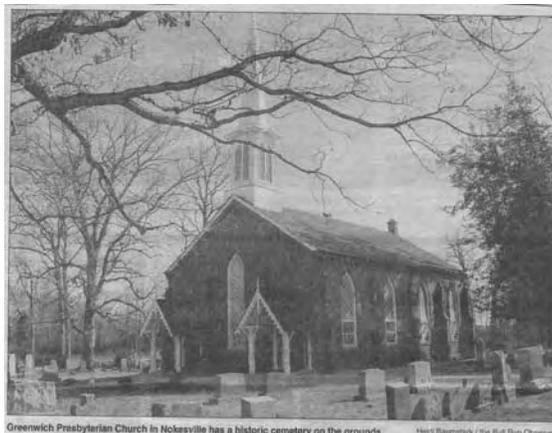


RELIGION

Older church cemeteries and archives often museum to county's past

By Heidi Baumstark



Greenwich Presbyterian Church in Nokesville has a historic cemetery on the grounds.

Heidi Baumstark / The Bull Run Observer

Older churches in our area can teach us something about our heritage as a county. Those interested in learning about Prince William's history can gain a great deal by checking out some old church graveyards. Some of these hallowed grounds hold stories worth learning about. History buffs may want to visit the churches listed below.

In Nokesville, at the intersection of Vint Hill and Burwell roads, stands the beautiful red brick Greenwich Presbyterian Church, built in 1858. The church was established thanks to the untiring efforts of Aminta Elizabeth Moxley (1777-1858); services were held in her home in the early 1800s. According to records found in the Library of Union Seminary in Richmond, prior to the brick structure, a small log building was erected and a meeting took place in 1810, marking the beginning of the current Greenwich congregation.

In front of the church is a Civil War trail marker highlighting the historical significance of the church. The old cemetery lists familiar family names such as Green, Moxley, Ewell, Bell and Piercy, just to name a few. One notable soldier buried in the church cemetery has a name that many may not recognize. He's not a local, in fact, he's not even American—he's an Englishman, Bradford Smith Hoskins, who fought for the Confederacy.

According to research by the late James L. Cooke of Nokesville and Ray Williams of Fauquier County, "Hoskins, precise Englishman, clad in his neat British uniform must have been quite a contrast to most of [John S.] Mosby's Rangers, many of whom made no pretense of uniform at all ..." Hoskins fell from his horse and on May 30, 1863 was mortally wounded by Federal forces near Grapewood Farm, which is today Vint Hill Farm, located about two miles from the church, according to Dave Goetz of Mosby's Confederacy Tours. Mosby and his 48 men were in the area to disrupt rail traffic, which was sending supplies to Union troops.

Interpretive tours, led by Dave Goetz of Fauquier County, takes groups of individuals to this very spot to pay respects to this brave Englishman. The church is at 15305 Vint Hill Road, and can be reached by phone: 703-754-7933. More information about private or group tours is available from Goetz, at 540-351-6073, who also has a website: www.mosbystours.com.

Another historic church, Sudley United Methodist Church, stands near the Manassas National Battlefield. What stands now is actually the third building, completed in 1922. The first church was built some time after July 1822 and was destroyed during the Civil War. The second structure, built in 1873, survived for 45 years before burning during an Aug. 7, 1918 lightning storm.

The church's narthex holds a display case showcasing artifacts from previous church members. Some items include a rusted hitching post found stuck into a tree trunk to tie up horses while members worshipped inside. There is also a baby's bonnet, which warmed the head of one of the children in the Wheeler family who lived in Manassas. Locked in a fireproof safe in the church archives is a very important item: the family Bible of Landon Carter of Woodland plantation.

A recent discovery reveals the church pews originating from the "19th century with a strong Victorian influence," states Joseph Miller, a local furniture restorer.

According to church historian Frances Moore, plans are to restore the wooden pews and replace the cushions.

Near the church parking lot and cemetery is a Civil War trail marker. The church, at 5308 Sudley Rd., can be reached by phone: 703-754-4380 or online: www.sudley-methodist.org.

Haymarket's St. Paul's Episcopal Church, located in the historic district at 6760 Fayette St., has some historical significance as well. In front of the church are two white stone markers on the left and right side of the church entrance

indicating where Civil War soldiers now rest in peace.

The marker on the left reads, "80 unknown Confederate soldiers who died of wounds after the first Battle of Manassas, July 21, 1861" are buried there.

The marker on the right honors the "memory of the Union soldiers who died in St. Paul's Church while it was a hospital during the Civil War, 1861-1865."

Before it was St. Paul's, this red brick structure, built in 1803, served as the county's district courthouse. The courthouse location was moved to the western end of the county from Dumfries because the Haymarket location could not only serve residents in western Prince William, but also neighboring Loudoun, Fauquier and Fairfax counties, according to historical information. The Episcopalians bought the building for a house of worship in 1822. St. Paul's can be reached by phone, 703-754-7536, on online, www.stpaulshaymarket.org.

In addition to the county's museums, there's plenty of history to learn from visiting the region's historic churches.