

St. Paul's Church

National Historic Site

Manhattan Sites

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior



Photo: Gray Williams

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so all may experience our heritage.

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

St. Paul's Church National Historic Site

consists of an 18th century church, used as a hospital during the American Revolution, an adjoining five acre cemetery with stones that date back to 1704, and a museum with exhibitions about local and national history. The site, located at the center of the colonial town of Eastchester, was the scene of the Election of 1733, which raised issues of Freedom of Religion and the Press.

Colonial Settlement

St. Paul's Church National Historic Site preserves an important chapter in our nation's early history, helping to tell the story of



The annual Revolutionary War Encampment to celebrate the Battle of Pell's Point, which took place near the site October 18, 1776, draws hundreds of school children and weekend visitors to St. Paul's.

the development of colonial society and the road to the American Revolution.

The parish that built St. Paul's Church was established in 1665 by English families who had previously settled in Fairfield, Connecticut. They came to an area 12 miles north of Manhattan island just as the Dutch were surrendering New Netherland to the British, who renamed the colony New-York. They called their town Eastchester, bringing a New England pattern of community that included government by a covenant among themselves and settlement around a common Village Green for mutual protection and support. The Green was the heart of the community and the setting for militia drills, elections, public punishments, animal grazing, and market days. A small wooden meetinghouse was erected in the 1690s, serving as church, town hall and courthouse.

Dissenting Voices

The founders of the parish were "dissenters", Puritans opposed to the official (Anglican) Church of England. They were forced to accept the Anglican church in the early 1700s as part of the English attempt to strengthen

colonial administration. Tensions between the dissenters and the established Anglican church, which runs through the history of the middle colonies, continued to divide the parish throughout colonial times.

Freedom of Religion Freedom of the Press

The Eastchester Village Green was the scene of an important provincial



Cliff Young's painting (1953) depicts the Election of 1733 which took place on Eastchester's Village Green.

assembly election in 1733 that raised the issues of freedom of religion and an independent press. The election was part of a political struggle between the Royal Governor, William Cosby, and an opposition group led by Lewis Morris, the colony's former Chief Justice. Morris defeated the Governor's candidate in the election but the sheriff

excluded Morris's Quaker supporters. He required that they swear on the bible that they owned sufficient property to qualify as voters, realizing that Quaker religious beliefs forbade such oaths. A year later, in direct response, the colonial legislature passed a law giving Quakers the right to affirm rather than swear on public occasions, an important milestone in the development of religious freedom in the colonies.

As part of their political battle with Governor Cosby, the Morris party also took the unprecedented step of establishing an opposition newspaper, hiring New York City printer John Peter Zenger to publish the New York Weekly Journal. The inaugural issue of the paper carried a lengthy account of the Eastchester election.

Bell for Eastchester

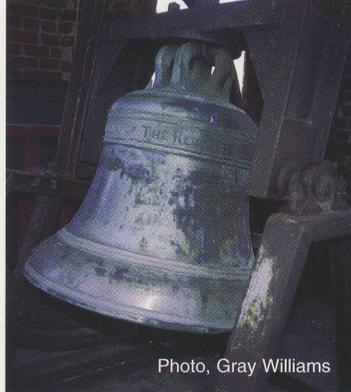
In 1758, The Reverend Thomas Standard, the parish minister, presented the congregation with a bronze bell. Like the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, it was cast at the Whitechapel Foundry in London. The bell hung in the belfry of the meetinghouse until the Revolutionary War, when it was hidden to prevent possible destruction for military purposes.

Construction of the extant St. Paul's Church was begun in 1763, when it was still an Anglican parish in the British colony of New-York. The church's stone and brick exterior, rounded arch Palladian windows and brick quoining are characteristic of Georgian architecture. The oblong shape, with the bell turret surmounting a square tower at one end of the building, was a departure from the square design of the earlier church. The church was unfinished by 1776 when the searing ordeal of the Revolutionary War halted construction.

The Storm of War Gathers

The area around St. Paul's played a pivotal role in the coming of the American Revolution. The Rev. Samuel Seabury, the rector, was one of several Church of England ministers in New

York who tried to rally support for the Crown. Seabury's "Letters of a Westchester Farmer", published in 1774, was a major Tory pamphlet, and it contributed to a division in



Photo, Gray Williams

Bell given to the Church at Eastchester by Rev. Standard in 1758 hangs at the top of St. Paul's Church steeple today.

the parish regarding the dispute with England. But support for the Whig cause grew after the outbreak of fighting in April 1775 and many soldiers were recruited for the American army on the Eastchester Village Green.

The Battle of Pell's Point, an important engagement in the New York campaign, was fought a mile from St. Paul's on October 18, 1776. About 4,000 British and Hessian (German auxiliary) troops under the command of General William Howe attempted to cut off the retreat of the main body of General Washington's army,

which was besieged in northern Manhattan after crushing defeats on Long Island and at Kip's Bay.

