferson appointed his father Collector of Customs. At sixteen Joshua was commissioned a midshipman in the US Navy. After the war he practiced law and bought the *Wilmington Advertiser*, planning to publish the newspaper with a Whig slant. That project was not realized, as he died suddenly of *bilious fever*, a euphemism for malaria or yellow fever used to avoid alarming the populace.

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Around the building corner lies John Cholwell, *periwig maker*, one of three in town, whose shops were on Dock Street. Theirs was essential work, as wigs covered baldness, sores, and scars, and were status symbols. Wonder how many orders were for “big wigs” in early Wilmington?! Cholwell’s pew was in the gallery of the 1771 church, which stood a little north of his grave.



Facing the building wall is an elegant slate stone with a neoclassical motif of urn, weeping willow, and fluted borders that was popular in Salem, Massachusetts, circa 1808. Captain Ephraim Symonds was born there. The stone was found to be fully ten feet long when it was lifted above ground recently to have its footing redone.

This heart-wrenching verse had sunk beneath the sand:

*Come hither all ye tenderest souls that know*

*The heights of fondness and the depths of woe*

*Two happy souls made intimately one:*

*And felt a parting stroke 'tis you must tell*

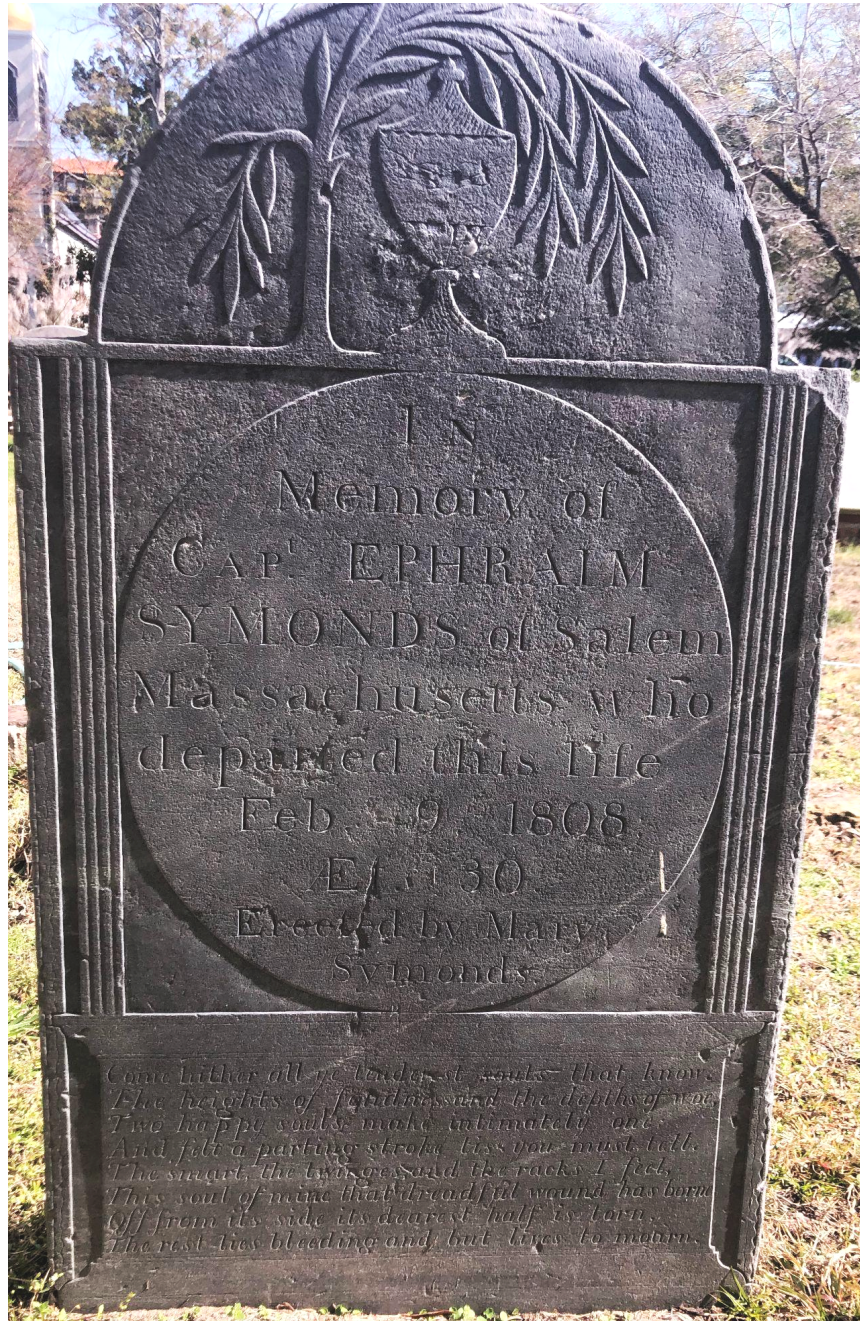
*The smart, the twinges, and the racks I feel*

*This soul of mine that dreadful wound has borne*

*Off from its side its dearest half is torn,*

*The rest lies bleeding and but lives to mourn.*

Mary Symonds lived a long life in Massachusetts with her son, Ephraim Mulliken Symonds (source: Massachusetts, U.S., Town and Vital Records, 1620-1988).



