

A Brief History
Of
St. George's Church



905 Princess Anne Street
Fredericksburg, Virginia

Established 1720

St. George's Episcopal Church

Historical Overview

The present St. George's Church building was built in 1849. It was the third to be constructed on this site. The first was a wooden structure built in the 1730s; the second, a more substantial brick building, was erected in 1815.

It was during the earliest period in St. George's history (1738) that the family of George Washington moved to the area. In time, they, as well as friends and relations famous in the founding of this country, attended services here.

Both the second and present buildings of St. George's were erected under the dynamic leadership of the Rev. Edward McGuire, who served as rector from 1813 (at age twenty, too young to be ordained) until 1858.

Throughout the more than 285 years of its existence, St. George's Church has been an active force in the community. During the Colonial Period, the Church was responsible by law for the welfare of orphans, widows, the sick and the needy in the community. From 1795 to 1802, the Church established male and female charity schools. Before the War Between the States, it operated Sunday Schools for black children. During the same war, it was used as a hospital and for revival meetings. Today, St. George's continues its commitment to the community by helping to create and support such organizations as the Fredericksburg Senior Citizens, Rappahannock Big Brothers/Sisters, the Interfaith Council, Hospice, the Homeless Shelter, and Hope House.

The current St George's Church building stands as a fine example of the Romanesque Revival style of architecture popular in the mid-19th century. It was designed and built by Robert Cary Long and H.R. Reynold of Baltimore.

The exterior focal points are the three main round-arched doors and windows. The central tower and steeple, long familiar city landmarks, have survived the ravages of time and war. The clock in the tower was set in place in 1851 (and restored in 1854 after fire damage) by the City of Fredericksburg, which is still responsible for its maintenance.

Inside, the plan follows the ancient basilica layout, with the nave and columns forming court-like space on three sides, and supporting a rear gallery.

The original "basic box" simplicity was first altered in 1876, with the removal of the high pulpit from the center of the east wall (where it stood above the Holy Table and reading desk). This opened the altar wall, allowing for the addition of the chancel. The lectern was placed on the left, the pulpit on the right. The lectern is in the shape of an eagle, the symbol of St. John the Evangelist and his Gospel of Love. In 1925, the choir and the organ were added to a newly expanded chancel area.

The side galleries were added in 1854, and the plain glass windows began to be replaced by stained glass with the dawning of the 20th Century.

Chronology of Highlights

In the History of St. George's Church

1720 - A land area designated as "St. George's Parish" is established by the House of Burgesses of Colonial Virginia. Eight years later, an act of the Assembly founded the City of Fredericksburg.

1732 - Plans are made and work begun on the Rappahannock Church within the parish on this site (later changing its name to St. George's Church) to serve the residents of the frontier port city.

1734 - The church is used for services while still under construction.

1738 - Members of the Washington family attend services here. Also William Paul (brother of John Paul Jones). Washington's brother, Charles, as well as his brother-in-law, Fielding Lewis, served as vestrymen.

1741 - The frame church building is completed.

1774 - William Paul is buried in a grave close to Faulkner Hall just inside the front gate and to the left.

1756 - Colonel Dandridge is buried in a tomb close to the church building near the bottom of the cemetery.

1776 - With American independence, the church-state ties are dissolved.

1789 - St. George's joins the new Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States.

1813 - Edward McGuire, age 20, becomes minister to the congregation with membership of "less than 12." Ordained in 1814, he served as rector for 45 years.

1815 - A new brick building replaces the old wood structure at a cost of \$11,000.

1849 - The present building is erected, designed in the Roman architectural style (rounded window and door frames), and in accordance with the ancient basilica plans (colonnaded aisles flanking a nave, and terminating in a semi-circular apse at the end of the oblong layout).

1854 - The side galleries are added during the repair following the July 19th fire. The town clock is installed in this decade.

1858 - The Reverend Mr. McGuire dies after 45 years as rector.

1859 - On July 3rd, Bishop Phillips Brooks, who wrote the words to the Christmas carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem," preached his first sermon in this church.

1862 - The church is hit by shell fire at least 25 times during the Battle of Fredericksburg in the War Between the States. The 4-piece communion set is stolen; one piece is retrieved almost immediately.

1863 - Religious revival meetings are held in the church by General Lee's troops.

