



Saint Paul's Church National Historic Site

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ST. PAUL'S CHURCH

In 1763 the people of Eastchester began building the present church to replace a small, square, wooden building that had served them since 1692. The first church, which stood on the Village Green perhaps 50 yards to the West, was built by **dissenters**, Puritans who opposed the Church of England (also referred to as the Anglican Church and, after the Revolutionary War, as the Episcopal Church). The early settlers hired Presbyterian or Congregational ministers. From 1702 onwards they were forced to accept, and pay the salaries of, Anglican ministers sent to the colonies by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

By the time the Revolutionary War began, St. Paul's Church (still referred to as The Church at Eastchester) was half-completed. Following the Battle of Pell's Point in October of 1776, the British and their Hessian allies used it as a hospital. At that time they demolished the first church and used the wood for their fires to keep warm. Many of the Hessians died in the church and were buried at the back of the cemetery in a mass grave.

After the war the people finished the building and by 1788 they were using it as church, meeting house, and court room. Aaron Burr practiced law here in 1787. It was officially named St. Paul's Episcopal Church in 1795, and in 1805, after completion of the balcony, it was consecrated. The church was used as a place of worship through the 1970's. In 1980 the Episcopal Diocese of New York transferred ownership to the National Park Service.

In 1942 the church was restored to resemble its appearance in the 1790's by the same architectural firm that developed Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. The church had undergone many changes in the intervening years: The pulpit had been moved from the South to the East wall. The pews had been turned to face East, then replaced with benches. The altar had become a more important focus of the service than the pulpit. The clear glass windows had been replaced with stained glass honoring the town's prominent families. The walls and ceiling had been stenciled with religious symbols. All of these changes were part of a 19th century movement within the Episcopal church, which favored more ceremony and ritual. It was a movement that attempted to restore continuity between the Church of England and its Catholic origins. As colonial architecture, the result of the restoration is not entirely accurate because of the addition of a chancel, the recessed area where the altar now stands.

(OVER)

Points of Interest:

Pews: The names of the individual families who owned the pews are known from the Eastchester Town Records that contain a diagram of the 1788 seating arrangement. The amount paid by each family varied from 32 shillings (the price of half a cow) for a double box next to the pulpit, to 8 shillings for a box toward the back. However, pews at the very back, near the door, were also expensive. People brought small charcoal heaters to church with them and the high pew walls kept the heat in.

Pulpit: During the colonial period, the pulpit was the focus of the entire worship service. It was three-tiered: The enclosed box at floor level was where the “clerk” led the singing of psalms. The minister read from Scripture and led prayers from the middle level. From the top deck he preached the sermon.

Models: These models were first displayed in 1865 to celebrate two important milestones in the history of St. Paul’s Church. That year marked both the 100th anniversary of the erection of the church and the 60th anniversary of the consecration of the church. The models show the original wooden cupola topped with a weather vane. It was replaced in 1887 with the current brick and stone structure, topped with a cross. The models also show the eastern wing that had been added in 1850 to serve as a vestry room and Sunday school. That addition was not part of the sanctuary until 1942. Joseph Mager, who may have been a member of the congregation, made at least one of the models.

Altar and Side Chancel: Eighteenth century congregations took communion (only two or three times a year) from a holy table placed against the East wall. The present chancel was created during the 1942 restoration by knocking out the wall that divided this area—an addition put on in 1850 used for vestry room and Sunday school—from the sanctuary.

Organ: Henry Erben, a New York City craftsman, was commissioned to make the organ in 1833 by George Rapelje, an original pew-holder in St. Paul’s Church. It is a pump organ and cost Rapelje \$800. It is one of the oldest working organs in the United States.

Bell: The church tower houses a bell presented to the people of Eastchester in 1758 by The Reverend Thomas Standard. It was made in London at the same foundry where the Liberty Bell was made. It hung first in the small wooden church, was buried during the Revolutionary War.

Stained Glass: The stained glass window at the rear (north side) of the Church depicts the New Testament story of the Visitation of the Magi, representing Mary, the Christ child, and the three Magi. It was installed in that location around 1890 to commemorate the Drake family, prominent members of the congregation and one of the original families of Eastchester. Stylistic comparisons strongly suggest the window was created in the studio of John LaFarge, a pioneering late 19th century artist. The window was removed in 1942 as part of a colonial restoration of the Church. Through funding from private donors and the National Park Service, it was restored in 1999 by Rohlf’s Stained & Leaded Glass of Mt. Vernon.