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Against the building wall, with markers for his service in the Revolution and the War of 1812, is the grave of Captain Thomas Callender, the only man in the graveyard who was actually a soldier in the Revolutionary War. Born in Boston, he was in his teens when he fought with George Washington and the First N.C. Continental Regiment at the battles of Brandywine, Germantown, Monmouth, and the siege of Charleston, S.C., where he was imprisoned with his unit. After his release, he settled in Wilmington.

During the War of 1812, Callender at fifty-eight again served his country, as captain of militia units massed here. He was for many years the city clerk, a vestryman, and the leader of the choir until shortly before his death at seventy-five. His only surviving child laid him to rest beside her mother in the graveyard of the church he served so faithfully. The stone for his wife Mary, long disintegrated, bore the names of five of their seven children who died within six years of each other, before her death at forty-two.

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Along with the stories of men honored here are the untold stories of the bravery and industry of the women who made their exploits possible. There was endless labor for wives, who tended the animals and kept children fed, clothed, and nursed through numerous illnesses while their husbands were town-and-nation-building.

Bearing their children was so often a death sentence. What must it have been like to endure repeated pregnancies without adequate medical care or sanitation, through winter cold, relentless humid summer heat, mosquitoes, and recurring plagues of yellow fever and malaria?! There are eight women buried here with their newborns. One of the ledgers set close together just across



from the door into the Great Hall is for Harriet Greer, forty-three. Her daughter lived, as did the baby of Mary Davis, age eighteen, who is buried a few steps farther east near the obelisk. Their similar inscriptions read:

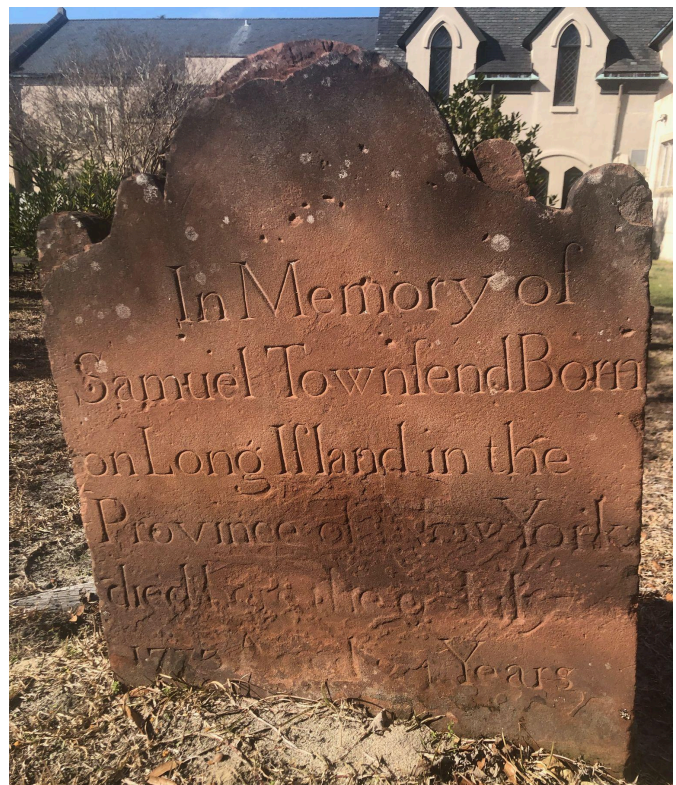
*Lo where this stone in silence weeps,  
A friend, a wife, a mother sleeps HER infant image here below  
Lies (Mary's says "sits", suggesting a slightly  
older child) smiling in its father's woe.*

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Southwest of the obelisk near the Fourth Street gate is a small red stone about which there was no information for many years. It reads:

*In Memory of  
Samuel Townsend  
Born on Long Island  
in the Province of New York  
died here the 9th July 1773  
aged 24 Years*

Nothing else. Local histories did not mention a Samuel Townsend. Who was he? How did he come to be buried here? (This was before 1998, before one could google almost any topic and get information in an instant.)