1864 - The church is used as a hospital for some of the 10,000 Union soldiers injured in the Battle of the Wilderness.

1866 - A second piece of the stolen communion set is returned by the New York City police.

1869 - A third communion set piece is returned by a person living in Jamestown, New York.

1875 - A new organ is purchased with funds raised by the women of the church, with the old organ as partial payment. It is built by Henry Erben of New York, and placed in the rear gallery.

1885 - The "Ascension of Christ" window above the altar on the east wall is installed in honor of The Reverend Mr. McGuire. It was made in Heidelberg, GE.

1890s - A brass lectern and pulpit are installed in the chancel. The eagle shape is the symbol of St. John the Evangelist.

1900 - Just after the turn of the century, the brass cross, flower vases, and vested choir are installed, in keeping with permission granted by the church hierarchy.

1907 - The "Mary Ball Washington" window is installed, a gift of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Mary Ball Chapter. It depicts Deborah pleading with Barak to lead the Israelites against Sisera. It is done in the medieval style, with very small pieces of glass by Colgate Art Glass of New York.

1908 / 1909 - The "Wafer" (left) and "Incense" (right) windows are placed in the Narthex. Similarly designed windows (#6 and #7) are placed along the left aisle.

1912 - The first of the Tiffany signed windows (#8 on left), "Christ on the Road to Emmaus" (Luke 24), arrives. This is the one which appears as a single unit from the main floor to the top of the gallery.

1914 - A second Tiffany window (#2, "Angel in the Field of Lilies") is set in place.

1917 - A third Tiffany window (#4, "Angel of Victory" or "Guardian Angel of Medical Science") is given in honor of a local doctor.

1925 - The organ and choir are moved to the new chancel.

1927 - The organ console is moved to the present position, on the right side of the chancel.

1931 - The last missing piece of the stolen communion set is sold to the church for \$50 by someone in Massachusetts.

1943 - The "Nativity Scene" (window #5), by Wilbur Burnham, is designed in a 12th and 13th Century style. At the gallery level the window depicts the "Majesty of Christ."

1950 - New chests, a trumpet stop, and chimes are added to the organ. A rededication is held, commemorating the men and women who served in World War II.

1959 - McGuire Hall is built to house the Sunday School. This 3-level addition links the Parish Hall with the main church building.

1976 - The two-manual organ console is installed; it is relocated in the rear gallery in 1984.

1977 / 1980 - St. George's launches a \$200,000 restoration drive to preserve the historic church building and to conserve and protect the stained glass windows.

1983 / 1984 - Four pipe organs are purchased from Mary Washington College and installed in the rear gallery. The remainder is used in the rebuilding of the Chancel Organ (1985-1986).

1987 - An organ fund drive provided for total rebuilding and major additions to the chancel organ. The entire organ chamber is rebuilt and a three-manual console designed by organist Thomas Guthrie, who spearheaded the project.

1993 - The kitchen is completely renovated with funds raised by St. George's Episcopal Church Women (ECW).

1994 - Project "Aim 2000" is launched for a major restoration and rebuilding of the church. Work was completed in time to close out the 20th Century.

2002 - All Saints Day: 18th Century skeletal remains of three men, two women, and one teenage boy, unearthed the year before in the renovation of Market Square, are reburied in the Church Cemetery using the 1690 Anglican Prayer Book, reciting the prayers in Elizabethan English.

2003 - A Nave Renovation Task Force is established to work with an architect to recommend changes to restore the nave and enhance the worship space. In 2004, Mr. Jim Wollon, an architect from Baltimore, Maryland is chosen.

The Windows

Toward the end of the 19th Century, stained glass windows became popular facets of church decoration all over the country. The three altar windows on the east wall were the first stained glass additions installed at St. George's. Made in Heidelberg, Germany, they were presented in 1885 in memory of the Reverend Mr. McGuire. The center window, depicting the Ascension of Christ, is flanked on the left by the Apostle Peter and on the right by the Apostle John.

For easy identification, the windows at St. George's are numbered clockwise from the chancel end on the gospel (right) side of the church.

Window #1 - On the right aisle, the "Mary Ball Washington" window was installed in 1907. A gift of the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, it was made by the Colgate Glass Company of New York for \$1,000.

