

LOST CHARLESTON

CALVARY EPISCOPAL CHURCH, 71 BEAUFAIN STREET

by *Grace Hall and Anna-Catherine Carroll*

In this special edition of *Lost Charleston*, the Preservation Society is pleased to feature our most recent Charleston Justice Journey site, **Calvary Episcopal Church**, the oldest African American Episcopal congregation in Charleston. Calvary's original church building at 71 Beaufain Street was constructed in 1849, but was unfortunately demolished in 1961, despite the preservation community's efforts to save it. Summer 2020 PSC intern, Grace Hall, conducted extensive research on the property to tell the complex story of the congregation's founding and the establishment of its first house of worship.



Calvary Episcopal Church c. 1960, Preservation Society archives

TWO DOWN AND ONE TO STAY

CALVARY CHAPEL



Another landmark gone by default. The bricks from its old walls have been shipped to Georgia. Embarrassing, is it not, to



see how much others appreciate the treasures that we hold so lightly?

The PSC lamented the demolition of Calvary Episcopal Church in Preservation Progress Vol. VI, No. 4, p. 5, 1961.

Today occupied by a small playground, the southwest corner of Beaufain and Wilson Streets was once the site of the first church building to house Calvary Episcopal Church, the oldest African American Episcopal congregation in Charleston.¹ Calvary Church, now located at 106 Line Street, was established in 1847 by the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina for the religious instruction of free and enslaved African Americans in Charleston, separate from white parishioners. For nearly a century, Calvary's original church building served as an important spiritual center for much of Charleston's Black community. However, in 1961, Calvary Church was demolished as a result of redevelopment pressure that disproportionately impacted historically Black neighborhoods and institutions in Charleston during the mid-20th century.

Constructed in the Early Classical Revival Style in 1849, the design of Calvary Church represented a combination of Greek and Roman influences.² Built of brick with a white stucco finish, the one-story church building could accommodate up to 400 people.³ The front façade featured a broad entablature and pediment over a paneled door with an elliptical fanlight flanked on each side by square corner pilasters and semicircular niches. Full-height, triple-hung windows spanned the east and west facades, with a semicircular apse located at the rear.⁴

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LOST CHARLESTON: CALVARY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

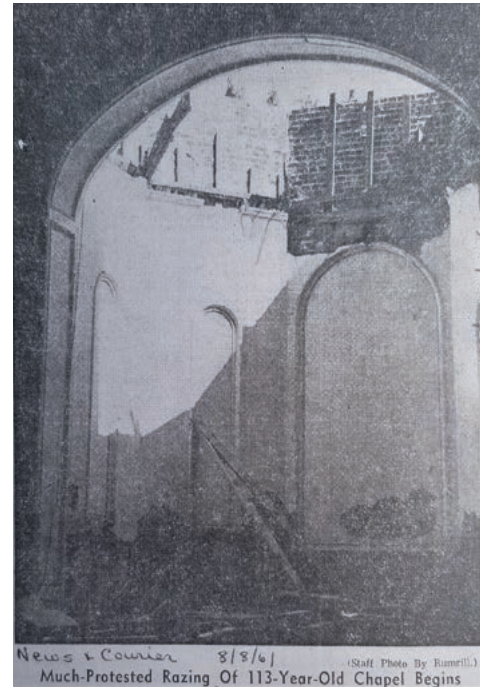
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The congregation faced one of its earliest and most severe trials before the construction of the church was complete. On July 13, 1849, a riot began at the Charleston Work House, a notorious penal institution utilized primarily for the punishment of enslaved people, located less than one block away from Calvary. Led by an enslaved man named Nicholas, approximately 37 prisoners temporarily escaped the Work House, inciting the panic and anger of the white community.⁵ The day following the riot, a mob of white Charlestonians assembled in an attempt to destroy the church in retaliation; while the Calvary Church congregation was closely surveilled by an all-white clergy, many in the community viewed the founding of Calvary Church as a dangerous and unprecedented allowance of Black independence, and sought its destruction.⁶ Notably, violence was quelled by prominent local attorney James L. Petigru, known for openly representing free people of color, who convinced the mob not to destroy the church.⁷

