

## **Pompion Hill Chapel ~**

The Society for the Propagation for the Gospel in Foreign parts, chartered June 16, 1700, by William III, sent out the Rev. Samuel Thomas, as a Missionary to the Yemassee Indians; but on his arrival, he was appointed by Governor Sir Nathaniel Johnson to succeed the Rev. Mr. Corbin in ministering to the families settled on the three branches of the Cooper River, and to make Goose Creek his chief place of residence. He reported that the French had fifty (50) communicants. Mr. Thomas died in 1706.

Pompion Hill Chapel was originally erected on the east side of the east branch of the Cooper River. It was built of cypress, thirty (30) feet square. The funds were contributed by Sir Nathaniel Johnson and private subscription. The Cemetery, on the original map, was 400 feet square. Pompion Hill Chapel was the first Church of England edifice erected outside of Charleston.\*

The Rev. Mr. Thomas reported to the Society that the people on the eastern branch of the Cooper, of which he had the care, numbered eighty (80) Church and twenty (20) dissenting families. Communicants forty-five (45); heathen slaves about 200, of whom twenty (20) can read.

St. Thomas Parish was laid off November 30, but its boundaries were only first defined on December 18, 1708:

“To the northeast by the bounds of Craven County; to the south by the bounds of Christ Church Parish and the Wando River; to the west by the Cooper River to that tract of land commonly called the Hagan, inclusive; and to the north by the eastern branch of Cooper River to the plantation of Sir Nathaniel Johnson, Governor, exclusive; and then by an east line from the northmost part of said plantation to the bounds of Craven County.” This was amended by an Act passed March 5, 1736-7; “bounded by the most northerly branch of the said eastern branch of the Cooper River.”

The French settlement, called Orange Quarter, from the principality of that name in Avignon, France, fell within the boundaries of St. Thomas. As few of the people understood the English language, it was erected into a distinct parish, and called St. Denis, from the battlefield in the vicinity of Paris, where Admiral Coligny and the Prince of Conde met the Catholic forces and slew their commander, Montmorency.

*\*The church was not, as Dalcho states and Dr. Irving repeats, the oldest of the English Communion outside of Charles Town, as Judge H.A.M. Smith proved it to be junior to that of Goose Creek.*

It was thus practically made a Church of England Parish. Hence, the people, being poor, they petitioned the Assembly for the public allowance for an Episcopal minister, who should give them the English Liturgy and French sermons. The amount granted to their first missionary, Rev. John LePierre, was £20 for present relief, October 11, 1711; £50 additional, April 2, 1712; and in the next June 7, the amount was increased to £100 per annum. The church edifice was made the Chapel of Ease to the Parish Church, December 18, 1708.

The Parish Church, (then) called the Brick Church, about three miles from Cainhoy, on the old Clement's Ferry Road, was authorized by the Assembly, 1706. It was begun the next year and finished in 1708, which date was engraved on one of the bricks. The Glebe lands were 200 acres for the Parish Church and 420 acres for the Pompion Hill Chapel. The money allowed by the government for the Parsonage was insufficient, and placed at interest until it should amount to the sum required.

*Note: Dalcho records in 1728, "The population of St. Thomas consisted of 565 whites, 950 negroes, 60 Indian slaves, 20 free negroes, or about 1600 souls."*

In 1747, an Act was passed declaring Pompion Hill to be the Chapel of Ease. The Rector was to have service the third Sunday in each month. The Act of the Assembly, December 18, 1708, which declared St. Denis (French) to be the Chapel of Ease, was repealed.

The second and new chapel at Pompion Hill, was begun in 1763, of brick, 48 x 35 feet in size. Gabriel Manigault, Esq., gave (money and) 960 brick tiles for the floor. The new chapel was completed by private subscription in 1765. Today, it is a miniature Georgian masterpiece, original and unaltered. This chapel, built on a typical rectangular plan, is probably the finest and best preserved of South Carolina's numerous small, eighteenth-century country parish, brick churches in existence.

Construction on the existing church began in 1763 and was completed in 1765. The Chapel is a one-story Georgian brick structure with a jerkinhead roof and a rectangular plan. The brick walls are laid in Flemish bond, and the roof is still covered with slate.

The brick for the Chapel was provided by Zachariah Villepontoux, a noted brick maker with kilns at his Parnassus Plantation on the Back River. He is usually credited with the design, which borrowed some details from St. Michael's in Charleston. (Villepontoux carved his initials and dates in the bricks by both the north

and south doors.) The master mason was William Axson – who signed his name along with a masonic emblem.

