

The Anglican Church in Colonial Monmouth County, New Jersey

Part II – Growth and Prosperity

By Joseph W. Hammond

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The Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church (and since 1789 in the United States as the Protestant Episcopal Church), made its entry into the area south of the Raritan River in New Jersey by 1700. Beginning in 1702, missionaries sent to America by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts served Monmouth County whenever possible in spite of the often-dangerous ferry crossing at Perth Amboy. The Society finally assigned missionaries full time to the area beginning in 1733. From then through the years of the American Revolution, the three Anglican congregations that evolved in Shrewsbury, Middletown, and Freehold depended on the Society for much of their support. This article, the second of three, tells the story of the Anglican Church in Monmouth County from 1751 through 1774. This was a period of steady growth and increasing prosperity led for more than two decades by the Rev. Samuel Cooke, a faithful missionary sent to the area by the SPG. The final article will focus on the depredations and difficulties faced by the Anglicans of Monmouth County and their churches during the years of the American Revolution when many (but not all) of them became Loyalists.

Part I of this story ended with the arrival in September 1751 of the Rev. Samuel Cooke as Church of England missionary to Monmouth County. He became the fourth missionary supported by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in London (hereafter SPG) to serve the Anglican churches at Shrewsbury, Middletown, and Freehold. These three parishes had, over the course of fifty years, acquired lots of land, built churches, received a large farm to serve as a glebe for the united congregations of Shrewsbury and Middletown, and obtained charters that

gave them many rights and privileges. Cooke's predecessor, the Rev. Thomas Thompson, had left this charge in peace and harmony among themselves after six years of internal controversy. So, the future looked promising for the Anglicans of Monmouth County as they began to move forward under the leadership of the Rev. Mr. Cooke.

On November 27, only a month after taking up his mission station in Monmouth County, the Rev. Samuel Cooke sent his first letter to the SPG informing them of his safe arrival in America, as well as his hopes and aspirations for the future.

I look upon it as a Duty incumbent on me to devote my time and service in the Cause on which I'm sent: to which end, I shall, I trust, so behave myself as to endeavor to procure the Love and Esteem of those whom I am sent to instruct; holding it as a maxim that when once Men are possess'd with a due regard for the Messenger, they will be sure to give greater attention, and more carefully listen to the Message he brings.¹

Cooke became a very regular correspondent with the SPG. In addition to reporting statistics, such as the number of baptisms, new communicants, and burials as required by the Society, his letters are filled with commentary on events and accomplishments within his mission station and elsewhere in the region. It did not take long for the new missionary to establish a respectful, cordial, appreciative relationship with his Monmouth County congregations. In a letter dated July 8, 1753, Cooke informed the SPG that:

His Parishioners at Shrewsbury, and Middletown, are building him an [sic] House on the Plantation given for the Use of the Missionary with 4 Rooms on a Floor two Stories high and a good Cellar under it, as a Testimony of their Regard to him . . .²

This brief description of the house suggests it was a full Georgian plan dwelling with two rooms per floor on either side of a central hallway containing a staircase. It was far more common

¹ Letter, the Rev. Samuel Cooke to the SPG Secretary, November 27, 1751. Archives of the United Society Partners in Gospel [formerly Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts], B Series Letter Books, vol. 19, 186. Hereafter referred to as USPG Archives.

² SPG Journal, vol. 12, 297-298. USPG Archives. The original of this letter does not survive in the Letter Books. It was the custom of the SPG to transcribe large portions of the missionary correspondence into their administrative journal.

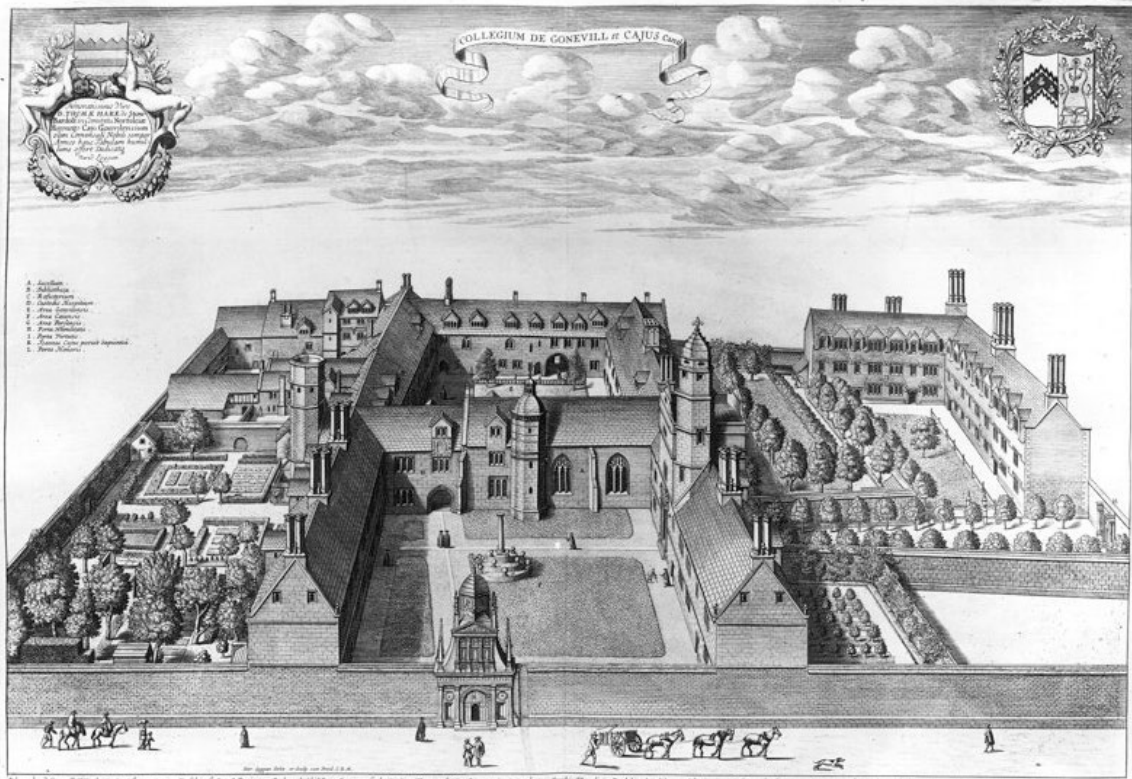
in Monmouth County to place two rooms per floor to one side of a hallway containing a staircase in what is called a two-thirds Georgian house plan. This was certainly an imposing residence for a missionary who was at the time still a bachelor. In a letter to the SPG dated January 23, 1754, Cooke reported that the house “is not yet finished, but in such Forwardness, as he hopes to get into it, some time next Spring.”³

What is the path that a young man from the United Kingdom might take to become an Anglican missionary in the American colonies? Much is known about the early life of the Rev. Samuel Cooke. So, he can provide one example or case study of the process. Cooke was born in 1723 in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, a port on England’s east coast. He was a son of Thomas Cooke and Mary Artis, who were married there on December 20, 1713. His father served as a collector of revenue in Great Yarmouth.⁴ Cooke received a year of education in his hometown, followed by seven years at the Charterhouse school in London under the tutelage of the Rev. Dr. James Hotchkis. Cooke was then admitted on November 9, 1743, as a scholar at Gonville and Caius College in Cambridge, where he matriculated in 1744 and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1747/48. Cooke was ordained a deacon by the Rt. Rev. Sir Thomas Gooch, Bishop of Ely and Master of Gonville and Caius College, on June 5, 1748. He then went to Beccles, a market town in northeast Suffolk, where he served as curate at St. Michael’s Church for three years. Cooke was finally ordained a Church of England priest by the Rt. Rev. Thomas Hayter, Bishop of Norwich,

³ SPG Journal, vol. 12, 359. USPG Archives. Located on the east side of Phalanx Road roughly opposite the entrance to Brookdale Community College, there is no known image of this house. It may have been the residence of Bruno Raub on the former Church Farm that was destroyed by fire on January 18, 1916. Raub had purchased the property from Christ Church, Shrewsbury, in 1906. The fire started in a wall behind an open fireplace in use, suggestive of an old building. See: *The Freehold Transcript*, January 21, 1916, 8, “Items of Local Interest.”

⁴ Personal Communication, Diana Stevenson to Joseph W. Hammond, January 9, 2024. The author is most grateful to Diana Stevenson, of Albany, New Hampshire, for sharing her extensive research on the Rev. Samuel Cooke, who is an ancestor of hers.

on September 23, 1750.⁵ He was at the time 27 years old and had gained experience as a preacher while a deacon in Beccles. Cooke also preached during this time in several rural parish churches in northeast Suffolk and an adjacent area of Norfolk. More on this aspect of his career later in this narrative.



Gonville and Caius College in Cambridge, England, as it appeared circa 1690 and as engraved by David Loggan. Courtesy Wikimedia. The wall and gate, as well as the quadrangle in the center foreground, remain intact today.

A solid education, university degree, and three years of working among the Anglican parishes in and around Beccles gave Samuel Cooke a sound start to his ministerial career. But this young man apparently wanted more from life than being a country parson in the rural churches of East Anglia. In the spring of 1751, some six months after his ordination, Cooke submitted a petition

⁵ John Venn, comp., *Biographical History of Gonville and Caius College, 1349 – 1897* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898), 54. Cooke's original certificates of ordination to the diaconate and priesthood survive along with a few other related documents in the Odell Family Collection in the Archives and Research Library of the New Brunswick Museum, St. John, N. B., Canada. One of Cooke's granddaughters married into the Odell family.

to the SPG offering his services to be appointed a missionary to the Society. The petition was accompanied by a certificate dated March 4 from the rector of St. Michael's in Beccles, and three other neighboring rectors, testifying to Cooke's good character. The petition came up for discussion at a meeting of the SPG board of trustees held on March 15, 1750/51. They agreed to recommend Cooke to the Society, and to appoint him a successor to the Rev. Thomas Thompson in his mission in Monmouth County, New Jersey. They further recommended that he be engaged at the same salary as Mr. Thompson (£60 per year), that he preach on verse 2 of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, and that Mr. Crusius be desired to hear him.⁶ That passage from St. Matthew in the King James version of the Bible reads, "And he opened his mouth, and taught them."

