

Museum Around the Corner

Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

In 1721, the Parish of Prince George was founded, but there wasn't a town here yet. A small wooden church was built out on Black River to serve the center of population in that area. Later, when Georgetown was founded and going well, a new church was planned for the town. In 1734, funds were being collected and materials gathered. For a few years, it was legislated that all funds paid at the Port of Entry went toward building the church, and bricks were collected from ships coming from England being used as ballast brick. It is thought that a small stream existed, running from the Sampit river through the neighborhoods and along Screven Street up to Broad Street. It may have been used to float the bricks up to the church. It finally opened its doors on August 16, 1747 and never closed its doors to worship in all this time.

There has been a lot written about Prince George Church, and docents in the church will tell visitors all about the dates and events in its 300 year history. Here are a few lesser known facts.

Did you know that the walls are 14 inches thick? That makes it pretty hard for sunlight to warm the interior during the winter, so the pews have high sides so that the parishioners could bring braziers with hot rocks or coals into their pew for warmth.

There has been an organ installed into the church since 1819. Another was installed in 1850. This one lasted almost 100 years. Various electric organs were rented or purchased until a new pipe organ was installed in 1968. In August of 2018, a new state of the art organ was installed that brings the beauty of music to a new level.

The British occupied the church from about June of 1780 to May of 1781. It is highly probable that they stabled their horses inside. Although we have no direct documentation, we know that they did this in churches all along the east coast. Some think the horses were placed inside the pews, but these are way too small to accommodate an animal of that size. It makes sense that the British barricaded the aisles and put their horses there. Another story often heard is there was a hoofprint in one of the floor tiles. One has not been found, and it would be difficult to imprint one in the hard surface of the tiles.

Another story is that the church was burned by the British. This is probably true to a certain extent. An account of 1788 states that the "British have stabled their horses in the Church and then burnt it. They have since got a roof upon it, but not half finished." According to Dalcho's Church History (1670-1820) "During the revolution the inside of this Church was burnt, but has since been completely repaired, and made more commodious and decent for the public worship of God."

The pews were purchased or rented by the year. They were considered private property and one could not walk into the Church and sit just anywhere as they can today. One pew at the very back was reserved for "Public". Since these pews were owned by the families, they felt safe in writing inscriptions and leaving messages inside and outside of their spaces. Every pew has some amount of scrawlings, and some have a great deal. Names, initials, dates, drawings of animals, ships, flags, and various symbols adorn pew walls. Several are quite faint and indecipherable while others are very clear. There is even a nursery rhyme that is unfinished and deviates a little from the original but seems to be tame. Not one inappropriate writing has been found.

By January of 1881 a significant growth of ivy covered the brick in the front of the church from the ground to the upper reaches of the steeple. An article in the Georgetown Enquirer of January 19, 1881 states the ivy was decades old at the time and that it frequently interfered with the clock. The article goes on to say, "I lean to the legend of its having been brought from Melrose Abbey in Scotland, rather than from Westminster; for I love to think its dark green leaves first breathed the breath of life in the purer air than that of dingy old London."

Prince George Parish will celebrate its 300th Anniversary in 2021. Many activities and events are planned and a book has been published about this venerable old church.