

KINGSTON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH¹ **Conway, South Carolina**

THE SITE:

The town of Kingston, now known as Conway, was laid out in 1732. In the original plan of the town, the area now occupied by Kingston Church's churchyard was laid out as part of the town commons. It was here, at the foot of present-day Third Ave., that the first church of record in Kingston was built in a grove of live oaks on a bluff overlooking a tributary of the Waccamaw River. It faced west, up present-day Third Ave., with the rear towards Kingston Lake. The grounds on either side of the church building became the village burial ground for the early settlers. The earliest graves were marked with wooden markers that have long since decayed. Some of the older stone markers have also disappeared.

THE COLONIAL CHURCH:

Documentation dating from the 1700s indicates that there was an active Presbyterian congregation here at least by 1756. It was recorded that on Feb. 7, 1756 the Rev. William Donaldson, who had been ordained by a Pennsylvania presbytery the prior year, accepted a call to the church on the Waccamaw, a petition having been sent to this intent. Donaldson is the first known regular minister, however it is recorded that John Baxter occasionally preached here prior to 1754. Rev. William Donaldson served this church on the Waccamaw until his death in 1759. By 1795 that congregation had apparently disbanded, for on 24 Dec. 1795 the Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury recorded in his diary, "We came to Kingston, where I preached in an old Presbyterian meeting house, now repaired for the use of the Methodists. I spent the evening with W. Rogers, formerly of Bristol, where our wants were richly supplied: thus, sometimes we abound and at other times suffer want; and we may balance the one with the other." It has also been said that the Episcopalians held services in the old colonial church after the Revolutionary War. It is believed that the building eventually fell into disrepair and was destroyed during a great storm in 1813.

THE PRESENT CHURCH:

In 1858 the present sanctuary was completed, adjacent to the site of the colonial church. On May 30, 1858 the first religious service was held in the sanctuary and the present Kingston Presbyterian Church was officially organized, with five charter members: Mrs. Thomas W. Beaty, Mrs. Samuel Pope, Samuel Pope, Joseph T. Walsh, and Miss M.J. Mack.

Construction was done under the direction of Otis Eaton, a master builder, who had come from Maine to build ships at Bucksville, S.C.. The building is in the classic Greek Revival style that was so popular at the time of its construction.

When construction of the present church began, it was on the foundation of the original colonial church, facing up present-day Third Ave., in the village burial ground. There was some objection to the Presbyterians building in the "town commons", so construction was halted and moved to an adjacent site, which had originally been laid out in the original plan of the town as part of a street. This was done with the approval of Mrs. Jane Norman, who owned the adjacent property. At times, Baptists used the sanctuary for their services. The church sanctuary is listed as an American Presbyterian/Reformed Historical Site.

SOME INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE CHURCH BUILDING:

There was no steeple originally, as was typical of the traditional Presbyterian Meeting House. A steeple was added in the late 1800s. That steeple was slightly damaged by Hurricane Hazel and was eventually replaced in 1962 with the present one.

The bell for the church was ordered from a foundry in West Troy, New York but the ship which was bringing it was lost at sea. A second bell was ordered and the ship bringing it was sunk in a storm. However, the cargo from the second ship was salvaged and the bell reclaimed. It then made its way on to Kingston Church. For many years it hung on a scaffold in the churchyard, It now hangs in the steeple. It is dated 1860.

There was another entrance on the west side of the front that gave access to the slave gallery, which was located upstairs over the vestibule. This entrance was closed up sometime after the War Between the States.

The tall windows could be lowered from the top and raised from the bottom, for better ventilation. A long stick with a hook on it was used to pull the top sash down.

The chandelier which hangs in the choir loft dates from 1879. It was a gift to Kingston by John R. Tolar. It used to hang in the center of the building and could be pulled down to be lit. The arms of the chandelier hold four kerosene lamps which could be removed for cleaning and refilling. In addition to the chandelier, there were several brackets along the walls which also held oil lamps.

A wooden panel divided the pews down the center of the sanctuary. Men sat on the west side, women and children sat on the east side. This tradition was abandoned in the late 1800s when Mrs. Cephas Perry Quattlebaum, Laura Q. Jordan's grandmother, decided to move, with her children, to the west side of the sanctuary and sit with her husband.

The church pew in the vestibule is one of the originals. In 1962 the original pews were replaced with the present ones. The thought at that time was that the new ones would be more comfortable. The new pews were installed closer together, thus leaving less leg room, and a few additional ones were added, extending the seating further to the front of the sanctuary.

The flooring is wide-plank heart pine. Many of the boards run the full width of the building. The beams underneath the floor run the full width and the joists extend the full length. The spacing of the joists is unusual in that it is similar to the spacing methods of support timbers used in the construction of the old wooden ships.

In the vestibule near the entrance stood the mite boxes (offering boxes). Later, the deacons took up the collection with crocheted pouches, lined with silk, on the end of long poles, similar to crab nets. In the display case in the vestibule are: one of the original mite boxes, an early offering plate, and the Church Bible dated 1858.