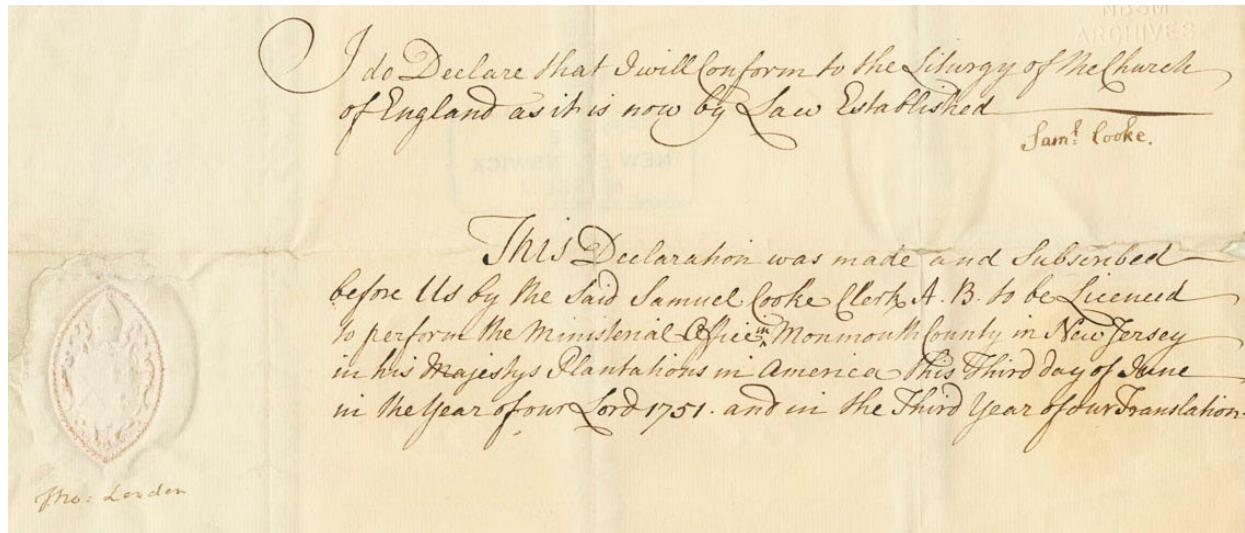
Cooke apparently passed his preaching assignment as events began to unfold quickly. On May 6, 1751, he delivered a farewell sermon in Beccles. Ten days later, the SPG issued him a certificate indicating that "the bearer, the Rev'd Samuel Cooke, is appointed Missionary . . . in Monmouth County in New Jersey." Then, on June 3, he was issued a minister's license in London by the Rt. Rev. Thomas Sherlock, Bishop of London, who had jurisdiction over all Anglican clergy in the Americas. The document read that: "Samuel Cooke Clerk A. B. to be licensed to perform the Ministerial Office in Monmouth County in New Jersey in His Majesty's Plantations in America . . ." Curiously, the license contained another clause to which Cooke signed his name. It stated: "I do Declare that I will Conform to the Liturgy of the Church of England as it is now by Law Established." This appears to be an indirect reference to the passionate evangelical preaching and liturgical liberties being taken by the Rev. George Whitefield and others in the Great Awakening

⁶ SPG Journal, vol. 12, 9-10. USPG Archives. Note that the SPG was still using Old Style dating in which the new year began on March 25. But they did not use the conventional format of 1750/51 for the period January 1 through March 24. Rather, the journal entry is simply dated 1750. In 1752, the United Kingdom switched to the Gregorian calendar to align with the rest of Europe.

revivalist movement that challenged traditional religious authority and led to the establishment of Methodism. Cooke was required to declare that he would adhere to the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.⁷ By late June of 1751, the adventurous young minister boarded a vessel bound for New York. As Cooke wrote to the SPG on November 27 from Shrewsbury in Monmouth County:

It is with Real Satisfaction I sit down to acquaint you that I happily arriv'd at New York the tenth of Last September, and having staid a few days there to refresh myself after the fatigues of an eleven weeks [sic] voyage, I came into the Jerseys and enter'd on my new mission.⁸

While staying in New York, Cooke preached a sermon on September 23 at Trinity Church.



Samuel Cooke Ministerial License issued June 3, 1751, by the Rt. Rev. Thomas Sherlock, Bishop of London. The seal at the lower left contains a Bishop's miter, with Sherlock's signature underneath. Courtesy Odell Family Collection, F36-4, New Brunswick Museum, Archives and Research Library, St. John, N. B., Canada.

Perhaps during his student years at Cambridge, but surely before his departure for America, Samuel Cooke adopted a coat of arms that he had engraved on a copper plate to produce an armorial bookplate. The arms featured three lions passant gardant in a bend or diagonal stripe from upper left to lower right across the shield. The shield itself is surrounded by elaborate rococo

⁷ Ministerial License for the Rev. Samuel Cooke, London, June 3, 1751. Odell Family Collection, F36-4, New Brunswick Museum, Archives and Research Library, St. John, N. B., Canada.

⁸ Letter, Rev. Samuel Cooke to the SPG Secretary, November 27, 1751. USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 19, 186.

mantling. Below the armorial, Cooke had engraved “S. Cooke / Gon. & Cai. Coll. Cant.”⁹ The initial purpose of the bookplate may have been to identify his books from those of other students while at Cambridge.



Samuel Cooke engraved armorial bookplate, England, circa 1745–1750. Courtesy Odell Family Collection, F36-8(2), New Brunswick Museum, Archives and Research Library, St. John, N. B., Canada.

For more than 23 years, the Rev. Samuel Cooke fulfilled his ministerial duties in Monmouth County with diligence and care. He faithfully reported his activities and accomplishments to the SPG on a regular basis, something that others of their missionaries in America neglected.¹⁰ His statistics speak for themselves. During his missionary years in

⁹ Several examples of the bookplate, plus the original engraved copper plate, can be found in the Odell Family Collection at the New Brunswick Museum, Archives and Research Library, St. John, N. B., Canada. Another example of the bookplate is owned by a descendant.

¹⁰ For instance, Cooke's predecessor in Monmouth County, the Rev. John Milne, did not communicate with the SPG between 1739 and 1744. That lack of reporting figured partly in his dismissal as a missionary.

Monmouth County, Cooke baptized a total of 724 persons – 626 white infants and children, 56 white adults, 31 black children, and 11 black adults. Over that same period of time, he conducted 145 marriages and 92 burials. Cooke dutifully recorded all of these events in the church register.¹¹

Preaching was a necessary requirement of any minister, Anglican or otherwise. This was apparently a skill in which the Rev. Samuel Cooke excelled. As early as June of 1752, only eight months into his Monmouth County ministry, Cooke had the satisfaction “of seeing Quakers, Anabaptists, and Presbyterians come to hear him, which gives him great Hopes that in Time some of them will be converted from the Error of their Ways.”¹² Two years later, the SPG journal noted that:

[Cooke] continues to officiate at the accustomed Places, and notwithstanding the Charm of Novelty is ceased, and Peoples Curiosity (which is a very predominant Passion in that part of the World) in a great Measure satisfi'd, he has the Pleasure to see such a Number of People of most Denominations, continue to attend his Preaching, as not only to make him [not] think Light of the Labour, but also to give Hopes that the greatest Part of them attend for a better Purpose than to Gratify an Aching Ear.¹³

Seventeen of the Rev. Mr. Cooke's sermons have so far been identified.¹⁴ They are written out as full essays, not just notes. Marginal notations indicate the scriptural citations that supported his comments. And, on the last page of each manuscript, he has listed where he delivered it and the date. Ten of the sermons were written while Cooke served as curate in Beccles, Suffolk, and the remaining seven during his missionary years in New Jersey. There is speculation that at least some of the early sermons may have been student exercises produced while Cooke attended

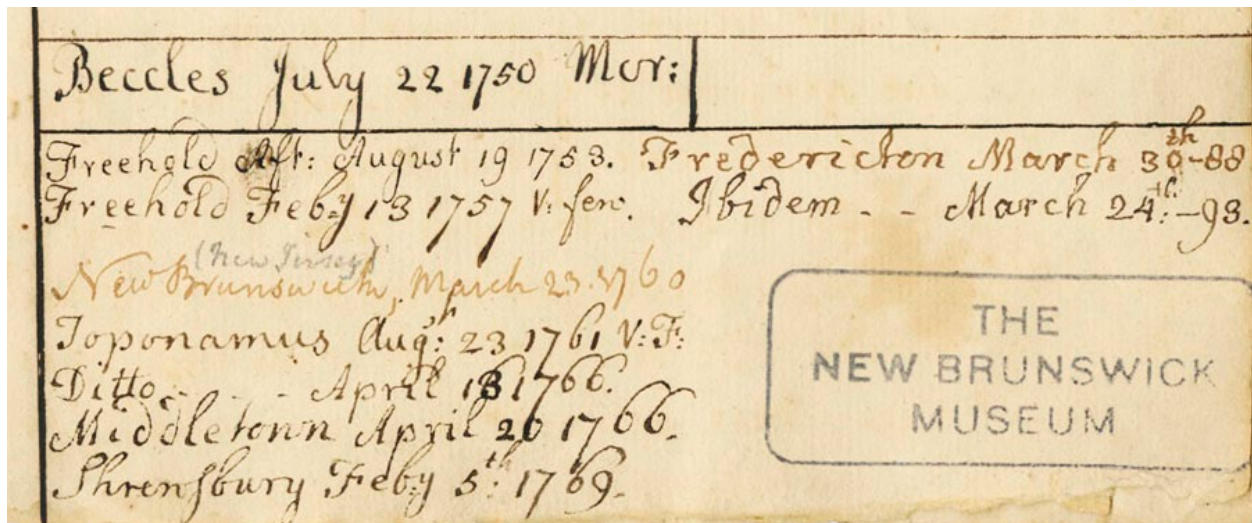
¹¹ Taken from the Church Register in the archives of Christ Church, Shrewsbury, as published by John E. Stillwell in *Historical and Genealogical Miscellany* (New York: Printed Privately, 1903), vol. 1, 175 – 199.

¹² SPG Journal, vol. 12, 180, USPG Archives.

¹³ SPG Journal, vol. 12, 359, USPG Archives. This passage is taken from a letter that Cooke wrote to the SPG Secretary dated January 23, 1754. The original letter does not survive.

¹⁴ Fourteen of the sermons can be found in the manuscripts collection of the Monmouth County Historical Association, Freehold, New Jersey; one each at Christ Church, Shrewsbury, New Jersey, and the New Brunswick Museum, Archives and Research Library, St. John, N. B., Canada; and one owned by a descendant.

Gonville and Caius College. He delivered these seventeen sermons a total of 207 times, spanning from his



Detail from the last page of Cooke's sermon on "Blessed are the Peace makers" showing where and when he delivered it between 1750 and 1793. Cooke distinguished his Freehold village services in the county courthouse from those at Topanemus, the location of the church some five miles away. Courtesy Odell Family Collection, F36-1(14), New Brunswick Museum, Archives and Research Library, St. John, N. B., Canada.

first Christmas in Beccles in 1748 to November of 1794, shortly before his death in Canada. Cooke obviously valued these writings highly as he drew on them for his entire career as an Anglican clergyman, and he took them with him wherever he went (including five trips across the Atlantic Ocean between England and America). Subjects vary. Many of them are moralistic in nature, preaching against such vices as swearing, drunkenness, temptation, wickedness, and greed. Others explain Christian doctrine, at times comparing Anglican beliefs to those of other denominations. A few were composed for specific events, such as Christmas, and celebration of the British victory over the French in November of 1759. The two most frequently used sermons were given a total of 23 times each. They are titled "The Easiness of Christ's Religion; How Incumbent it is upon us to obey his precepts" and "The Folly and danger of an Evil Heart of Unbelief." Two other sermons reveal much about Cooke's personality. "Blessed are the Peace makers, for they shall be called the Children of God" was delivered in times of controversy, divided opinion among one of his

congregations, and war. The farewell sermon focused on “The Duty of Mutual Love Enforced from our Lord’s Example.” These seventeen fully developed sermons constitute a rare body of intellectual and Anglican religious thought from eighteenth century New Jersey.¹⁵

Cooke settled into the routine of primarily serving his three principal congregations in Monmouth County. But he also preached occasionally at Allentown in western Monmouth County, as well as in Middletown Point (now Matawan), Manasquan, Cranbury, New Brunswick, Perth Amboy, Woodbridge, Elizabethtown, and Piscataway. At times, he went further afield to New York City, Hempstead and Oyster Bay on Long Island, and Philadelphia. Cooke also made at least one missionary trip south for 70 miles along the New Jersey coast, an area where organized religion had not yet been established. The church register indicates that Cooke performed many baptisms while traveling over the same wide section of central New Jersey where he preached.