One hot summer afternoon, a striking young woman came to the church office looking for Samuel's grave. She and her co-author had just published a book about his illustrious Oyster Bay, N.Y., family! Along with their many civic activities, the Townsends were importers who owned five transatlantic-worthy ships.

Samuel supplied commission merchants all along the coast with cotton, flour, tea, pork, flaxseed, tar, tobacco, and rum. When he succumbed to one of Wilmington's highly contagious fevers, there was no way to get his body home without endangering many people, so he was interred here. No other member of his family is known to have visited Wilmington, but wrought iron fencing, probably from his oldest brother's foundry, once surrounded his burial plot.

*Espionage and Enslavement In The Revolution*, by Claire Bellerjeau and Tiffany Brooks, includes an account of the Townsends' business dealings with the firm of Ancrum, Forster, and Brice in the uncertain and chaotic war years. As was the case for many, the Townsends lost heavily during the conflict. An older brother, Robert, sought the help of Henry Toomer, a member of the Wilmington Commission that worked to settle disputes between merchants and debtors in an effort to recover losses, often with little success.

Founding father and patriot John Ancrum had been killed by the British when they destroyed his plantation. His grave was found under Market Street some years ago when there was a cave-in near the corner with Fourth. John Forster had been killed while serving as commissary for patriot units. Francis Brice, the remaining partner, who had left Wilmington with the British when Cornwallis went to Yorktown, pledged to repay a sizable sum to the Townsends within a year, but absconded to Jamaica. He returned to recover his confiscated property, but was banished. Returning a second time, he married Elizabeth, the well-off only child of Marmaduke Jones, but never paid the Townsends what he had promised.

Not until the 1920s, some 80 years after Robert's death, did it come to light that he, operating under the alias "Culper, Jr.", had been a member of President Washington's spy ring, indeed the leader of New York City's intelligence operation so vital to the winning of the war. He was probably responsible for

saving Washington's life by foiling an early coup attempt. At great risk to himself, Robert for years supplied information about British troop movements, the counterfeiting of U.S. currency, and double agents, but even Washington himself never knew his identity.

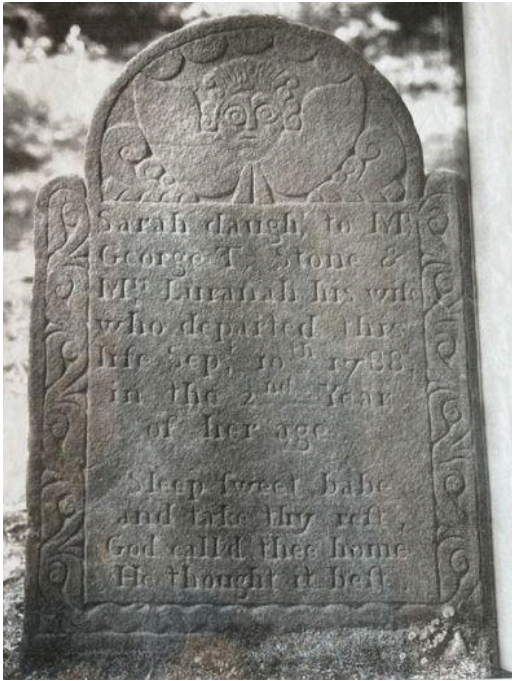
*Espionage and Enslavement*, the scrupulously researched history of the Townsend family's complex and challenging life, is intertwined with the intriguing story of strong-minded Liss, born into slavery in the Townsend household. Promised her freedom, she slipped away with the British occupiers of the family's home. Betrayed, her two-year-old mulatto son forcefully taken from her, she was sold and imprisoned in the cargo hold of a ship bound for Charleston, S.C.

Robert and James Townsend located Liss' child and took him into their care. After a two-year search they found Liss, bought her from the last of five southern masters, and reunited her with her child. Once the owners of the most slaves in Queens County, the Townsend family became some of the earliest abolitionists in New York. Attorney Robert used his knowledge of N.Y.'s complicated manumission laws to free Liss, her son, and many others from the inhumane institution of slavery.

Author Clair Bellerjeau, formerly Director of Education at Raynham Hall Museum in Oyster Bay, housed in the 1840 Townsend homestead, has established a website, [clairebellerjeau@rememberliss.org](mailto:clairebellerjeau@rememberliss.org), which welcomes donations to support the ongoing work of promoting, through education and raising awareness, the just treatment of all people who have no voice.

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South of the Townsend marker is a slate marker for Sarah Stone, one of three 1788 memorials created by Josiah Manning, the most successful stonecutter in eastern Connecticut. Cloudlike shapes surround a rather humorous *soul head* with tightly coiled hair, eyes like fried eggs, and the preaching tabs of a cleric. Stylized flowers border the sweet inscription for a baby daughter.