Skillfully led by Colonel John Glover of Massachusetts, 750 Continental Army troops delayed the Crown forces at the battle, helping Washington's army to withdraw to more defensible ground in Westchester County. Following this battle, soldiers from the Hessian regiment von Knyphausen occupied the unfinished St. Paul's church, using it as a hospital. According to local tradition, the Hessians disassembled the first meetinghouse and used its



The Reverend Samuel Seabury

wood for campfires. At least five Hessian privates died of illness and were buried in a sandpit behind the church. A small marble stone marks their graves today. Subsequently, American soldiers who fell during the

Revolutionary War were also interred at St. Paul's.

During the Revolutionary War, New York City was the headquarters of British operations, and St. Paul's was just north of the

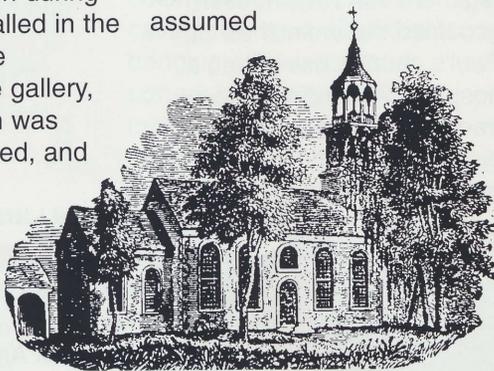


Colonel John Glover

perimeter of English defenses. It also was just south of American encampments in northern Westchester County. As a result, this "neutral ground" was a no man's land, with no governmental authority controlling it. Many civilians fled to safer ground, and those who remained were subject to frequent foraging raids from Loyalist parties based in southern Westchester County and occasionally from American units as well. The unfinished church was used sporadically throughout the war as hospital, barracks and supply depot.

New Church, New Nation

Following American victory and independence, construction of the church was resumed, and by 1787 it was in use. New York State disestablished the Anglican Church immediately after the war, and in 1795 the Eastchester parish freely incorporated as an Episcopal congregation under the title of St. Paul's Church, Eastchester. The bronze bell hidden during the war was installed in the steeple. With the completion of the gallery, St. Paul's Church was considered finished, and on October 24, 1805, it was consecrated.



St. Paul's Church, ca. 1855

From Parish to Park Site

Increasing industrialization of the area around St. Paul's Church in the early 20th century led to the decline of the parish. In 1942, as part of an effort to revitalize the congregation and draw attention to the site's historical significance, the interior of the church was restored to its 18th century appearance, based on the original pew plan of 1787. A committee chaired by Sara Delano Roosevelt, mother of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt,

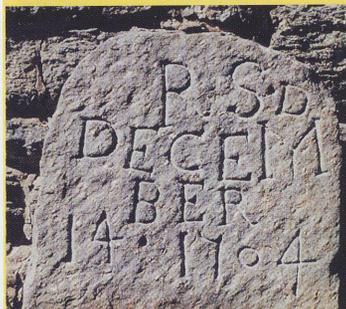
raised funds for the project. In 1943 the Secretary of the Department of the Interior declared St. Paul's Church a National Historic Site.

While the restoration initially succeeded in reviving the congregation, by the 1970s the parish had dwindled to only a handful of worshippers. The last regular Sunday service at St. Paul's occurred in May 1977. In 1980, the National Park Service assumed

ownership of St. Paul's Church and cemetery through the generous donations of the Episcopal Diocese of New York and the City of Mount Vernon. In 1984 St. Paul's Church National Historic Site opened to the public.

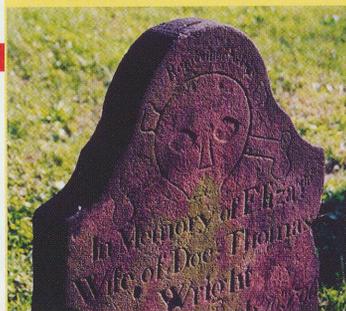
St. Paul's Cemetery

covers more than five acres and contains an estimated 9000 interments. The variety of styles, imagery and types of stones provide insights into lifestyles and attitudes toward death over a period of 300 years.



The earliest legible stone, for Richard Shute (R S), dates from 1704, when the town was so small a person could be identified by only his initials.

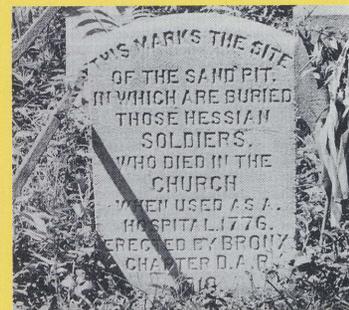
Photo, Gray Williams



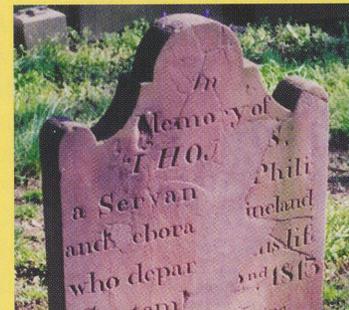
The death's head design which appears on Elizabeth Wright's tombstone, above, was a common symbol on tombstones in the 18th century. It served as a reminder to passersby that death could come at any time, so they should be ready.