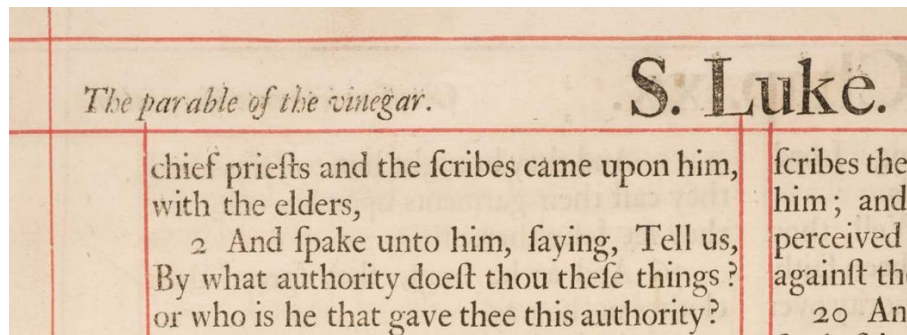
A few highlights and events from the Rev. Samuel Cooke’s lengthy missionary ministry in Monmouth County provide further evidence of his accomplishments.

- In a letter dated January 6, 1753, Cooke informed the SPG that “Mr. [Robert] Elliston Comptroller of Customs at New York has presented y^e Parish Church of Shrewsbury with an [sic] handsome Folio Bible in 2 Vol in Blue Turkey Leather . . .”¹⁶ This was a copy of the famous Vinegar Bible printed in 1716/17 by John Baskett of Oxford. Renowned for its exquisite workmanship and lavish engraved illustrations, as well as its glaring errors, this monumental edition of the King James version of the Bible received its nickname due to a typesetting error in the heading of Luke chapter 20 that reads “The parable of the vinegar” instead of vineyard. The Vinegar Bible remains one of the most treasured historic items at Christ Church, Shrewsbury. Later

¹⁵ The author is deeply indebted to Diana Stevenson, a Cooke descendant, for her willingness to share her sermon checklist and analytical spreadsheet on where and when the sermons were delivered.

¹⁶ SPG Journal, vol. 12, 253, USPG Archives.

rebound into a single large volume, the Elliston armorial bookplate was retained. Robert Elliston (1681–1756) was also a benefactor of the SPG.



The misprinted heading of Luke chapter 20 resulted in naming this edition of the King James version of the Bible the “Vinegar Bible,” printed by John Baskett of Oxford in 1716/17. Courtesy Dominic Winter Auctioneers, South Cerney, Cirencester, UK.

- Cooke continued to earn the respect of his parishioners in Monmouth County. In a letter to the SPG dated October 16, 1755, he stated that “he hath the happiness of living amicably with his People, who in general are ready to contribute every thing [sic] in their power to make his Situation among them easy & agreeable . . .”¹⁷
- The conservation of church assets also became a task of SPG missionaries in America, in addition to vestries. At their April 21, 1758, meeting, the Society’s board of trustees discussed a letter from the Rev. Samuel Cooke dated October 1, 1757.

Mr. Cooke has now lived 2 years upon y^e Farm belonging to y^e Churches of Middletown & Shrewsbury, & has now so improved it, that tho’ at his first coming it was lett [sic] for £27 pr ann. Currency, it would now rent for £50 pr ann. Currency.¹⁸

It is most unlikely that Cooke farmed the extensive former Leeds property himself, given his responsibilities as a missionary serving a large territory and his lack of any agricultural background. Rather, tenant farmers, hired hands, or slaves would have been responsible for those aspects of the church glebe operation.

¹⁷ SPG Journal, vol. 13, 94, USPG Archives.

¹⁸ SPG Journal, vol. 14, 45, USPG Archives. The term currency in this context means colonial currency, not British pounds sterling.

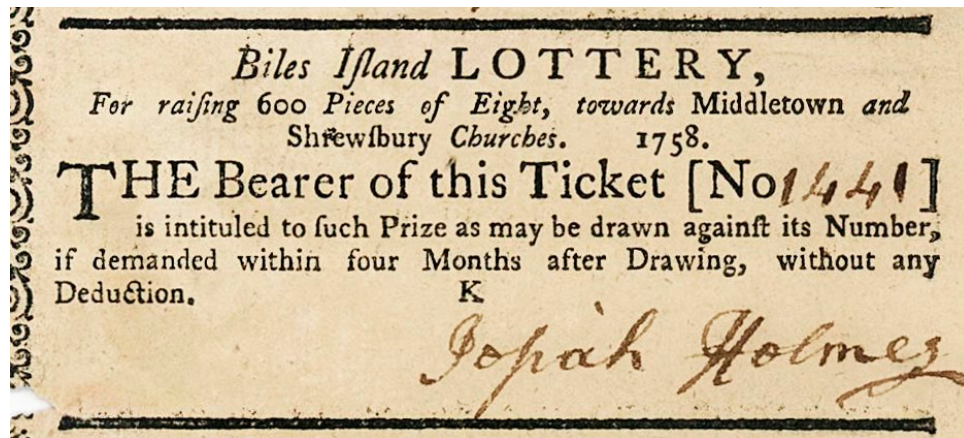
- Late in 1757, the vestry for Shrewsbury and Middletown took steps to set up a lottery scheme for funding repairs to their two church buildings. This was a popular approach at the time for raising funds to build, complete, or repair churches, colleges, and other public buildings. The lottery, consisting of 2,500 tickets at eight shillings each, was advertised beginning on January 9, 1758, in the *New York Mercury*. The drawing would take place on Biles Island located on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River between Trenton and Bordentown. The island was selected as by then New Jersey had banned lotteries and other forms of gaming. The drawing took place in June of 1759. Its results were printed in the *New York Gazette* on July 2. But after further consideration, the lottery scheme was amended in September 1759 by the addition of a second class to raise 720 dollars for the use of the church in Shrewsbury only.

As the Money raised by *Biles Island Lottery*, for the Benefit of the Churches of *Middletown* and *Shrewsbury*, proves to be insufficient for the Purpose; the Church of *Shrewsbury*, upon being surveyed, is found will require to be rebuilt almost from the Foundation; therefore a second Class is added for the Benefit of *Shrewsbury Church* . . .¹⁹

The drawing for this second lottery class, consisting of 1,200 tickets at four dollars each, was to be held on Biles Island in the spring of 1760. However, in June 1759, Pennsylvania passed an act “for the more effectual suppressing and preventing of Lotteries and Plays.” To circumvent this situation, after several postponements, the public was finally informed that the lottery would be positively drawn “on the fourteenth of May now next on board a vessel off the fishing banks of Sandy Hook.” Payment of the prizes dragged on into 1762. It is not known how much money was actually raised by these two lotteries. But apparently the proceeds fell far short of the funds needed for the stated purpose of carrying out church repairs. Not until 1769 did replacement of the small brick church in Shrewsbury commence.²⁰

¹⁹ *New York Gazette*, September 17, 1759, Supplement 1.

²⁰ For a very detailed discussion of the lotteries, see: James Steen, *History of Christ Church Shrewsbury* (Red Bank: *The Standard*, 1903; bound for limited distribution in 1972), 48–57. Many of the remarkable documents cited by



Ticket for the first 1758 lottery to benefit Christ Church, Middletown, and Christ Church, Shrewsbury. The drawing took place in June of 1759. Josiah Holmes served as one of the lottery managers. Courtesy Holmes Family Papers, MCHA Research Library.

- As early as November 14, 1756, the Rev. Samuel Cooke delivered a sermon in Philadelphia on “But above all things, my Brethren, Swear not.” Cooke associated closely with the Anglican clergy in Pennsylvania as well as in New Jersey. On May 2, 1760, during a voluntary convention in Philadelphia, Cooke joined nine Church of England ministers from Pennsylvania and Delaware in sending an address to James Hamilton congratulating him on his appointment as Lieutenant Governor of the province.²¹ The May 15, 1760, issue of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* then announced that, at its recent commencement, the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania) had conferred an honorary Master of Arts degree on Cooke, along with six other members of the Anglican and Presbyterian clergy.²² As a further testament to Cooke’s great respect among his Philadelphia colleagues, in a letter to the SPG of April 8, 1768, he wrote:

About eighteen months ago, I . . . refused to accept the offer of being an assistant Minister jointly and equally with M^r [Richard] Peters and M^r [Jacob] Duche, made me by M^r Peters and the Vestry of Christ Church Philadelphia. I am happy where I am – I love, and am

Steen can now be found in the Holmes Family Papers, Monmouth County Historical Association Research Library, Freehold, New Jersey. Hereafter MCHA Research Library.

²¹ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 8, 1760, 3.

²² *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 15, 1760, 3.

beloved by my People – I think I cannot do more good any where [sic] else – and possibly, was I to change, less.²³

- A collegial atmosphere also existed among the Anglican missionaries in New Jersey. In November 1761, six of them, including Cooke, sent an address to Josiah Hardy congratulating him on his appointment as governor of the province.²⁴ The previous year, Cooke had written to the SPG that:

Encouraged by the Advantages we find arising from our Annual Meetings, we, the Society's Missionaries of this Province Unanimously agree regularly to Continue them, And agreeable to the Last year's appointment, we convened at my house in Monmouth the 24th of Sept^r Last; which gave me an opportunity I have long wish'd for, of Entertaining my Brethren.²⁵

- At an annual convention of regional clergy held in Elizabethtown in October 1767, a committee of four was tasked to “frame some plan of provision for the distressed widows and children of such of our Clergy as should die in narrow or necessitous circumstances.” The Rev. Samuel Cooke joined with the Revs. Dr. William Smith, provost of the College of Philadelphia; Dr. Samuel Auchmuty, rector of Trinity Church in New York; and Dr. Myles Cooper, president of King's College in New York (now Columbia University), to draft such a plan, with three similar charters to be procured in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The next convention held in New Brunswick in October 1768 accepted the plan, which led to the creation of the Corporation for the Relief of Widows and Children of Clergymen. Nineteen priests attended this important meeting, nine of them from New Jersey. The rest represented Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut. Governor William Franklin issued a New Jersey charter for the Corporation on March 29, 1769, thereby creating an institution that anticipated the establishment of The Church Pension

²³ Letter, Rev. Samuel Cooke to the SPG Secretary, April 8, 1768, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 302.

²⁴ *New-York Mercury*, November 23, 1761, 1.

²⁵ Letter, Rev. Samuel Cooke to the SPG Secretary, November 5, 1760, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 273.

Fund and other clergy aid programs of the Episcopal Church by nearly 150 years. Cooke's participation in the distinguished committee that drafted the plan reflected the high esteem in which his fellow Anglican clergymen held him.²⁶

Events in the Rev. Samuel Cooke's personal life paralleled those of his ministerial career. On November 16, 1756, Cooke married Graham Kearney at Christ Church in Philadelphia.²⁷ Born on May 21, 1736, she was the youngest child of Michael Kearney Sr. of Perth Amboy and Sarah Morris. Graham was named for her maternal grandmother, Isabella Graham, who had married the late Governor Lewis Morris.²⁸ This connection to the influential and extended Morris/Kearney family made Cooke an in-law relative to many of the leading individuals in the Shrewsbury community, several of whom served on his vestry. These included Graham's uncle, New Jersey Chief Justice Robert Hunter Morris; her brother Michael Kearney Jr.; Lewis Morris Ashfield, Thomas Kearney and William Norris, her cousins; Henry Leonard, a brother-in-law; and Dr. James Boggs, who married Mary Morris, a cousin. Michael Kearney Sr., a native of Ireland and resident of Perth Amboy, owned extensive landholdings in New Jersey as one of the East Jersey Proprietors. He also filled various important offices, including as secretary and treasurer of the Province of East Jersey, clerk of the Assembly, surrogate, clerk of the Court of Common Pleas, and as a vestryman and warden of St. Peter's Church, Perth Amboy.²⁹ Kearney may have spent his last

²⁶ For a detailed discussion of the process by which the Corporation was created, and its early history, see Nelson R. Burr, *The Anglican Church in New Jersey* (Philadelphia: The Church Historical Society, 1954), 299–310.

²⁷ *Record of Pennsylvania Marriages Prior to 1810* (Harrisburg: Clarence M. Busch, State Printer of Pennsylvania, 1895), 68, 152.