East of the circle of benches is the earliest stone here, placed in 1757 for nineteen-year-old William Hunt. A cherubic *soul head* with softly rounded features and graceful wings fills the tympanum. The border has tulips in threes, symbolic of the Trinity. *Price engravor* is inscribed in a scalloped arch below, for Ebenezer Price of Elizabethtown, New Jersey, the boy's home. The dour inscription, typical of that era, is at odds with the whimsical design. Did William perhaps run away to see the world aboard a ship that stopped here after the crew fell ill with malaria or a fever?

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Midway in the long straight row to the right is the marble marker of Frances Wilkinson, eighteen, and her son, eight days old. The baby's grandfather, William Wilkinson, was a business partner of Cornelius Harnett in the rum trade. They had a distillery and a sloop for transporting sugar from the West Indies. Although he owned pew thirty-one in the Anglican church, Wilkinson left funds in his will to build a Presbyterian church. Before the Revolutionary War, all landowners paid a tax for the support of the Church of England, regardless of their religious preference.

This is the second of the 1788 stones by Josiah Manning, a marble rectangle with a similar, but more primitive, soul head with unrelieved wings. By contrast, Joseph Gautier's 1801 marble marker farther along the row, signed *Witzel and Cahoon, NY*, has an elegant urn draped in deeply carved folds of fabric. It is the height of neoclassical refinement, which was in vogue for turn-of-the-century gravestones.



Thomas Gautier, the boy's father, is named on the nearby obelisk. He was a midshipman in the British Royal Navy before emigrating and joining the US Navy. During the 1812 war he patrolled the coast and inspected ships entering the Pamlico, Neuse, and Cape Fear rivers. By 1817 he was piloting the *Prometheus*, a genuine innovation, the first steam-driven paddle wheeler to carry passengers and goods on the Cape Fear.

A descendant researching Thomas Gautier's history sent an account of his first marriage to a much older, wealthy woman. Concerned that he seemed in poor health, she left everything in trust

for him, arranging for executors to handle his affairs after her death. Within the year Thomas had recovered, married a much younger woman, and enjoyed the first wife's largesse until his death at age eighty-four. Ironically, the new wife lost two babies in two years and died an early death.

Another Gautier grave has a French inscription. It says that Ann Boudet was born in Rochefort, France. The Gautiers were Huguenots, Calvinist Protestants who, like the prominent deRosset family, left France for England after the 1685 Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and later immigrated to America. What a loss for France!

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A little east of the end of this straight row is an odd set of stones for four children in the Muter family (Muter's Alley runs from Dock to Front near Orange Street) who died within five years. Two deaths in eight days suggest one of the communicable diseases that were often fatal to children in early Wilmington. Thirty children under the age of six are buried in this small graveyard. Parish records list them dying of measles, mumps, and whooping cough; scarlet, bilious, and brain fever (meningitis); putrid throat (strep), lockjaw (tetanus), and worms!

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Turn and walk toward the SW corner of the yard. Note in passing the date and design of the slate marker of William Millor, *an honest & inoffensive man*. His is the third of the 1788 stones by Josiah Manning. The stones here were cut elsewhere, as this area has no native stone. They could be carved and shipped wherever they were wanted for as little as three dollars plus an inscription fee of a dollar or less per letter. By the 1850s large marble obelisks with ornate bases could be ordered from Sears Roebuck and Co. for twenty-five dollars!

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A small red sandstone marker south of the joined brick vaults marks the grave of Grainger Wright, two months old, who died in 1795, and his brother Joshua, fifteen months, who died two years later. Their Quaker grandfather was one of Wilmington's four founders in 1739. Wrightsville Beach is named for their father's family, Bradley Creek for their mother's.

Susan and Judge Joshua Grainger Wright lived in the Burgwin-Wright House at Third and Market streets and had a summer home on Bradley Creek, which Susan named Mt. Lebanon. It is said that no one was ever turned away hungry from her door. They are great-grandparents of Bishop Robert Strange, who is buried under the chancel of the church, as is Bishop Thomas Wright, and Bishop Thomas Atkinson, whose diplomacy kept the National Episcopal Church from splitting into northern and southern factions after the War Between the States.

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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 forty-nine was listed as bilious fever, i.e., mosquito-borne malaria or the dreaded yellow fever. His plain stone bears this elegant tribute:

*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.*

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The St. James Parish Register of burials for 1829 lists adults dying of consumption (tuberculosis), apoplexy (stroke), dropsy (congestive heart failure), lockjaw (tetanus), dysentery, seasickness, childbed, gunshot, a fall from a horse, intemperance - *a tragic death* - and influenza. It is a wonder that Sarah Bowdish lived to be eighty-four and John Nutt eighty-seven.