Window #2 - An "Angel Standing in a Field of Lilies," was created by the Tiffany Studios and installed in 1914. It is St. George's second Tiffany window.

Window #3 - The "Resurrection Angel at the Empty Tomb" depicts the Easter morning revelation of the three women coming to discover that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Window #4 - The "Angel of Victory" or "Guardian Angel of Medical Science" is the third Tiffany window. Dated in 1917, it was presented in honor of a local doctor.

Window #5 - The "Nativity" by Wilbur Burnham, dated 1943, is the most recent stained glass window given to the church. It is designed in a 12th-13th Century style, using very small pieces of glass. At the gallery level, it depicts the "Majesty of Christ."

Windows #6 and #7 - On the left aisle, the "Wafer" and the "Incense," installed in 1908-1909, are similar to the ones in the narthex of the same dates.

Window #8 - "Christ on the Road to Emmaus" was the first Tiffany window set in the church, presented in 1912. This window is the one which appears as a single unit from the main floor to the top of the gallery.

Window #9 - "Christ with the Little Children," made in 1907 by Colgate Glass at a cost of \$400-\$500, is a memorial to the late Marshall C. Hall, a long-time Sunday School superintendent at St. George's.

Window #10 - The "Trial of Paul before Agrippa," was the first window to be installed in the nave, circa 1903. It depicts the trial of Paul before Agrippa, as related in the Book of Acts, Chapter 26.

The Bell

The present bell is the third in the church's history. The original bell, given by Alexander Spotswood, Jr., was replaced in 1788. The second bell had to be replaced after a wind storm in 1856. The present bell was made in West Troy, New York, in 1858, by the Meneely's Company.

The Cemetery

When the City of Fredericksburg was established in 1728, two lots were set aside for the church and graveyard. The present church and graveyard occupy one of the original lots.

Although some graves were removed to make room for the present church building in 1849, others were not disturbed. There is an old tradition that says Colonel Fielding Lewis of Kenmore, Revolutionary War patriot and brother-in-law of George Washington, and his son are buried beneath the front steps of the church. The son, perhaps, resides in the cemetery but Fielding Lewis more likely lies at his son's plantation in Clarke County.

In 1892, the Ladies' Cemetery Guild of St. George's Church undertook to document the history of the cemetery. The earliest legible date to which they could attest without question was 1752, on the grave of an otherwise unknown John Jones. Two years later, there was an Archibald MacPherson, aged 49; and two years after that, Colonel John Dandridge, father of Martha Washington. William Paul, brother of John Paul Jones, was buried there in 1774. The latest ascertainable date is 1924, on the grave of Virginia B. Patton.

At the time of the ladies' survey, 164 tombstones could be identified; some had no dates, others, no ages. There are 35 known burials without stones.

As part of their project, the ladies spent \$150 of the funds raised for cleaning, landscaping, planting, and sowing the cemetery grounds. At the time of their report, they were planning to use the remainder of the money to "enclose the front of the cemetery with a handsome iron fence," which is still in service today.

More recently on All Saint's Day 2002, St Georgians reinterred the remains of six 18th Century Fredericksburg citizens dug up during the renovation of Market Square, using the "Office for Burial of the Dead" from the 1690 Anglican Prayer Book.

The Organ

The first record of an organ in the church is the one given by Dr. Charles Mortimer in 1796. In 1875, \$3,000 was raised by the women of the church to help purchase a new organ, to be placed in the rear gallery. This organ has several times been enlarged and moved. In 1950, new chests, a trumpet stop, and chimes were added. A rededication ceremony was then held, honoring the men and women who served in World War II.

Four pipe organs were purchased from Mary Washington College in 1983 and a complete rebuilding project was undertaken. As a result, there are now two consoles (one in the chancel and one in the rear gallery) and 46 ranks (sets) of pipes, all of which can be played from the chancel console. This installation, combined with the excellent acoustics, make the church a frequent concert hall for a variety of musical performances.

The Pews

When the church was built, the box pews were “sold” to families, and the money subscribed, together with the annual “pew rents,” went to pay for the building and church operations. Some of the names of early pew holders may still be seen engraved on the silver plates on the pew doors.