²⁸ Governor Lewis Morris, long an advocate for the Church of England in New Jersey, figured prominently in Part I of this series on the Anglican Church in Colonial Monmouth County.

²⁹ Rev. W. Northey Jones, *The History of St. Peter's Church in Perth Amboy, New Jersey* (New York: Patterson Press, 1924), 342–343.

years in Shrewsbury, where he owned much property and where three of his daughters and son lived after his death. He was buried in the yard of Christ Church on May 9, 1741.³⁰

The Rev. Samuel Cooke and his wife Graham Kearney became the parents of two sons and six daughters between 1758 and 1771. The first son, Thomas, died at two years of age and was interred at Christ Church on November 14, 1763. Complications from the birth of their last daughter, Anastasia, in 1771 may have caused Graham's early death at the age of 35. She was also buried at Christ Church on September 25, 1771. Cooke lamented his loss to the SPG in a letter of October 10, 1771.

Last week it pleased God to visit me with a most severe and trying affliction in the sudden Death of one of the best of Wives – by which means, seven children, from six months old to thirteen years, have met with the irretrievable Loss of a most tender and attentive parent, and whose sole Support, under God, now depends on the slender & precarious Thread of their Father's life. This heavy and unexpected Stroke so totally fills my Mind, and depresses my Spirits, as to render me incapable of paying my Duty to the Ven^{ble} Society in the Manner I ought to do.³¹

Perhaps to accommodate his growing family, the Rev. Samuel Cooke acquired a farm in 1764 that was located on the road from Tinton Falls to Shrewsbury (now Sycamore Avenue) approximately where the Garden State Parkway passes under the road today. He described it some years later as “consisting of 165 acres hav^g upon it a good Dwelling House with a Barn, Stables, and other convenient Houses . . .” Cooke valued the farm at £1,400 New York currency, or £787.10 Sterling. Apparently to work the farm, he owned a “Negro Man about 25 years old” valued at £100 local currency. His wife was assisted by a “Negro Wench” valued at £56.³² Slave ownership was common among the Kearney and Morris families. For instance, the Rev. Mr. Cooke baptized one

³⁰ Stillwell, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 162. The three daughters were Isabella Kearney, Euphemia Leonard, and Graham Cooke. Euphemia and Graham were minors at the time of their father's death. The Rev. John Milne, SPG missionary to Monmouth County, witnessed Kearney's will, which was dated March 12, 1740/41, just weeks before he died.

³¹ Letter, Rev. Samuel Cooke to the SPG Secretary, October 10, 1771, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 316.

³² Memorial of Samuel Cooke, March 15, 1785, American Loyalist Claims, Series I, AO 12/13, 188. National Archives, Kew, Richmond, United Kingdom.

adult Black female and four Black children belonging to Isabella Kearney, his sister-in-law. From time to time, Cooke expressed to the SPG his happiness at being their missionary in Monmouth County, never more eloquently than in the following passage.

Blessed be God, I am Happy in America – Happy both in my publick & private capacity – Happy in the Love and Harmony of my Congregations – Happy in Domestic Union and Tranquility – and Happy in such connexions [sic] Here, as I expect, and Hope, nothing will intervene to prevent my Ending the remainder of my days in this Country, and in the Service of my God and the Society.³³

The Church of England in central New Jersey saw steady growth throughout the 1750s and 1760s. Congregations increased, more SPG missionaries were assigned to the area, and a few new churches were built. As an example, the Anglican faithful in the village of Spotswood in Middlesex County erected a church that was ready for use by 1758. Their numbers grew so rapidly that in 1761 a gallery had to be added to the structure to increase seating capacity. This new house of worship, named St. Peter's, was located 10 miles from the church at Topanemus in Monmouth County, where some families in the nearby parts of Middlesex County had been attending. The new Spotswood church therefore drew those people away from the Rev. Samuel Cooke's Freehold mission station. SPG missionaries assigned to New Brunswick visited Spotswood regularly.

A group of SPG missionaries from New Jersey met together in Elizabethtown in April of 1765. Five of them, including the Rev. Samuel Cooke, signed a joint letter to the SPG on April 11 "humbly proposing & earnestly requesting that a New Mission be erected for St. Peter's Spotswood and St. Peter's Freehold, whose want of a Miss^{ry} is fully set forth . . ." The letter, discussed by the SPG on July 19, 1765, went on to outline the funds raised and commitments made by the two congregations should a missionary be assigned to their churches. The New Jersey clergy then observed that "They are also of opinion, that adding Freehold to Spotswood will be an

³³ Letter, Rev. Samuel Cooke to the SPG Secretary, April 6, 1761, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 277.

agreeable relief to Mr. Cooke, after the immense fatigue, for 14 Years, of such an extensive Mission as but few constitutions are able to support.” The SPG board “Agreed to recommend the Establishment of a New Missⁿ for St. Peters Spotswood and St. Peters Freehold.”³⁴

The SPG assigned the Rev. William Ayers to the new mission station. As he wrote to the Society on Michaelmas 1768, “I arrived safe at my Mission the 29th of April last, and was kindly received.” The letter was accompanied by another letter from the wardens and vestrymen of the Spotswood and Freehold congregations thanking the SPG for their benefaction in sending them a missionary, and acknowledging the services of the Rev. Samuel Cooke, who “with great Faithfulness and Diligence discharged the Duties of his Function & conducted himself in a Manner truly laudable.”³⁵ Cooke delivered his farewell sermon at the Topanemus church on June 6, 1768, reusing his text prepared when leaving Beccles seventeen years before on “The Duty of Mutual Love Enforced from our Lord’s Example.”

Born about 1735, Willian Ayers was a native of Philadelphia. He entered the Charity School for Boys there as a student in 1752. He stayed on after 1755 as Assistant to Master Andrew Morton, then from 1759 to 1767 as Master of the Charity School, succeeding Morton. This institution was housed on the campus of the College of Philadelphia. Ayers first appeared in New Jersey in 1766 as a lay reader and candidate for orders. The following year he was reprimanded for reading prayers and his own sermons without consulting the clergy. Ayers finally convinced them of his worthiness. He went to England for ordination in 1767, and on December 21 was licensed by the Rt. Rev. Richard Terrick, Bishop of London, to serve the new mission station in New Jersey.³⁶

³⁴ SPG Journal, vol. 16, 389, USPG Archives.

³⁵ Letter, Rev. William Ayers to the SPG Secretary, Michaelmas, 1768, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 6–7.

³⁶ Nelson R. Burr, *op. cit.*, 581–582.

It did not take long for Cooke's two remaining congregations in Shrewsbury and Middletown to extend thanks to the SPG for giving them more of their beloved missionary's time.

In a letter dated June 14, 1768, signed by the four wardens and ten vestrymen, they wrote:

It is with Pleasure we take this Opportunity of bearing Testimony to the Worth & Merit of our present Missionary the Rev^d. M^r. Cooke whose Diligence in his Function – whose Moral Life & Conduct has been such for above these Sixteen years past, as Justly to entitle him to the Esteem & Love of all his Congregation, and we doubt not but the Churches will now increase & flourish under his care, since the Society has been pleased to confine his Labors to two only which formerly were too much dissipated to answer Effectually the design of the Society.³⁷

As early as May 1767, the vestry of Christ Church, Shrewsbury, had “Ordered that Mr. Knickerbocker and Mr. Jacob Dennis do examine the Church, and make a Report of the Cost of rebuilding or repairing thereof.”³⁸ The small brick building of 1730–1732, with only sixteen pews, a few benches at the rear of the sanctuary, and a small gallery, had been considered, since the mid-1740s, too small to accommodate all who wished to worship there. Multiple efforts had also been mounted over the years to repair the church, or explore the feasibility of enlarging it. So, in 1768, with a burst of renewed energy and enthusiasm, plans were drawn up for an entirely new house of worship to be erected on the site of the earlier building. At their vestry meeting of January 27, 1769, the following actions were taken:

The Incumbent Mr. Cooke produced a Subscription amounting to Four Hundred & fifty Pounds for rebuilding of Christ's Church in Shrewsbury. Whereupon it is unanimously agreed that the Work shall immediately be set about. Mr. Cooke at the same Time produced a Draught of the Building, 60 by 36 feet in the clear, which is agreed to. Ordered that Mr. Cooke, Mr. John Wardell, Mr. Joseph Leonard and Mr. Morford be a Committee, they or any three of them, to carry on the Work.

³⁷ Letter, Wardens and Vestrymen of Christ Church, Shrewsbury, to the SPG Secretary, June 14, 1768, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol 24, 304.

³⁸ Vestry Minutes, May 7, 1767, Christ Church Archives, Shrewsbury, New Jersey. The original eighteenth century minutes were kept on loose sheets of paper. In the early nineteenth century, those minutes that survived were copied into a bound volume. Space was left for those that were missing.

After agreeing on the payment of workers and how to credit subscriptions with work in kind, the vestry then went on.

Ordered that Josiah Halstead be Overseer of the Work and Workmen, and that his Wages shall be 5/ p^r day, New York Money, the whole Account being to be kept in that Currency, and that Mr. Halstead shall be paid Eight Shillings p^r Week for the Board of such Workmen as shall choose to board with him.³⁹

Josiah Halstead was a good choice to serve as overseer of the project. He was a carpenter/joiner by trade who had worked on the old church for decades. In 1754, Halstead purchased a building across the road (now Broad Street) from Christ Church that he turned into the Blue Ball Tavern, a popular establishment in Shrewsbury that operated as such for 60 years or more.⁴⁰ His accommodations for some of the workmen were certainly convenient to the job site.

For the plans of the new church, the Rev. Mr. Cooke turned to Robert Smith (1722–1777), the leading builder/architect in colonial Philadelphia. Smith had been born in Scotland and immigrated to Philadelphia by 1749. Approximately 50 of his commissions have been identified so far, with clients ranging from Virginia to New Jersey. Among Smith's most important works are the steeple of Christ Church, Philadelphia (1751–1753), Nassau Hall and the President's House at Princeton University (1753–1757), a new Philadelphia residence for Benjamin Franklin (1764–1766), the Philadelphia Bettering House (1765–1766), the Hospital for the Mad & Insane at Williamsburg, Virginia (1770), and the Walnut Street Prison in Philadelphia (1773–1774). Smith also played a prominent role in the Carpenters' Company of the City and County of Philadelphia, America's oldest trade guild, at one point providing the designs for Carpenters' Hall (1768).

Robert Smith supplied plans for at least seven new churches during his distinguished career, all but two of them in Philadelphia. Three were for Anglican congregations, three for

³⁹ Vestry Minutes, January 27, 1769, Christ Church Archives.

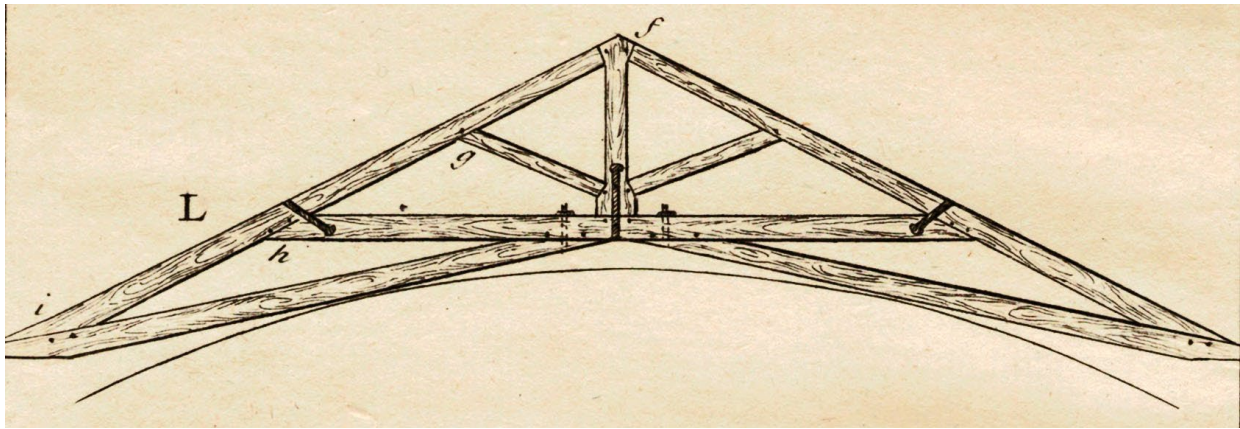
⁴⁰ The building still stands, known today as the Allen House and furnished as an 18th century tavern might have looked. It is owned and operated by the Monmouth County Historical Association.