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Opposite Mr. Dall find the upright marble stone of Elizabeth Brice, who died in 1796, two days after her newborn son. Her husband Francis was the town tax collector, secretary of the Committee of Public Safety, and commissioner of the Port of Wilmington, but he joined the British and left under the protection of Lord Cornwallis in 1781, bound for Yorktown. After a failed effort to regain citizenship, he was banished from North Carolina, his property confiscated.

Elizabeth was the only daughter of Marmaduke Jones, Esq., Attorney General of the province of N.C. and a member of Royal Governor Arthur Dobbs' Council. William Hooper, signer of the Declaration of Independence for North Carolina, said, "I have met him, and he is the greatest coxcomb alive!"

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Under the wide diamond-paned window of the Bridgers Building is the *Henry Toomer & Charles Jewkes's Family Vault 1786*. Toomer, owner of pew thirty-two in the first church, was justice of the peace, served on the Safety Committee, as county coroner, and as a commissary for North Carolina units during the Revolution. Probably the town's

richest man in his time, he buried three wives and died in 1799, leaving a large estate: a brick *mansion* on Toomer's Alley (from Front to Second streets between Market and Princess - now a parking lot); two plantations and forty-five slaves; a summer home on the sound and Dorsey's Tavern. It was at Dorsey's Tavern that President

Washington, a Mason himself, was hosted by Wilmington's Masons during his 1791 Southern Tour, before attending a gala ball with bonfire and fireworks.

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The appearance of the "Father of the Country" was a great event for every town George Washington visited. Henry Toomer and the Light Horse Dragoons rode out to meet his entourage twelve miles northeast of town near Cornelius Harnett's Poplar Grove Plantation on The King's Highway, as US 17 was called then. They escorted Washington to the outskirts of town where an official party of local dignitaries was waiting to greet him.

It was Easter Day afternoon. Washington was making a grueling tour of the thirteen colonies to begin forging them into one nation. Always conscious of the effect of his person, he surely donned his buff and navy blue military regalia before mounting his great white steed, Prescott, and leading the parade into town. He was followed by his gleaming white carriage with four matching brown horses driven by red-liveried attendants. Mounted trumpeters heralded his arrival and cannons boomed in salute. What a moving moment it must have been for people lining the way to hail the first president of the United States of America!

The next morning when Washington emerged from his quarters, he was met by thirteen young girls in white dresses who went before him, scattering flower petals in his path as he walked to the courthouse for welcoming speeches by more town dignitaries. The tall hero, standing head and shoulders above most men of his day, showed pleasure at everything done in his honor, but confided to his diary that the terrain from New Bern was the most barren he had ever beheld, and that Wilmington was "*no more than a bed of white sand!*"

After nights of bad lodgings and worse food along the way, he was delighted with his stay at the widow Quince's house at Front and Market streets. Quince's Alley is there today, just south of Market. Washington particularly admired the sixty-five "beautifully dressed" ladies presented to him at a second ball held at

the new Assembly Hall on Front Street between Orange and Ann.

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Charles Jewkes, whose family shared the vault with Toomer's, was a partner of John Burgwin in his shipping and mercantile businesses. Educated at Eton and Oxford, Burgwin, a second son, arrived in Wilmington, via Charleston, in 1741. He soon married Margaret, the only child of Captain Roger Haynes. Her maternal grandfather, the Reverend Richard Marsden, had held services in the Cape Fear area before Saint James Parish was established in 1729.

Burgwin built a fine plantation house approached by a three-mile cedar-lined drive on property left to Margaret by her mother. It adjoined her family's plantation, Castle Haynes, which further enriched John when she died childless in 1771, shortly after he built the townhouse at Third and Market streets.

In the early days of the Revolutionary War, when Patriots were focused on supporting the cause of freedom and liberty, Burgwin was giving large parties at the Hermitage, as he had ironically named his plantation. Reportedly Madeira was the favored refreshment. One evening he suffered a badly broken leg while playing "Blind Man's Bluff" and was soon off to England, ostensibly for special medical attention unavailable here.

Jewkes moved his family into the townhouse to protect it from confiscation by the British, but to no avail. Cornwallis chose it for his eighteen-day stay, and the tyrannical Major Craig was in residence when Cornwallis left him in charge and set out for Yorktown. Burgwin was abroad for the duration of the war.