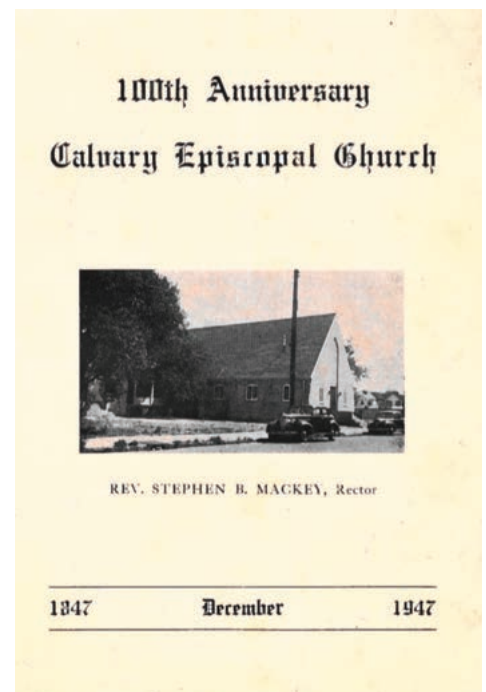
On December 23, 1849, Calvary Church was consecrated by Rev. Christopher Gadsden, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of SC.⁸ By the end of the following decade, Calvary had one of the largest Sunday School programs in the city, and eventually claimed the membership of some of Charleston's most prominent African American citizens, like Justice Jonathan Jasper Wright. Calvary's growth continued into the early 20th century. By 1940, however, neighborhood demographics in the area now known as Harleston Village were shifting toward a predominantly white population, resulting in the loss of congregants at Calvary. Simultaneously, the Housing Authority of Charleston began pressuring the congregation to relocate as the newly-constructed, white, housing project, Robert Mills Manor, surrounded the church on all sides.⁹ As a result, the congregation ultimately purchased a piece of property at 106 Line Street as the new location for the church, where services are still held today. On November 25, 1940, the last service was held at Calvary Church on Beaufain Street.¹⁰

Following relocation, old Calvary Church stood vacant for 20 years until the Housing Authority submitted a request for demolition on April 29, 1960. In spite of community opposition to the request, all attempts to save the Church from demolition ultimately failed, and after being deemed unsafe, Calvary was razed in August, 1961.¹¹

Visit charlestonjusticejourney.org to read the full Calvary Church story, access additional resources, and explore related CJJ sites. The Preservation Society of Charleston internship program is made possible by the generous support of the Patrick and Ann Marie Dolan Charitable Fund, the Daniel M. Hundley Fund of Coastal Community Foundation of SC, and Mr. and Mrs. John Winthrop. For more information on how you can support our internship program, please contact Jane McCullough, Director of Advancement, at jmccullough@preservationsociety.org or call 843.722.4630 ext 23.



Demolition of Calvary Episcopal Church in 1961, News and Courier, August 8, 1961.



Pamphlet acknowledging the 100th anniversary of Calvary Episcopal Church, featuring a photo of the new church building on Line Street, courtesy of Avery Research Center.

MEET GRACE HALL, SUMMER 2020 PSC INTERN

*Second year, Master of Arts in History
College of Charleston*



Tell us about your research goals as a student and what drew you to support the PSC's work on the Charleston Justice Journey.

I am currently in my second year of the Master of Arts in History Program at the College of Charleston, and for my thesis I am researching the history of Charleston's commemorative landscape and its monuments. I am a part of the new Public History Concentration being offered by the Program, and my research focus is on the history of race relations and collective memory making in the American South, which is why the PSC's Charleston Justice Journey was brought to my attention. Recently I have been trying to find a way to make my work more relevant and accessible to the public, so when this internship opportunity was suggested I jumped at the chance to be of service to the Charleston community by giving voice to the underrepresented.