Presbyterians, and one for Lutherans. Several more can be attributed to him or his circle. The documented buildings ranged in size from 38 by 62 feet for Christ Church, Shrewsbury, to 70 by 108 feet for magnificent Zion Lutheran Church in Philadelphia (1766–1769). The latter was considered the largest house of worship in British North America until well into the nineteenth century. Five of Smith's churches still stand. All but two have been altered almost beyond recognition. Only St. Peter's Church in Philadelphia (1758–1761) and Christ Church, Shrewsbury (1769–1774), retain original interior features. When viewed as a group, these seven houses of worship constitute one of the most significant bodies of ecclesiastical commissions associated with one builder/architect in all of colonial America.⁴¹

It appears that Cooke may have been put in touch with Robert Smith by the Rev. Jonathan Odell, SPG missionary at St. Mary's Church in Burlington, New Jersey. That congregation had just completed a major enlargement of their church in which Smith probably played a role in its design. As events toward construction began to occur in Shrewsbury after the January 1769 vestry meeting, disagreement soon arose as to the manner in which the building should be framed. Experienced builder/architect Smith had chosen what is called a raised bottom chord truss for the roof that was based on Plate K of *The British Carpenter* by Francis Price, an important trade book which first appeared in print in 1733. Trusses of this particular configuration had been used in London as early as 1706, when two pairs of them were incorporated into the west end of St. Paul's Cathedral. The primary advantage of the raised bottom chord truss is that it accommodates a graceful arched ceiling that rises above the level of the wall plates, a feature found in four of Smith's churches that used this roof framing system. The design also eliminated the need for

⁴¹ For a detailed discussion of Robert Smith's church designs see: Joseph W. Hammond, "The 18th-Century Church Designs of Robert Smith," in *Timber Framing: The Journal of the Timber Framers Guild*, Number 73, September 2004, 16–23.

interior columns or supports and allowed for a low roof pitch of 30 degrees or less. It also made comparatively sparing use of timber, achieving structural integrity through the use of iron bolts and straps at critical joints. Smith applied this truss successfully in clear spans ranging up to 65 feet at St. Paul's Church in Philadelphia (1760–1761), a building which still stands.



Detail from Plate K of *The British Carpenter* by Francis Price, the first edition of which appeared in print in 1733. This depicts what is called a raised bottom chord roof truss that accommodates a curved ceiling below. Architect Robert Smith favored this roof framing approach for his church commissions. Author's collection.

Emotions about the Shrewsbury church design apparently ran high, so much so that the Rev. Samuel Cooke delivered his sermon on “Blessed are the Peace makers” to the congregation on February 5. Things came to a head at a vestry meeting held on Easter Tuesday (March 28), 1769, when Josiah Holmes submitted a glaring confrontational resignation from the vestry and building committee. In it, he used the word “gimcrack,” which in the eighteenth century was a derogatory slang term that meant either something flimsy or poorly made but deceptively attractive, or a bumbling tinkerer in mechanical contrivances. The letter opens with a reference to the Rev. Jonathan Odell. The recently enlarged St. Mary's Church in Burlington made use of the raised bottom chord truss.

The Gimcrack Vestery [sic] By M^r Cook Returns . . . thanks to their Master Gimcrack M^r Odell for his Very Polite Letter.

Josiah Holmes not approveing [sic] of the Method considered on for the Building of the Church and for Divers [sic] other Reasons Desires to be Excused from Serving or acting

as one of the Committee for Carrying on the Work – Which Request is Refused him – Whereupon He thinking it too great a hardship to be obliged and Layed [sic] under the Disagreeable Necessity of acting against his own Reason also thinking himself and others Ill used &c Declines and Absolutely Refuseth [sic] to Act Either as a Member of Said Committee or as Church Warden until he can at Least be Better Reconciled to the Method and proceedings Determining to have no Manner of Concern in ordering or Carrying on the said Work, But only to Remain Barely a Spectator according to which Determination his name is eras^d in the minutes of the Vestry.

The following day, Holmes sent the text of his resignation to the Rev. Cooke, with the appended note:

S^r I here send you the Vestry Book and as I have Determin^d not to act Either as Church Warden or Committee Man thought proper to give you this Intimation thereof that if Necessary another Gimcrack may be Chosen in my Room.⁴²

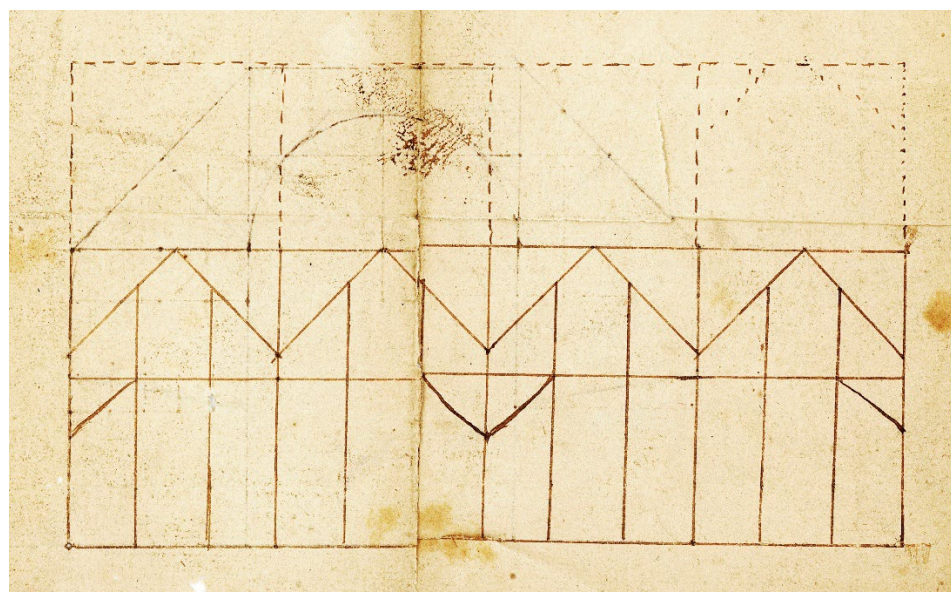
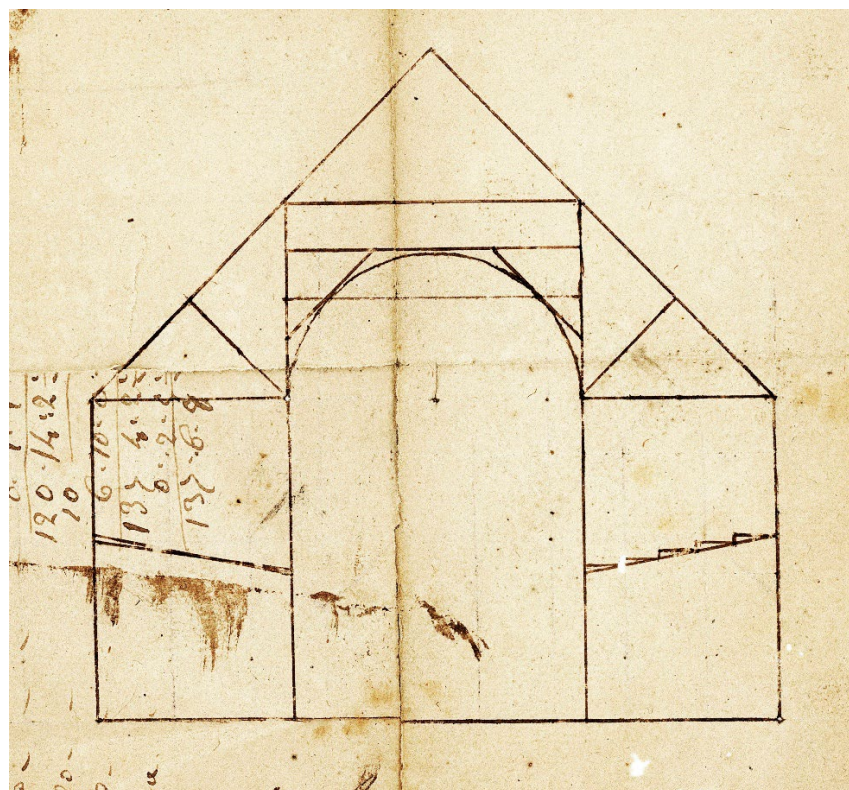
The vestry minutes of the March 28 meeting contain a somewhat toned-down version of Holmes's letter of resignation that eliminated the term gimcrack. The vestry then "Ordered that the building of the Church shall be carried on, and that the Roof &c. shall be framed according to the Draught of Mr. Smith of Philadelphia."⁴³ Dr. James Boggs replaced Josiah Holmes as a church warden on the vestry. Holmes had served for thirty years as a vestryman, warden, lottery manager, and clerk of the vestry at Christ Church, Shrewsbury. He had also signed the 1738 petition requesting a charter for the congregation.

A local merchant who in his youth had been trained as a silversmith, Josiah Holmes was not a carpenter, but two of his sons were. Eighteenth century sketches for a church survive among the family papers. They give an idea of what the Holmeses had in mind as an alternative to the Robert Smith plan. A section drawing shows a structure of longitudinal alignment with two rows of interior columns supporting sloped galleries on either side of a center nave with a high barrel-vaulted ceiling. Rather odd framing around and above the vault supports a roof with a high 45-

⁴² Letter, Josiah Holmes to the Rev. Samuel Cooke, March 29, 1769, Holmes Family Papers, MCHA Research Library.

⁴³ Vestry Minutes, Easter Tuesday, 1769, Christ Church Archives.

degree pitch. A side elevation framing sketch called for a building of four bays.⁴⁴ Overall, the general massing of their proposed church resembled Old Tennent Presbyterian Church near



Section and side elevation framing sketches for a church, circa 1769, Holmes Family Papers, Courtesy MCHA Research Library.

⁴⁴ Undated sketches for a church, Holmes Family Papers, MCHA Research Library.

Freehold in Manalapan Township, Monmouth County, built in 1751–1753. Documentation of eighteenth-century structural disagreements such as that which occurred between the Holmes family and the vestry of Christ Church, Shrewsbury, are rare. Josiah Holmes returned to the vestry by April 17, 1770.

In a lengthy letter dated April 12, 1769, the Rev. Samuel Cooke informed the SPG of the decision to build a new church in Shrewsbury. He first reiterated that limiting his ministry to two churches had contributed to the energy being displayed by the congregation as he can now perform divine service there more than once a month, and that the old building was too small and out of repair.

Towards accomplishing this very desirable end they have really exerted themselves to the utmost of their Abilities, and have by very generous Contributions raised within themselves upwards of £500 current money of this Province. They seem to have been actuated by a truly religious & laudable spirit and I hope if they persevere to the end to have it in my power e're long to acquaint the Society of our having completed a handsome & durable Church.

It is to be a framed Building – the Dimensions are 60 feet by 36 feet in the clear, and 24 feet high – with an elegant Cupola – The timber is all provided and drawn to the Spot – The shingles and Boards are engag'd – and the Carpenters next week are ordered to begin to Frame it.