When he returned to reclaim his property, he brought with him a baby son and a new wife who made the trip in the ninth month of pregnancy, giving birth to her second child the very night they landed in Charleston. Frail Elizabeth survived that ordeal, but died after the birth of a third child. Her parents raised the three children at their home in England. When daughter Eliza was eighteen she returned to Wilmington to be with her father in his last years. He had sold the townhouse to the Wrights and lived at the Hermitage until his death in



1803. He was buried in the family graveyard there, covered over now by a development of ranch-style houses.

Shortly after his death, Eliza eloped with a Dr. Clitherall who had not been in her father's good graces. She bore him eight children - six lived to adulthood - and often kept a school to help with expenses, as her husband never seemed able to adequately provide for his family. They moved back to Wilmington from his practice in Alabama on news of his mother's death and burial at St. James.

Parish records list George's death from intemperance when he was only forty-nine. Eliza's handwritten diary, kept in the North Carolina Room of our library, tells a touching story of the life of the daughter of one of the richest men in the province. A copy of his portrait by no less an artist than John Singleton Copley hangs in the Museum of Fine Art in Raleigh. In spite of the trials she endured, Eliza created a close, loving family and was generous and gracious to everyone.

The North Carolina Society of the Colonial Dames of America in North Carolina saved the Burgwin-Wright house from demolition in 1937. After an extensive restoration, the Georgian-style house was opened to the public in 1951. It has since been an inspiration for the mostly successful effort to preserve Wilmington's historic residential district.

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Charles Jewkes' summer home on Greenville Sound was part of a neighborhood where families who could, escaped the heat, humidity, and dreaded fevers that periodically ravaged the town in summer. Children of the Bradley, Wright, Grainger, Toomer, Hostler, Green, and other families played together and often married the friends they had grown up with. Widowers married widows. The same names were given from family to family, making it confusing now to know who's who in the Wilmington "cousinhood". Shandy Hall on Greenville Sound, owned by several of these families through the years, sold in 2020 for over a million and a half dollars and was demolished! After over 200 years of lazy

summer memories along that hill, the house named for the enigmatic hero Tristram Shandy, of Laurence Sterne's popular novels', is no more.

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Three brick barrel vaults nearby are a complete mystery, in spite of the marble plaque on the east side of the wall joining them. They are unique in Wilmington and rare in the state, found mostly in coastal areas. Only for the affluent, they were expensive to build, requiring handmade bricks laid by a skilled mason, with walls and floor. Vaults this large accommodate extended families, with caskets and corpses in shrouds or winding sheets placed on wooden shelves attached to the walls. Openings on the west side of these vaults were resealed following each burial. It is tempting to think, because the Toomers and Jewkes families shared the fourth vault, that others of the "cousinhood" might have shared these.



After much analysis and research, the vaults were authentically restored by a benefactor whose ancestors were influential in the town's earliest years. The

family remains loyal to the church today.

An article in the *Wilmington Messenger* in 1902 described what was found when a barrel vault elsewhere in the yard needed repair. At a depth of almost eight feet, a man and a woman lay amid the remains of their coffins. Two tiny intact coffins and shelves once attached to the walls were atop the skeletons. Snail shells and their slime covered the floor.

One skeleton wore the remnants of a soldier's uniform with brass buttons dating from the Revolution or the earlier French and Indian War. A cartridge box was buckled around the waist. Lettering on the vault's marble plaque was illegible, partially obliterated, so the occupants remained unknown. The vault was not included in Elizabeth McKoy's 1939 list of graves. It may have been covered over when the Great Hall was built in 1924.

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For an incredibly heroic story, walk east from the vaults to the straight row of gravestones. In the middle of the row is the 1787 sandstone marker of Mary Bleakly and her nine-month-old son, who both died of one of the fevers Wilmington was infamous for in the 18th century. Widower John worked hard in his wine and grocery business and used his profits to purchase warehouses and rental dwellings on the river, before dying of a fever himself when his first son was sixteen.



Captain Johnston Bleakly

He had entrusted Johnston to the care of his longtime Irish friend, attorney Edward Jones. Neither Mary nor John could



ever know that Johnston, a toddler whom they probably chased about the deck when they sailed from Ireland, would be North Carolina's dashing naval hero of the War of 1812.

The University of North Carolina student was described by Mrs. Jones as rather small, well made and handsome, with very black hair and eyes. She remembered the exceeding whiteness of his teeth and the brightness of those eyes, and said Johnston was grave and gentlemanly in his deportment, cheerful and easy at home. In his second year at the university, his inheritance went up in flames as Wilmington's riverfront burned yet again. The Jones wanted to help him finish his education, but he wanted to go to sea.

Johnston enlisted in the Navy as a midshipman and soon distinguished himself. During the War of 1812, he was given command of a new 22-gun sloop, the *Wasp*. On his first cruise out he captured, burned, or sank fourteen British ships in five months. That was an amazing feat, as many commanders did not take a single enemy vessel in their entire careers.