Many Revolutionary War soldiers are buried in the cemetery. This stone for Samuel T. Pell, who distinguished himself at Saratoga, reads: "Thus after returning victorious from the field of Mars, he cheerfully obeys the summons to eternity from whence there is no return."



The cemetery contains a common grave for the Hessian soldiers who died in the church, including 5 young privates who died of the "bloody flux."



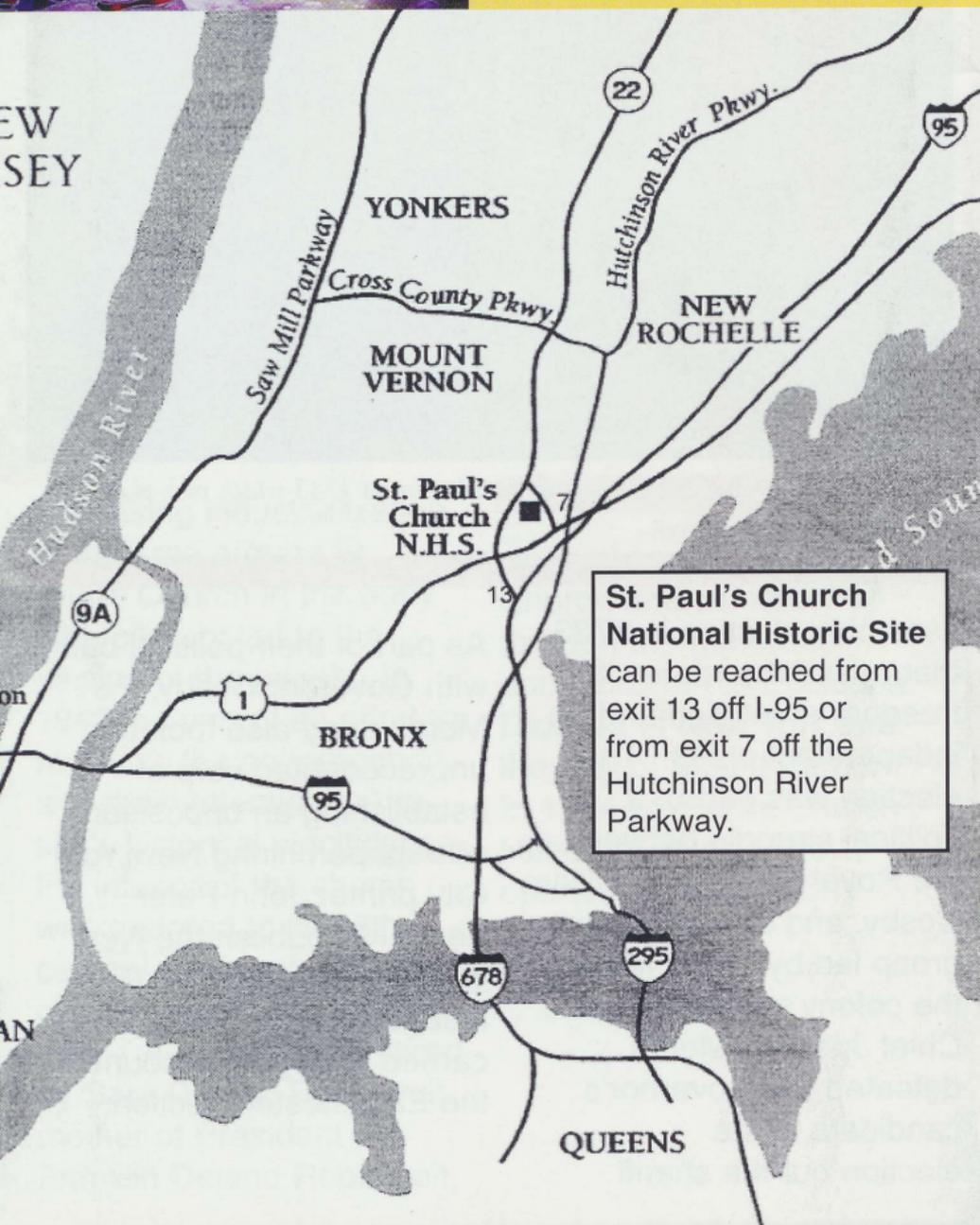
St. Paul's cemetery includes interments of several men and women who were slaves, including Thomas, above, who died in 1813.



In the late 19th century some members of the congregation donated stained glass windows to the church as memorials to their ancestors. These were removed during the restoration. In 1999 the Drake family window, left, attributed to John LaFarge, was reinstalled.

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897 South Columbus Ave.,
Mount Vernon, NY 10550, is
open Monday through Friday,
9-5, closed Federal holidays.
For information about group
tours and special weekend
events, call (914) 667-4116 or
visit www.nps.gov/sapa



**St. Paul's Church
National Historic Site**
can be reached from
exit 13 off I-95 or
from exit 7 off the
Hutchinson River
Parkway.