The Cost of the Building, when finished, is computed at £800. For the remaining £300 we depend something on the solicited Benefactions of the generous & well-disposed Christians in other places . . .⁴⁵

Events moved more slowly than anticipated by the Rev. Mr. Cooke. A contract with a team of carpenters was signed on June 12, 1769. In it, Daniel Halstead, his brother Josiah Halstead, Othiniel Rogers, and Jacob Dennis Jr. were to be paid £300 in New York currency in three instalments based on the progress of their work. They:

On their parts jointly or severally engage to Frame, Raise & enclose with shingles from top to bottom, with a Cupola agreeable to the plan deliver'd herewith, and to make the Window

⁴⁵ Letter, Rev. Samuel Cooke to the SPG Secretary, April 12, 1769, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 309.

Frames, sashes, Doors, Inside & outside Cornish and lay the floors, all in a good, substantial & neat manner as shall be deem'd sufficient by any other workmen . . . The Dimensions of the said Building to be sixty-two Feet in length, & thirty eight in Breadth from outside to outside and the Posts as high as the Timber on the Spot will admit of; the Roof to be built & framed agreeable to the Plan given herewith from Mr. Smith of Philadelphia.

Other terms of the contract required the Rev. Cooke and John Wardell to find all the materials for the church. If the carpenters had to cut more timber, then they would be paid reasonable wages over and above the contract price of £300. Three of the carpenters also agreed to appoint "Daniel Halstead as the head workman & engage themselves to follow his Directions throughout the work." And finally, the building was to be "finish'd in a Workman like manner as specified above, by the First of November next ensuing the Date hereof." The document, written in the Rev. Cooke's hand, was signed by Wardell and Cooke representing the congregation, and the four carpenters.⁴⁶

At a vestry meeting held on July 10, 1769, two further issues were resolved by votes. First was the placement of the northeast corner of the new church. And second was its alignment on the lot, either parallel to what is now Sycamore Avenue, or facing south parallel to Broad Street. The east-west alignment of the roof ridge won by a 7 to 5 vote. The meeting then continued. "The Churchwardens are requested to wait upon the Rev^d [Charles] McKnight, next Sunday, to beg the Favor of the Use of his Meeting-House during the building of the new Church."⁴⁷ The Presbyterians of Shrewsbury had built a meeting house adjacent to Christ Church on a lot that they had purchased from Nicholas Brown in 1727. Permission to hold services in their building was granted in a rare display of cooperation between Anglicans and Presbyterians. Relations between

⁴⁶ Articles of Agreement between John Wardell and the Rev. Samuel Cooke of one part, and Daniel Halstead, Josiah Halstead, Othinie Rogers and Jacob Dennis Jr., June 12, 1769, Christ Church Archives, gift of Arthur S. H. Jones, a Cooke descendant, 1918.

⁴⁷ Vestry Minutes, July 10, 1769, Christ Church Archives.

these two denominations had become strained during the Great Awakening with the rise of the “New Light” Presbyterians, with whom the Rev. Mr. McKnight affiliated. Renewed effort beginning in the late 1760s to have an Anglican bishop assigned to the American colonies was also most strongly opposed by the Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Tensions between the Anglicans and Presbyterians in New Jersey would increase in the first half of the 1770s, the very period during which Christ Church, Shrewsbury, was under construction and the two neighboring congregations shared a single house of worship.

The old church must have been removed very quickly once the contract had been signed, as the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* contained an extract of an unusual letter from Shrewsbury dated August 29, 1769, that was sent to a friend in Philadelphia.

A Few Days ago as some Workmen were digging for some Purpose, in a Churchyard at Shrewsbury, they were obliged to take up two Coffins. On examining one that had been buried near 40 Years, the Corpse was in its usual state; but the other, that had been deposited 32 Years, was found with the Flesh whole, as at the Day of Interment, to the great Surprise of the Persons present. The Corpse was kept 2 Days and shown to great Numbers of People and former Relations, and had a formal Burial, an old Man assisting, who had helped to carry it to the Grave the first Time, said it was the Body of J. Morris, Brother to your former Governor [Robert Hunter Morris]. It is said that there was a Quantity of Salt put into the Coffin, to preserve the Corpse some Time, that it might be removed to the Family burying [sic] Place, at Morrissenia [sic], in New-York Government.⁴⁸

The new church in Shrewsbury was erected over a large portion of the graveyard to the south of the earlier building. Several interments were disturbed in 1909 when a furnace pit was dug under the church.⁴⁹ They were again disturbed in 1997 when further work was carried out to improve the furnace area.⁵⁰ As part of foundation preparations, stonemasons laid a cornerstone in

⁴⁸ *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, September 11, 1769. Robert Hunter Morris (1700–1764) served as Deputy Governor of Pennsylvania from 1754 to 1756. No mention of this 1737 burial appears in the church register, which was begun in 1733. The body was that of John Morris, a son of Governor Lewis Morris and his wife Isabella Graham. He was born in Shrewsbury on April 27, 1707, and died on June 12, 1737. Family histories claim that his death took place at the family estate called Morrisania in the Bronx section of New York City. They apparently are not correct.

⁴⁹ *The New Jersey Standard*, Red Bank, New Jersey, September 24, 1909, 1.

⁵⁰ *Asbury Park Press*, November 8, 1997, 4.

the southwest corner of the church facing what is now Broad Street. It was inscribed with the letters SCM and the year 1769. It is this writer's opinion that the letters stand for Samuel Cooke Missionary.⁵¹

The contract with the carpenters did not include such interior features as pews, a pulpit, and other chancel furnishings. Fabrication of these items may have been awarded to Josiah Halstead, the carpenter/joiner who had fashioned the sixteen pews of the old church in 1751. At the April 17, 1770, meeting of the vestry, it was "Voted that [at] Mr. Josiah Halstead's Request, that he have Liberty to build a Shop at the North-East Corner of the Church Yard."⁵² This small single-story building stood until 1899, when a parish house designed by architect Joseph Swannell of Red Bank was erected in its place.⁵³ A photograph of the shop shows a large door in the street elevation, no doubt for moving material such as lumber into it and finished products such as pew parts out.



View of the former carpentry shop in the northeast corner of the Christ Church lot in Shrewsbury, New Jersey, circa 1890. Used in the nineteenth century as a school and later as a parish house, President Ulysses S. Grant was entertained in the building in 1869. Courtesy Christ Church, Shrewsbury.

⁵¹ For many decades, parish historians have believed that the letters were SPG for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. That is clearly not the case when the cornerstone is viewed in strong raking light.

⁵² Vestry Minutes, April 17, 1770, Christ Church Archives.

⁵³ *Red Bank Register*, December 6, 1899, 10.

The Rev. Samuel Cooke brought the SPG up to date in a letter of October 1, 1770, that described the difficulties in making progress on the new church.

I should have had the Satisfaction of performing Divine Service in it by this time had it not been for the unhappy Difference which has subsisted between the Mother Country and her Colonies which has been a means of depriving us of two very material articles, Viz, glass & nails; which stopped the Progress of the work above three months. The latter we have supplied ourselves with, made at Shrewsbury tho' at an expensive rate, being almost as dear again as the English Nails.

The Glass is yet tho' I hope will not be much longer wanted as the Non-importation Agreement seems to be at an end. This delay however will prevent my officiating in it this Winter, which will be attended with some little ill convenience to my Congregation, yet I hope it will be no Detriment. For upon pulling down the old Church, the Presbyterian Minister of this place, with two of the Elders of the Meeting, very civilly offer'd me their Meeting House to officiate in till such time as my own Church was finished . . .⁵⁴

By early April 1771, the vestry of Christ Church, Shrewsbury, took action in an effort to speed up construction. "Mr. Wardell is desired to urge Daniel Halstead to finish the Work he has undertaken."⁵⁵ But progress on the new church soon encountered issues that could not have been foreseen. Othiniel Rogers, one of the principal carpenters, died in August of 1771 at the age of 50, and was interred in the church graveyard on the 21st.⁵⁶ The following month, the death of Graham Kearney sent her husband, the Rev. Samuel Cooke, into a period of melancholy. Then early in 1772, Josiah Halstead was incarcerated in the common goal of Monmouth County for debt. A recent act passed by the Provincial legislature provided relief for insolvent debtors. So, after Halstead complied with the directions of the act, two judges of the Inferior Court of Common Pleas agreed to "hereby Discharge the said Josiah Halstead from his said Confinement. As Witness our

⁵⁴ Letter, Rev. Samuel Cooke to the SPG Secretary, October 1, 1770, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 312.

⁵⁵ Vestry Minutes, April 2, 1771, Christ Church Archives.

⁵⁶ Stillwell, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 198.

hands this 28th Day of April 1772.”⁵⁷ On the following October 27, Cooke sent a letter to the SPG “expressing his concern that their new Church is not yet finished, owing to the heaviness of the expence [sic], more than £800 having been expended already, and £200 more will be wanting, which he has the agreeable prospect of raising.”⁵⁸

In his spring 1774 letter to the SPG, the Rev. Samuel Cooke at last informed the Society that the new church in Shrewsbury was finally finished after five years of effort.

I postponed addressing the Ven^{ble} Society at my usual Time last Autumn because it was not then in my Power to acquaint them of the finishing of my Church at Shrewsbury, and I was really afraid to say any thing [sic] relative to it, as I had been so frequently Disappointed in my Expectations for these two years last past; so that on the whole, I thought it safest to be silent than to venture any more hazardous Conjectures. My Disappointments arose partly from the Difficulty of raising Money sufficient to carry on the work with a proper spirit – and partly to the Dilatoriness of the Workmen employed, who notwithstanding all I could do, would occasionally quit their Work for private and more lucrative jobbs [sic]. However, I now have the Pleasure to inform the Society, that all Difficulties are at length overcome, and I can with Truth affirm, that I have got one of the most compleat [sic] & best finished Churches in this Province. And what adds much to the Credit of my Congregation, the Accounts are all settled, the Materials all paid for, and the Workmen satisfied to the uttermost Farthing.

I was kindly assisted at the opening of it, by Dr. Auchmuty from New York, Mr. Beach from New Brunswick, and Mr. Ayres [sic] from Spotswood; every thing [sic] was conducted with great Regularity and Decency. The People assembled upon the occasion were numerous, expressed much Satisfaction at the Solemnity, and a handsome Collection was made after Sermon for the Benefit of the Church.⁵⁹

It was a singular testament to the respect his fellow clergymen accorded the Rev. Samuel Cooke that three of his ministerial colleagues assisted at the opening of the church. They were the Revs. Dr. Samuel Auchmuty, rector of Trinity Church in New York, and fellow missionaries

⁵⁷ Monmouth County Miscellaneous Records, Book A, 137, Monmouth County Clerk’s Office, Freehold, New Jersey.

⁵⁸ SPG Journal, vol. 19, 399, USPG Archives.

⁵⁹ Letter, Rev. Samuel Cooke to the SPG Secretary, April 12, 1774, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 319.

Abraham Beach of Christ Church in New Brunswick, and William Ayers of nearby St. Peter's Church in Freehold and Spotswood.