To honor his achievement North Carolina had a medal struck, a silver saber made for him, and planned a presentation ceremony, but he never returned. He vanished with his 173-man crew somewhere east of Madeira, leaving a wife and a baby daughter he had never seen. A fellow officer said of Johnston Bleakly that he was as calm and courteous under fire as at the dinner table.

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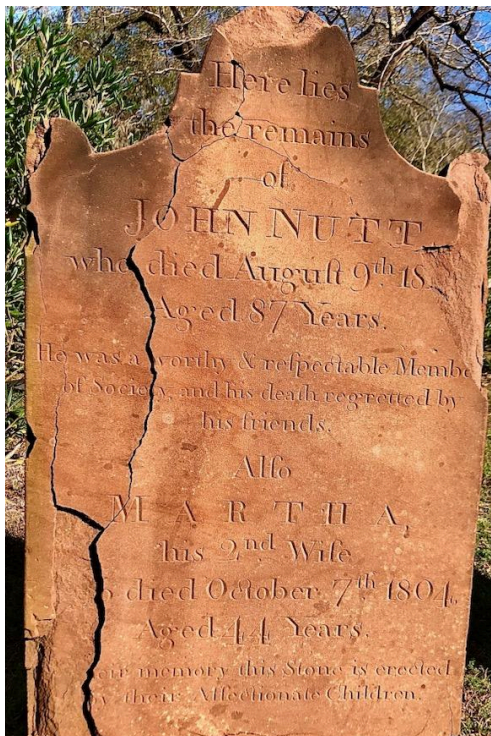
Turn north toward Market Street and walk past four low box ledgers. On the right is the rapidly disintegrating red sandstone marker of John Nutt, the oldest man buried here. He was born in London in 1723, the second son of a wealthy merchant. England's Law of Primogeniture dictated that first sons inherit the family estate, so in addition to his formal education, John had to prepare himself to earn a living. He apprenticed with a cabinetmaker. This presented another problem when young men began immigrating to the American colonies to seek their fortunes. Parliament forbade artisans to leave, saying their

skills were needed in England. Showing his independent spirit, John Nutt slipped away from his homeland forever on one of his father's merchant ships, packed in a crockery barrel until he was well out to sea.

Once in New York, unable to get funds from his family for fear of implicating them or being found out, John worked at his trade to supply his needs. By 1760 he had arrived in Wilmington, a growing coastal town with a busy port, and here he stayed. One of his Windsor chairs graces the east parlor of the Burgwin-Wright House, a gift from the Latimer family.



John prospered. He acquired property on the southwest corner of Princess between Second and Third streets, a lot south of Queen, another lot north of town where Nutt and Red Cross Streets meet, and a country place on a bluff above the Cape Fear River that adjoined Lilliput plantation near Orton.



In the second half of his life, John took a second wife. Martha was half his age. They had at least two children, and John continued in his independent ways. He appeared before the town commissioners to answer charges by John Burgwin and Henry Toomer that he sold rum to their slaves. Without protest, John paid the fine of two pounds ten shillings. Two centuries later his fifth great-grandson, a retired Bishop of Alabama who attends St. James, opined that it seems an act of kindness, given the harshness of lives lived in slavery.

There are five 18th and 19th century Nutt graves here, and more recent ones at Oakdale Cemetery. An effort is underway to replace John and Martha's stone in time for St. James' Tricentennial Year with a copy that can tell their story for three centuries more.

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In the long straight row east of the big obelisk near Perry Hall, next to the elegant marble memorial of Joseph Gautier, is the stone of Mary Wright Claypoole. Her brother was Judge Joshua Grainger Wright who purchased John Burgwin's townhouse at Third and Market. Mary lived with the family, perhaps to help her sister-in-law Susan Bradley, who had thirteen children in nineteen years and buried five in infancy.

She was with them until her marriage to Dr. William Claypoole, who came from Philadelphia c. 1782 and built a house around the block on Dock Street. He was a physician whose family arrived in America with their friend William Penn. Portraits of William's paternal great-grandparents grace a sitting room in the Burgwin-Wright house, given by his descendant Sue Claypoole Lovering, a lifelong member of St. James Church.





Mary and William had two sons who died in infancy. Two-year-old *Miss Polly's* stone is five graves north of her mother's. A fourth child, Ann Grainger, was a year old when her mother died at sea at age 27. Claypoole, who had practiced medicine here only five years, closed his office. He left his estate to baby Ann, naming Mary's brothers her executors and guardians before dying that same year in Fayetteville, N.C., where he was buried.