Seating Plan of St George’s Church in 1849

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|---|----------|------------------------------|-------|---------|------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 4 Mrs. J. D. Taylor \$350 | 3 J. B. Ficklen \$450 | 2 Mrs. Coalter Chs. Herndon \$460 | 1 Rector | Pews Sold April 23d, 1849 | Desk | Pulpit | Desk | Church partially burnt. July 1854 | 100 T. B. Barton \$405 | 99 R. W. Carter \$380 | 98 J. T. Lamay \$355 | 97 Mrs. Hunter \$310 |
| | | | | | Table | Chancel | | | | | | |

Communion Rail

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| 5 J. Coakely \$315 | Capt Hamilton \$385 | 72 |
| 6 M. H. Crump \$295 | Dr. J. B. Hall \$395 | 70 |
| 7 A. Goodwin \$295 | M. Forbes \$400 | 68 |
| 8 Mrs. J. R. Harrison \$320 | D. H. Gordon \$405 C. Wister Wallace | 66 |
| 9 Thos. Pratt \$310 | Misses Fitzhugh \$415 | 64 |
| 10 M. Slaughter \$325 | Dr. J. H. Wallace \$400 A.W. W. | 62 |
| 11 Mrs. V. Carmichael \$245 | W. K. Gordon \$400 Dr. A. G. Doggett | 60 |
| 12 Mrs. A. S. Hayes \$275 | H. Fitzhugh \$385 | 58 |
| 13 Dr. B. S. Herndon \$290 | T. F. Knox \$370 | 56 |
| 14 Mrs. J. B. Gray \$290 | T. F. Knox \$370 | 54 |
| 15 Dr. J. Cooke \$280 | Dr. J. G. Wallace \$360 | 52 |
| 16 W. C. I. Rothrock Robt. Hall \$230 | Dr. J. R. Taylor \$340 | 50 |
| 17 F. J. Wiatt \$255 | Y. Smith \$325 J. Z. Stansbury | 48 |
| 18 W. R. Mason, Jr. \$240 | Y. Smith \$325 Dr. W. M. Smith | 46 |
| 19 J. W. Johnston \$230 | Dr. Carmichael \$300 | 44 |
| 20 N. Fitzhugh \$225 | J. J. Berry \$280 | 42 |
| 21 Jane H. Dickinson \$225 | R. D. Minor \$255 | 40 |
| 22 Mrs. Ellis | Paul Clay \$255 | 38 |
| | \$200 Buck | |

| | | |
|---|--|----|
| 73 R. C. L. Moncure \$310 | Dr. Wm. Browne \$340 | 96 |
| 71 Miss Agnes Gray St. G. R. Fitzhugh \$390 | P. Goolrick \$275 | 95 |
| 69 Mrs. Scott Dr. Wm. S. Scott \$385 | Geo. B. Scott \$280 | 94 |
| 67 Mrs. F. Scott Mrs. Allen \$385 | Dr. H. Morson \$295 | 93 |
| 65 J. F. Scott J. P. Corbin \$400 | A. K. Phillips \$300 | 92 |
| 63 Hugh Scott B. S. Herndon \$400 | Benj. Temple \$290 A. B. Botts | 91 |
| 61 S. Phillips \$370 | W. S. Barton \$245 A. B. Botts, Sr. | 90 |
| 59 Jno. Hart \$360 | C. S. Scott \$245 | 89 |
| 57 Miss Jane Hart E. M. Braxton \$360 | H. B. Hoomes \$265 | 88 |
| 55 Jno. L. Chinn \$355 | Misses Pearson \$265 | 87 |
| 53 Wm. Pollock \$330 | W. H. Cunningham \$255 | 86 |
| 51 Capt. J. Rudd \$325 | J. J. Young \$230 | 85 |
| 49 J. M. Whittemore \$300 | T. H. Botts \$225 | 84 |
| 47 F. Slaughter \$290 | Duff Green \$225 | 83 |
| 45 J. W. Lucas \$300 | Miss Goodwin \$225 | 82 |
| 43 J. H. Roberts F. W. Johnston \$270 | Dr. Mason \$225 | 81 |
| 41 M. A. Blankman \$245 | J. Galleher \$225 | 80 |
| 39 Mrs. A. J. Fitzhugh \$225 | Jno. Minor \$200 | 79 |
| | Mrs. Smock | 78 |

Where there is a lower name on a pew, it is generally that of a subsequent purchaser.