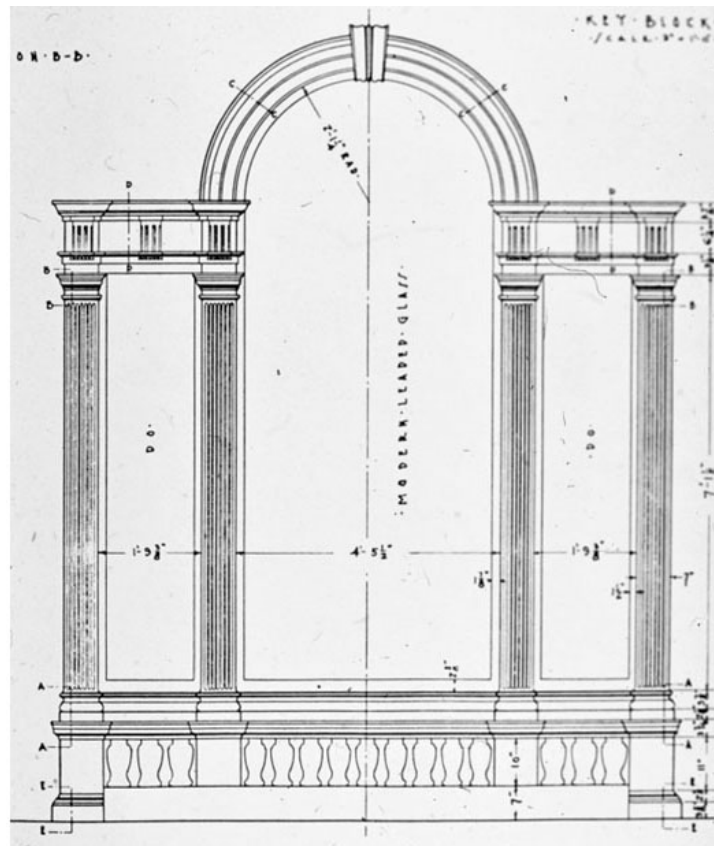
The new church in Shrewsbury was built according to the specifications, measuring 38 feet in width by 62 feet in length, with side walls rising 24 feet to the plates. Square butt white cedar shingles 36 inches in length covered the exterior, with 12 inches exposed to the weather. The cornice, which runs around all four elevations, consisted of a bold plastered cove below a bed of crown moldings. The west elevation featured two pedimented entrances of the Doric order with two rectangular windows above and an oculus window high in the gable. An octagonal cupola with arched openings surmounted the gable, its dome and spire ending in a wrought iron weathervane capped with a crown. The side elevations contained four arched windows with double hung sash. A fine Palladian or "Venetian" window ornamented the east elevation.

The two entrances in the west elevation opened to two aisles which ran the length of the building to a cross aisle at the east end of the interior. Two canopied pews flanked the elaborate Doric order Palladian window at the east end of the sanctuary to form a small chancel area. Seating consisted of 16 square pews, eight each along the side walls of the interior, with 24 long pews installed in pairs in the center of the church.⁶⁰ A pulpit appears to have been placed in the center of the chancel in front of the Palladian window, following the recent example of Christ Church, Philadelphia.⁶¹ A graceful elliptical or arched plastered ceiling spanned the entire width of the church, being accommodated by the raised bottom chord roof trusses above. An internal tower, situated between the two entrances at the west end of the church, ran up to the roof truss above in

⁶⁰ Determined from a listing of pew owners as of April 1, 1830, in the archives of Christ Church, Shrewsbury.

⁶¹ An elaborate free-standing pulpit with sounding board above, designed and fashioned by cabinetmaker John Folwell, was installed in Christ Church, Philadelphia, by June of 1770. It was placed in front of the Palladian window in the chancel after much discussion. It remained in that position well into the mid-19th century. This exceptional pulpit is now located in the left front corner of the chancel, minus its sounding board. For a circa 1785 engraving of the Christ Church interior showing the pulpit in its original position, see: <https://digitallibrary.hsp.org/index.php/Detail/objects/10520>

order to support the weight of the cupola.⁶² Stairs in this tower provided access to two small galleries, one on either side of it. Robert Smith had used this internal tower solution previously at St. Peter's Church in Philadelphia, finished in 1761, for the same purpose—to support the weight of a large cupola and two bells.

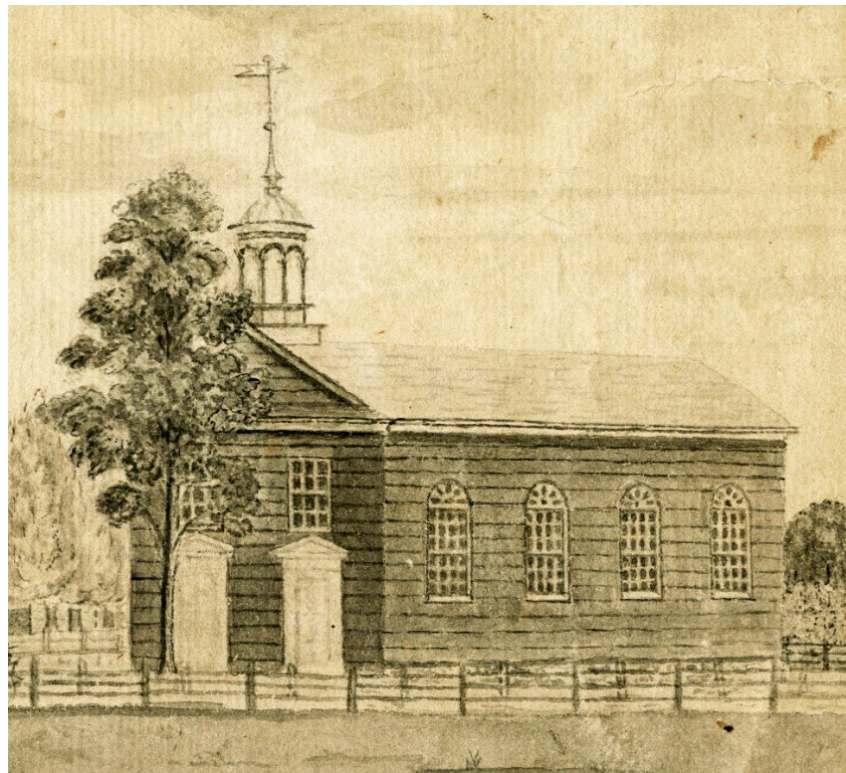


Measured drawing of the Palladian window interior elevation as it appeared in the 1930s. Prepared by the Historic American Buildings Survey, courtesy Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. This Doric order architectural composition was the most academic detail in any known Monmouth County colonial building. Unfortunately, the row of plinths below the pilasters and half balusters known as a blind railing, original to the window, were removed in the 1960s during changes made to the chancel.

It should be noted that Christ Church, Shrewsbury, is the only eighteenth century building in Monmouth County known to have incorporated any of the five formal orders of architecture, in

⁶² The cut down remains of the internal tower were discovered in place under the current 1879 organ during structural work on the church carried out in the mid-1990s.

this case the Doric order as mentioned above. Also, the inclusion of two canopied pews provided seating for visitors to the church in the day when all the pews on the main floor were either sold



Detail of Christ Church from a drawing titled *A View of Shrewsbury Town New Jersey*, ink and gray wash on beige paper, circa 1800. Courtesy Monmouth County Historical Association, Freehold, New Jersey, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Varick Stout, 1944.

as private property or rented to the pewholders. Surviving early floorplans for other eighteenth century churches at times referred to such canopied pews as “Public Pews.”⁶³ On April 25, 1774, the vestry of St. Michael’s Church in Trenton, facing a shortage of seating, “Ordered that the Church Wardens have the Pew called the Strangers Pew divided, and made into two Pews.”⁶⁴ A sketch of Shrewsbury drawn about 1800 gives some idea of the early exterior treatment of Christ Church. The entrances, window sash and trim, cornices, and the cupola were painted a light color,

⁶³ Nineteenth century legends about Christ Church refer to these canopied pews as reserved for the rector and the governor of the province. No colonial governor of New Jersey is known to have ever stepped inside the building.

⁶⁴ Vestry Minutes, April 25, 1774, St. Michael’s Church Archives, Trenton, New Jersey. The Strangers Pew was double in depth of others in the church, and located in the northeast corner of the sanctuary, according to an early circa 1789 pew plan. Its location equaled that of the north canopied pew at Christ Church, Shrewsbury.

probably either white or off-white. The rest of the exterior appears as a darker color, apparently the silver-gray of unpainted cedar shingles left to weather.⁶⁵

The Anglicans of Freehold seem to have become motivated by having an SPG missionary assigned to them half time, as did the congregation in Shrewsbury. In March 1771, the Rev. William Ayers announced to the SPG that a new church was finally going to be built on the lot in Freehold village that St. Peter's had purchased in 1738.

Permit me . . . to acquaint the Venerable and Honourable [sic] Society that the Church in the Freehold part of my Mission is vastly out of repair, and in consequence of that, the Vestry have advised me to perform Divine Service, half my time, in the Court-house, which is commodious, at the County Town, which is about Six Miles from the Church, but which is very central to, and much more convenient for my Parishioners to assemble at than the Church, this has happened through the removals of my Hearers, and therefore they do not purpose to repair the Old but to build a New Church in this Town. The Vestry have appointed Managers to collect Money from the well disposed of our own Communion, and indeed even from the Dissenters in order to effect this Building, who have already made some progress therein.⁶⁶

Only six months later, Ayers was able to report that "my Hearers at Freehold have erected the Frame of the Church, mentioned in my last, in the County Town, & they purpose to have it enclosed this Fall."⁶⁷ By May of 1772, Ayers informed the SPG that "the new church at Freehold-Town, mentioned in my last, is in great forwardness . . ."⁶⁸ And by that September, "that the New Church at the County Town is in greater forwardness than when I wrote last . . ."⁶⁹ But work on the building apparently slowed to a stop given a shortage of funds, rising political events, and the unfortunate illness of their missionary (to be discussed in Part III of this narrative). Nonetheless,

⁶⁵ Careful examination of original exterior shingles during mid-1990s restoration work did not reveal any darker paint layer beneath white first applied in the mid-1830s.

⁶⁶ Letter, Rev. William Ayers to the SPG Secretary, March 25, 1771, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 16.

⁶⁷ Letter, Rev. William Ayers to the SPG Secretary, September 30, 1771, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 18.

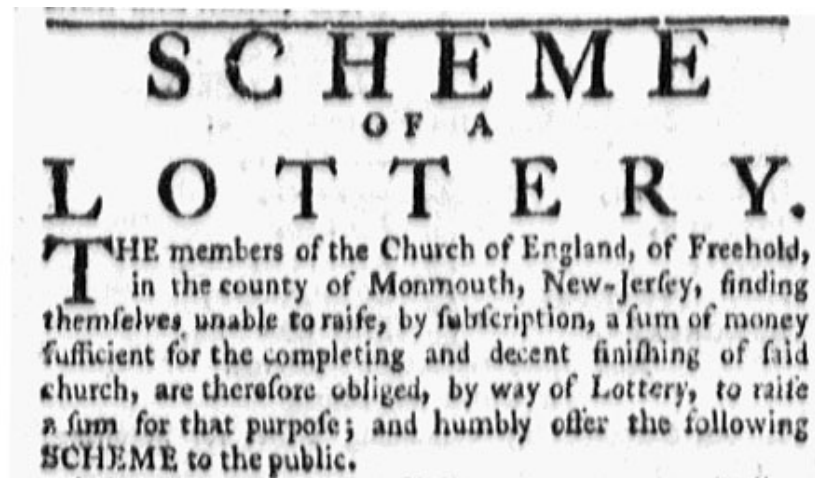
⁶⁸ Letter, Rev. William Ayers to the SPG Secretary, May 12, 1772, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 20.

⁶⁹ Letter, Rev. William Ayers to the SPG Secretary, September 29, 1772, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 22.

early in 1774, the congregation advertised a lottery that would help them raise money for financing the project.

The members of the Church of England, of Freehold, in the county of Monmouth, New-Jersey, finding themselves unable to raise, by subscription, a sum of money sufficient for the completing and decent finishing of said church, are therefore obliged, by way of Lottery, to raise a sum for that purpose.⁷⁰

Four thousand tickets were to be sold at three dollars each, with the drawing scheduled to commence on or before the first Tuesday in April on Fishing Island in the Delaware River opposite Trenton. But the lottery may not have gone forward. No further advertisements appeared in the New York or Philadelphia newspapers, and no winning numbers were published, as promised in the scheme. St. Peter's, Freehold, was not made suitable for use until the 1790s.