Ann was raised by her aunt and uncle in the Burgwin-Wright House and married banker Henry Hill. His home was across Third Street next door to St James. Their daughter, Eliza Ann Hill, married her cousin Dr. William Augustus Wright, and also lived in the Hill house. Local historian Susan Block, in *Cape Fear Lost*, says about this generation of interrelated families: "the marriage of first cousins once removed turned two family trees into a forest .... First cousins must have crossed Third Street continually." The wonderful old Hill house, built before 1799, was purchased by the church in 1951. It had to be demolished when a much-needed education wing was built a year later.



Some people in the row with Mary Claypoole and Miss Polly, and some of those in the straight row west of the obelisk, were originally buried near the 1771 church. Fourteen graves were moved in 1892 when the site was chosen for the Bridgers Parish House, identifiable by its diamond-paned windows.

Two Vestry members are required to be present when graves are moved, but surely more sensitivity was needed in relocating these. Mary Claypoole was separated from her baby daughter. Capt. Callender and his wife, who had seven children together in life, were parted in death. Mary Callender's stone was

engraved with the names of five of their children who “*lay buried by her,*” as it said on her stone, so she was separated from her whole family.

Thanks to Miss Elizabeth McKoy’s work recording the inscriptions in 1939, the names and ages of Mary and her children are preserved. Her stone has since completely disintegrated. A footstone, but no grave, was found for Geo. Evans, husband of their daughter, Margaret. Thomas, husband and father, Revolutionary and 1812 War veteran, vestryman and choir leader, was left with the children alongside the wall of the new building.

The footstones were abandoned under the building when the graves were exhumed and relocated. In the 1930s workers making repairs found them and brought them out. Rather than being rejoined with their headstones, some were fixed to the base of the building wall, others set at random in the ground nearby. Maybe that’s the best place for them, as the stones are evidence that the graves, presumably in family plots, were originally close to the first St. James Church.



Elizabeth Francenia McKoy from the 1908 Converse College Yearbook, Spartanburg, S.C.

## IN MEMORIAM

St. James is deeply indebted to Elizabeth Francenia McKoy, communicant and local historian. In 1939, when most of the inscriptions were still legible, she recorded them and made a map of the graveyard. Without her work, we would know almost nothing about the people buried here. A model she constructed of the early church and burying ground is in the History Hall created by Tucker Whitesides upstairs in the Parish House. A model of early Wilmington Miss Elizabeth made is in the Cape Fear Museum. It shows where she reckoned the 1771 church and its graveyard were located.

The McKoy family was present in colonial Wilmington. William Berry McKoy attended Princeton and read law. He loved local flora, history, and genealogy, and was a Grand Master of the Masons. One of his four sons wrote *Wilmington, N.C.: Do You Remember When?*

Miss Elizabeth's maternal grandfather, Henry Bacon, Sr., lived on Third Street across from the First Presbyterian Church. He was the engineer who designed and installed the dam, known locally as *The Rocks*, to close New Inlet, which was causing the river channel to silt up, impeding shipping. Henry Bacon, Jr., her favorite uncle, designed the Lincoln Memorial in Washington and asked his friend Daniel Chester French to sculpt the seated Lincoln. Bacon's elegant gravestone stands close to Elizabeth's plain one in the family's plot in Oakdale. He also designed and oversaw the construction of our beautiful church house, originally built for the Donald MacRae family in 1901.

Miss Elizabeth was a dedicated woman who was born and lived her entire life in the Stick Style house on the SW corner of Third and Nun streets. Most days she walked downtown to the courthouse and spent hours in the basement Records

Room reading every page of every deed book of the town and recording every transaction. Once she was so engrossed that she was locked in and had to spend the night there.

Often on her way home she stopped for a visit with her dear friend, another historian, Ida Brooks Kellam, who lived in an Italianate jewel of a house on the east side of Third. She retired after forty years of teaching public school and began writing about local history. The two often collaborated.



It was Mrs. Kellam, celebrated for the accuracy of her research, who edited *The Wilmington Town Book 1743-78*, an invaluable source of information about the graveyard residents. Wilmington is the only town in the state to have such a book - handwritten minutes of 18th-century commissioners' meetings during the years when Wilmington was becoming the major port and largest city of the province.

The leatherbound book disappeared in 1920, not to be seen again until it just turned up forty-six years later. Mrs. Kellam and Donald Lennon of the State Department of Archives and History, after extensive research, added biographical notes about the people mentioned in the commissioners' meetings and published them in 1973. The original is in the Museum of History in Raleigh.

Miss Elizabeth wrote, *"I plead for the preservation of what adds to our charm, our dignity, our interest for visitors - the buildings that tell our history, the precious heritage from our forefathers."* The treasures she preserved for us are the identities of those forefathers and mothers buried here, together with the stories her friend's research tells of their part in founding the town and nation we call home.

February 2024  
Virginia Allen Callaway  
(Mrs. Samuel Clayton Callaway, Jr.)



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