

Short History of Trinity "Old Swedes" Episcopal Church

Other Names: Raccoon Church, Swedish Lutheran Church, Trinity Church at Rakkoon, Church at Raccoon, Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church at Raccoon, Trinity Church of Swedesboro

By Chad G. Nichols, 4 Jan 2005

Among our confusion as researchers is learning where historical churches are/were located. A perfect example of this dilemma is the Trinity Episcopal Church at Swedesboro, Gloucester County, New Jersey.

The original log cabin structure was built between 1702 and 1703 and when completed was the first Swedish Lutheran Church in New Jersey (third Swedish church in America). The original log cabin structure was damaged during the Revolutionary War.

By the end of the war, Swedish influence in the colonies was literally dying out. For example, consider the vast cultural differences between the Danes, Germans, Swedish and English. Now consider the frequent occurrence of inter-marriage. Swedish customs and language were disappearing. Resulting from this dramatic cultural change in the colonies, the Swedish Crown no longer sent ministers to America. The church was then replaced in 1784 with a new design. The bell tower and steeple were added in 1839. This is how the church stands today.

In 1788, with a new church standing, the last Swedish pastor was Reverend Nichols Collin. He transferred to Gloria Dei in Philadelphia in 1788 (coincidentally he is buried in Gloria Dei's cemetery, too). Therefore the church had need of a new minister and sought a young Anglican (now Episcopalian). John Croes was the first Episcopalian rector and later became the first Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of New Jersey. Finally in the 1950's or 1960's, the church officially took on its identity as the Trinity Episcopal Church. "Old Swedes" continues to attach itself to the church signifying its original identity.

In 1976, a small plot of land overlooking Raccoon Creek near the current church was dedicated as the New Sweden Park. In this park lies a huge rock which marks the exact location of the original log cabin church.

Sources:

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