Constructed of red cedar, the pulpit is modeled after that of St. Michael's Church in Charleston. (To the best of this writer's knowledge) all of the interior woodwork and nearly all of the furnishings are original. The exterior of the chapel is also largely original and unaltered.

Pompion Hill Chapel . . . then (in the late 1770's) came the war, the American Revolution War, with destruction and devastation among every area, throughout the Parish and countryside.

Then, in the year 1842, John Irving tells us – “Pompion Hill Chapel – The walls threatened to fall; grass grew in the building; the shrubbery was a wilderness; trees grew so thickly that access to the graveyard and one of the church doors was very difficult . . . .” But . . .

Then, in 1843, Irving continues, “ . . . the hand of human taste has been at work on the premises. The avenue leading from the public road has been cleared – the undergrowth has been removed – the trees have been thinned and trimmed, and the Chapel itself is about to be restored to that condition which befits the House of God, standing in the midst of a Christian people!”

And in 1883, again in Reconstruction, we read, “The Pompion Hill Chapel is one of the very few colonial chapels remaining as built. The floor is tiled, the seats face the aisle, the pulpit, with sounding board and prayer chancel, are at the vestry end, and the communion chancel at the opposite end of the aisle. The building is cracked on the chancel and river sides, which will soon be repaired, but is, otherwise, in good condition. The graveyard has recently been cleaned. Some of the graves have disappeared into the river. In both yards many have been buried whose graves have become obliterated, and others of whom no record has been made in any register. But two families remain to attend the chapel. There are but five church families on the Wando, and they attend services at the School House Chapel. Nearly thirty white families live about Hell Hole Swamp, and twenty at Cainhoy and elsewhere. The old family residences, with very few exceptions, are going to ruin rapidly.”

Pompion Hill Chapel was Listed in the National Register April 15, 1970, and designated a National Historic Landmark April 15, 1970. And one final word, the name, “Pompion,” no matter how spelled, is always pronounced “Punkin.”

Edited by Keith Gourdin, April 2026

## Resources:

*The Annals and Parish Register of St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish, in South Carolina from 1680-1884, Collected and Arranged by Robert F. Clute, Rector.*

*A Day On Cooper River*, by John D. Irving, M.D., Enlarged and Edited by Louisa Cheves Stoney, Reprinted with notes by Samuel Gaillard Stoney.

## Pompion Hill Chapel Graveyard –

*Many thanks to: Berkeley County South Carolina Cemetery Inscriptions 1995 by Mildred Hood*

|                         |                     |                    |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Benjamin Simons         | Catherine Simons    | Simons, 6 children |
| d. 7 Sep 1789, 53 years | w/o Benjamin Simons | c/o Benjamin &     |
|                         | d. 8 Nov 1820       | Catherine Simons   |

|                           |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Ann Simons                | Robert Harleston Ingraham |
| w/o Benjamin Simons       | s/o Wm Postell &          |
| d/o Edward & Mary Keating | H Harleston Ingraham      |
| d. 20 Apr 1754, 36 years  | d. 20 Jul 1848            |

|                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Mrs. Lydia Bryan            | John Bryan                  |
| w/o John Bryan of Camp Verl | b. Newcastle England        |
| d/o Elias & Lydia Ball      | d. 10 Nov 1805, 57 yr, 11mo |
| of Kensington 86 years      |                             |

|                                      |                                                    |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Elizabeth Harleston                  | Bryan, 3 children                                  |
| m/William Harleston 9 Dec 1789       | c/o John & Eliza C Bryan                           |
| d/o Roger & Frances Susanna Pinckney |                                                    |
| 9 Jan 1772 – 26 Sep 1790             | Bryan Monument erected by<br>13 surviving children |

|                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Thomas Karnow            | Benjamin Simons          |
| d. 15 Jul 1820, 76 years | d. 30 Apr 1770, 36 years |

|                           |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| John Bryan                | Hannah Harleston Ingraham |
| s/o John & Lydia Bryan    | w/o Wm Postell Ingraham   |
| m/Eliza Catherine Legree  | 28 Jul 1809 – 20 Feb 1869 |
| on 28 Nov 1810            |                           |
| 18 Jul 1791 – 14 Apr 1848 |                           |

|                           |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| John Haskell Quash        | Wm Postell Ingraham       |
| d. 9 Nov 1846, 60 yr 4 mo | 10 Dec 1848 – 12 Mar 1875 |



Pompion Hill Chapel  
1765 – 2026