How were you able to overcome the challenges of navigating the research process during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Despite the unique challenge presented by the COVID-19 pandemic I was able to conduct in-depth research on all of the sites by making use of digitized sources like newspaper articles, academic articles, Ebooks, and other archival materials that I was able to access online. I think many would find it surprising how much information one can find using a basic web or library catalog search, but the key is using multiple combinations of search terms, and cross-referencing sources for related subjects. Ultimately, the research I was able to conduct would not have been possible without the remote research and pick-up services offered by the College of Charleston's Addlestone Library, the wonderful remote research assistance of Georgette Mayo, Processing Archivist at the Avery Research Center, and the staff of the South Carolina Room at the Charleston County Public Library.

What is your most valuable takeaway from this summer's internship experience?

The discoveries I have made about the long struggle for civil rights in Charleston are without a doubt the most valuable takeaway from this summer's internship. As someone who went to high school in the Lowcountry I should have learned about Esau Jenkins, the Progressive Club, Septima Clark, Ruby Cornwell, Calvary Episcopal Church, the Kress Sit-In, Bill Saunders, and the Hospital Works Strike of 1969, yet I did not learn about their importance until now. I have admittedly grown very attached to the stories of these people and places in a way I definitely did not expect, but I think I am a better historian and person for it.

[1] K. R., "Do You Know Your South Carolina: Calvary Church: Extension of Robert Mills Manor Forces Negro Episcopal Congregation to Vacate 90-Year-Old Building," *The Charleston News and Courier*, July 22, 1940. [2] Calvary Episcopal Church, "Calvary Episcopal Church Profile," n.d., http://www.episcopalchurchsc.org/uploads/1/2/9/8/12989303/calvary_episcopal_church_profile.pdf; K. R., "Do You Know Your South Carolina: Calvary Church." [3] "Calvary Church, Charleston, in Beaufain-Street.," *Charleston Gospel Messenger and Protestant Episcopal Register* (1842-1853), January 1850.; Calvary Episcopal Church, "Calvary Episcopal Church Profile." [4] Calvary Episcopal Church, "Calvary Episcopal Church Profile," n.d., http://www.episcopalchurchsc.org/uploads/1/2/9/8/12989303/calvary_episcopal_church_profile.pdf; K. R., "Do You Know Your South Carolina: Calvary Church." [5] Bernard E. Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 17. [6] Bernard E. Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 17; Calvary Episcopal Church, "Calvary Episcopal Church Profile."; K.R., "Do You Know Your South Carolina: Calvary Church."; Robert F. Durden, "The Establishment of Calvary Protestant Episcopal Church for Negroes in Charleston," 77. [7] Bernard E. Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 17; Calvary Episcopal Church, "Calvary Episcopal Church Profile."; K.R., "Do You Know Your South Carolina: Calvary Church."; Robert F. Durden, "The Establishment of Calvary Protestant Episcopal Church for Negroes in Charleston," 77. [8] Calvary Episcopal Church, "Calvary Episcopal Church Profile." [9] Calvary Episcopal Church, "Calvary Episcopal Church Profile."; Edward G. Lilly, ed., *Historic Churches of Charleston, South Carolina*, 131.; K.R., "Do You Know Your South Carolina: Calvary Church."; "71 Beaufain Street (Calvary Chapel) - Property File," Charleston Past Perfect, accessed June 9, 2020, <https://charleston.pastperfectonline.com/archive/2A7D91C8-2A24-473F-AB0F-052572729247>. [10] Calvary Episcopal Church, "Calvary Episcopal Church Profile."; Edward G. Lilly, ed., *Historic Churches of Charleston, South Carolina*, 131. [11] Barbara J. Stambaugh, "Calvary Chapel Demolition Ordered by City Officials: Attempts to Preserve Church Fail."