The area behind the back walls of the sanctuary is an addition dating from 1931 which was built to provide classrooms, with a fellowship hall and kitchen in the basement (later used as a nursery). In order to make the 1931 brick addition and the old wood siding sanctuary harmonious, both were covered with plaster.

THE CEMETERY:

The churchyard was the original village burial ground, or town commons, and contains graves dating back to the 1700s, the earliest of which are no longer marked. In this area, stone markers were hard to come by so wooden markers were often used. Over time these decayed and became only memories. The oldest surviving marker is a slate headstone that marks the grave of Elizabeth R. Singleton, who died in 1815, aged 4 years, 9 months.

The cemetery is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is significant for its fine examples of Victorian gravestone art of high quality. Gravestones of the mid 1800s tended to be monuments to the dead rather than simply markers of the burial place, as were the relatively simple slabs of the colonial era. Gravestones as sculpture was a result of the rural cemetery movement of the 1830s, in which cemeteries became viewed as acceptable places to visit and were carefully planned as parks where the living remembered the dead. The cemetery contains several exceptional examples of Victorian gravestone art. (Beaty, Buck, and Graham gravestones) The five children buried in these graves were first cousins who died within months of each other, in 1859.

In addition to the many graves of Confederate veterans, it is also said that the cemetery contains the graves of Revolutionary War veterans.

INFORMATION ON SOME OF THOSE BURIED IN THE CHURCHYARD:

Grave of Thomas W. Beaty - He was a member of Kingston Church and a signer of S.C.'s Ordinance of Secession in 1860. His home still stands today and is located at 428 Kingston Street.

Grave of Judge Joseph Travis Walsh - Distinguished citizen, one of the founders and charter members of Kingston Church and supporter of the Confederacy, who set an example for the people of the area after the War Between the States by voluntarily being the first to take the oath of allegiance to the U.S.. This action made it easier for others to submit to the oath by lessening the stigma attached to doing so. Taking the oath was necessary in order to obtain full voting and property rights, and thus return civil authority to the capable hands of the former Confederates.

Grave of Capt. Thomas W. Daggett - Captain of the Confederate coastal defenses between Little River and Georgetown, he is credited with making the "torpedo" which sank the USS Harvest Moon on March 1, 1865 in Winyah Bay, the only Union Flagship (Admiral's ship) that was sunk during the War Between the States.

Grave of John R. Beaty - Beaty was a Lieut. in the Confederate Army. He died in Feb., 1865 from gunshot wounds received when he and others went out in the night to defend the town from an attack by raiders. His home, which still stands today and is located at 507 Main Street, was occupied by Union officers during the occupation of Conwayborough by the Yankees. The other Yankee soldiers occupied various buildings downtown around the old courthouse (Conway City Hall) and a building at the intersection of Third Ave. and Laurel St..

INFORMATION ON ADDITIONAL CHURCH PROPERTIES:

A congregational meeting was held December 16, 1903, for the election of a Board of Trustees to act for the church in the purchase of a lot upon which to build a manse. The lot purchased is on the northwest corner of Elm Street and Fifth Avenue. In 1905 the church built a manse at that location. In 1940, it was moved onto the adjoining lot and the present manse was constructed. In 2001 the manse was sold.

In 1956, an Educational Building (now the church office building) complete with a Fellowship Hall was built in the edge of the cemetery, adjacent to the site of the original meeting house. On October 14, 1956, the building was dedicated to the glory of God and to His service.

In 1977, construction of a new educational building was begun on a site adjacent to the existing one, and a sea wall was constructed behind it in order to extend the grounds. The flood after Hurricane Floyd resulted in the rear room being removed and part of the seawall being replaced.

In 1988, using funds from the Edna Marlowe Gore Memorial Account, the church purchased the Perry Quattlebaum House on the corner of Second Avenue and Kingston Street and converted it into the Kingston Youth Center. Its purpose is to provide the youth of our church with a special place of their own in which they can gather in Christian fellowship. It was remodeled in 2004.

In 1989, the Kingston Building was purchased for future use of the church. It was remodeled in 2004 to provide classrooms for adults.

In 1995, Mrs. Laura Quattlebaum Jordan left to the church the house that she had always called home. This house was also the home of her parents, both members and leaders of Kingston Presbyterian Church. The house is believed to have been built circa 1830 and it was remodeled in the early 1900s. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was sold around 2001.

Kingston Presbyterian Church is the Mother Church of the following:

Waccamaw Presbyterian Church - 1889

Bayboro Presbyterian Church - 1901 (dissolved)

Loris Presbyterian Church - 1924

Murrell's Inlet Presbyterian Church - 1925

Myrtle Beach First Presbyterian Church - 1928

Ocean Drive Presbyterian Church - 1947

¹ Sources for the above text were: The Kingston Presbyterian Church by Paul Quattlebaum, talks with Laura Quattlebaum Jordan, information obtained from several other long-time members of Kingston Presbyterian Church, and research by Ben Burroughs, Church Historian, 14 Jun 2005.