

## A new Episcopal Church and a new Bangor Stone Church

The Constitution of the United States was drafted by a Constitutional Convention, meeting in Philadelphia in 1787. Two years later, the first convention of the Episcopal Church also met in Philadelphia, organizing the former Church of England congregations which had survived the Revolution into a new national church and authorizing an American Prayer Book (1789). The Rev. William White, the venerable Rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia, was the prime architect of the new denomination and soon became the first Bishop of Pennsylvania and Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. Bishop White was to make three visits to Bangor Church over the next fifteen years.

The Bangor Church churchyard, or the area surrounding the church property as defined by a handsome stone wall, has been used as a parish burial ground since the 1741. Among these buried in the churchyard are over twenty men who were veteran soldiers of the Revolutionary War. In time, veterans of all US wars would also be laid to rest in the churchyard, including the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish American War, World Wars I and II, Korea and Vietnam.

The Churchtown region experienced dramatic growth in the four decades after the Revolutionary War. Fueled by the iron industry and work at the nearby Windsor and Pool Forges, Bangor Church membership increased and outgrew the colonial church building. Having served the congregation for three-quarters of a century, through its founding and colonial period, and into the birth of a new nation, the stone church was taken down and another stone church built in its place. At a cost of \$4,000 the present stone church was erected about a hundred feet west of the old structure. Some stones on which the donors to the old church had cut their names were incorporated into the walls of the new building and can still be seen today. The stone in the front was thought to be a fine example of the workmanship of old-time masons. The outline of the foundations of the 1755 stone church have been marked in surface paving stones in the Churchyard.

On Sunday, January 15, 1832, the Rt. Rev. Henry Ustick Onderdonk, Assistant Bishop of Pennsylvania, officiated at the consecration of the new church. The bishop wrote, "This building takes the place of the former one, which was old and greatly out of repair. It is very substantial; the walls are of stone and it is neatly finished and arranged."

An adjacent building, the "Chapel (Sunday School)" was built in 1844. The rural congregation declined in membership during the middle years of the 19th century and often struggled to maintain their buildings. This decline corresponded with the closure of the iron forges as the iron industry gave way to steel production. By the time of the Civil War, the congregation was quite small and struggled to maintain the church, chapel and surrounding churchyard.

For about five years prior to 1879, services were suspended in the church until a bulge in the east wall could be repaired. The Chapel building, now called the Church House, was used for worship until repairs were made. In addition to the necessary structural revisions,

the interior of the church was significantly updated. On the facing of the interior front arch over the altar area, the words of Psalm 93, verse 5 were stenciled: ***Holiness Becometh Thine House, O Lord, For Ever.*** Regular Sunday services in the church resumed in June 1881. On St. Andrew's Day, November 30, 1886, the Rt. Rev. Mark Antony DeWolfe Howe, Bishop of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania, traveled to Churchtown and officiated at the consecration of the renovated Bangor Church.

A distinctive steeple and bell were added to the church in 1896. Years later in 1987, Bangor Church and Churchyard were named to the National Register of Historical Places.

The Churchyard is lovingly maintained, the resting place for some 400 burials over the years. Although full burials no longer take place, a Memorial Garden in the eastern section of the Churchyard was established in 1998 for the interment of cremated ashes. This area is defined around a four-sided granite obelisk that contains the names of those interred. A Pet Garden for the interment of pet ashes was set aside in the southwest corner in 2024.

Although never blessed with a large congregation, the people of Bangor Church continue to witness to their faith and heritage, forming a vibrant community and maintaining an uninterrupted schedule of worship in their historic setting. Inside the nave of the church, a Welsh flag is proudly displayed as a reminder of the hardy colonial pioneers who first made their way to this valley and founded The Episcopal Church of Bangor in Caernarvon.