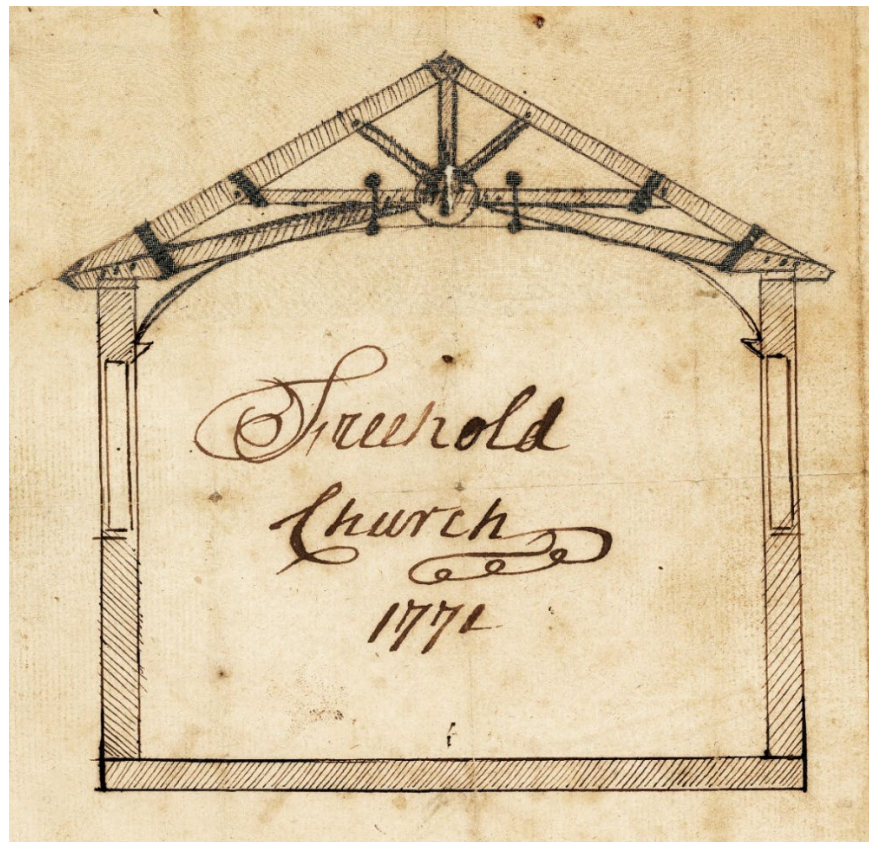


Rivington's New-York Gazetteer: or the Connecticut, Hudson's River, New-Jersey, and Quebec Weekly Advertiser, January 13, 1774. Courtesy GenealogyBank.com.

The building measured 52 feet in length and 35 feet wide, outside dimensions, and was covered with square butt white cedar shingles showing 13 inches to the weather. An octagonal cupola integral to the framing assembly sequence of the roof ornamented its west gable. There is virtually no documentation for this first phase of construction on St. Peter's Church, Freehold.

⁷⁰ *Rivington's New-York Gazetteer: or the Connecticut, Hudson's River, New-Jersey, and Quebec Weekly Advertiser, January 13, 1774, 4.*

However, a remarkably rare section drawing of the church, dated 1771, does survive. It depicts a raised bottom chord truss like those used at Christ Church, Shrewsbury. The carpenters who framed St. Peter's Church followed the drawing but eliminated the iron straps in all locations except under the king post in the truss that supports the cupola. The drawing appears to have been supplied by Robert Smith of Philadelphia. It shows his enhancements in the use of iron over the Francis Price truss model as illustrated in *The British Carpenter*. Professional handwriting analysis of the legend on the drawing compared it to several documents written by Smith in the same year. It was given a 50% chance of being in his hand, primarily because there are so few characters on the drawing.



Section drawing for St. Peter's Church, Freehold, dated 1771, attributed to builder/architect Robert Smith of Philadelphia. Courtesy MCHA Research Library. The drawing shows Smith's uses of iron straps and bolts at all major joints in raised bottom chord trusses. The carpenters who raised the church frame that year did not install the straps.

There were two major reasons why the Rev. William Ayers would seek out Robert Smith for the design of his new church. First, construction of nearby Christ Church, Shrewsbury, had

entered its second year. The two missionaries maintained a collegial relationship and would have shared information about their respective building projects. Second, Ayers would have gained first-hand knowledge of Smith's work at the Charity School and College in Philadelphia. Smith had carried out all design and building work there from 1750 through his death in 1777. His engagements on that campus included conversion of an existing meeting house into classrooms and a lecture hall (1750), further changes to the lecture hall (1755), design and construction of a new college building (1762–1763), and design and construction of a new residence for the college provost (1774–1776).

The Church of England congregations in Monmouth County entered 1774 on high notes. The imposing new church in Shrewsbury approached completion after five years of effort, while that in Freehold was at least framed and enclosed. The two local missionaries, the Revs. Samuel Cooke and William Ayers, reported their activities regularly to the SPG. In January of 1774, their esteemed colleague in Elizabethtown, the Rev. Thomas Bradbury Chandler, summarized the overall state of the Anglican church in New Jersey as follows:

The Church in this Province makes a more respectable appearance, than it ever did, till very lately: Thanks to the Venerable Society!, without whose charitable Interposition there would not have been one episcopal Congregation among us. They have now no less than Eleven Missionaries in this District; none of whom are blameable in their Conduct, and some of them are eminently useful. Instead of the small Buildings, out of Repair, in which our Congregations used to assemble 20 Years ago, we have now Several that make a Handsome Appearance, both for size and decent Ornament, particularly at Burlington, Shrewsbury, New-Brunswick, and Newark; and all the rest are in good Repair. And the Congregations in general appear to me to be as much improved, as the Churches they assemble in.⁷¹

In spite of this optimistic view, everything for the Anglicans in Monmouth County and elsewhere in New Jersey would change abruptly beginning in 1775.

⁷¹ Letter, Rev. Thomas Bradbury Chandler to the SPG Secretary, January 28, 1774, USPG Archives, B Series Letter Books, vol. 24, 271.

POSTSCRIPT

Part II of *The Anglican Church in Colonial Monmouth County* draws heavily on the records of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, as did Part I. These consist of the B Series Letter Books, and C Series Letters, both of which contain the original correspondence received in London from the Society's missionaries in America. This author has also consulted the administrative journals of the SPG, which are mainly comprised of meeting minutes. The missionary letters were either transcribed in full into the journal, or they appeared as extracts. Discussion of them and actions taken proved highly interesting. There is some duplication between the correspondence in the journal and the letters in the B and C Series. Others survive only in the journal. As an example, there were no original letters from the Rev. Samuel Cooke dated between 1752 and 1760. Ten from 1753 to 1759 were found entered into the journal, plus scattered others filling in more fully for the years 1751 through 1782. The records of the SPG, in digitized and searchable format, are available by subscription on the website of British Online Archives.

Christ Church, Shrewsbury, and St. Peter's Church, Freehold, both still stand. Christ Church retains much of its original interior features, as described above. In 1844, the pews were reconfigured to slip pews of even length. In doing so, parts of the original square and long pews were cut up and reused. Those paneled elements from the square pews have been lengthened with other salvaged material, while the long pew parts have been cut off. At the same time, a chancel recess was constructed on the east end of the sanctuary between the canopied pews, flanked by two Greek columns. The Palladian window in the east elevation was relocated to the east wall of the new chancel. Other changes to Christ Church over the years include the installation of second-hand stained glass windows from St. Thomas's Church in New York City (1867); installation of new stained glass in the Palladian window (1867); construction of a clock tower and relocation of

the original cupola onto the tower (1874); closure of the two original entrances in conjunction with construction of the tower in favor of a single central doorway (1874); removal of the interior tower and enlargement of the gallery to accommodate a larger organ (1879); installation of a slate roof and an ornamental pressed tin ceiling (1906); a light-handed Colonial Revival redecoration (1924-1925); extension of the chancel recess to provide sacristy and robing areas (1958); lowering the floor of the chancel area and other interior alterations (1961-1963); and major structural repairs requiring the installation of a hidden steel framework following heavy snow load failure of the roof truss system (1996-1998). Reuse of such original features as the pew parts, Palladian window, and cupola, along with the retention of the canopied pews and original side elevation window openings, has contributed significantly to the colonial architectural character of Christ Church today.



The earliest known exterior photograph of Christ Church, Shrewsbury, circa 1869, showing the two pedimented Doric order entrances and cupola atop the west gable. Stained glass had been installed in the 18th century window openings in 1867. Courtesy Christ Church, Shrewsbury.



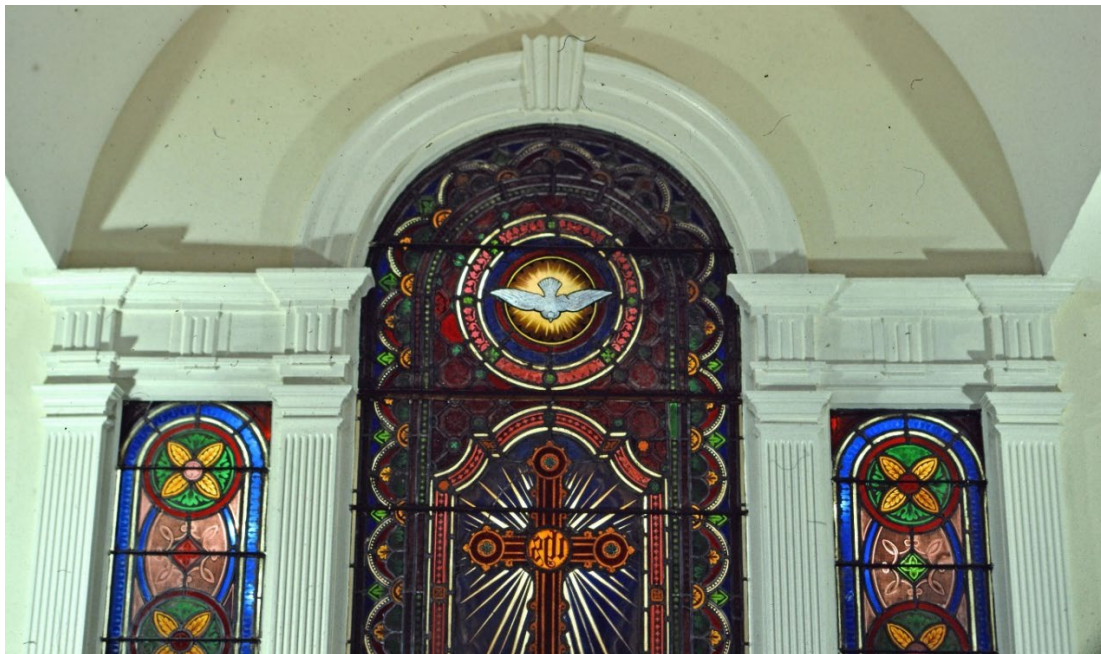
Christ Church today, with the cupola relocated to the top of the clock tower constructed in 1874. Author's image.



Cornerstone of Christ Church, Shrewsbury, bearing the initials SCM that are believed to stand for Samuel Cooke Missionary, and the date 1769. Author's image.



The interior of Christ Church, Shrewsbury as it appears today. The two original canopied pews flank the 1844 chancel recess. The raised bottom chord roof trusses allowed for the graceful arched ceiling which is now ornamented with pressed tin installed in 1906. Author's image.



Detail of the original Doric order Palladian window as relocated in 1844 to the east wall of the chancel recess, and as fitted with stained glass in 1867. Author's image.



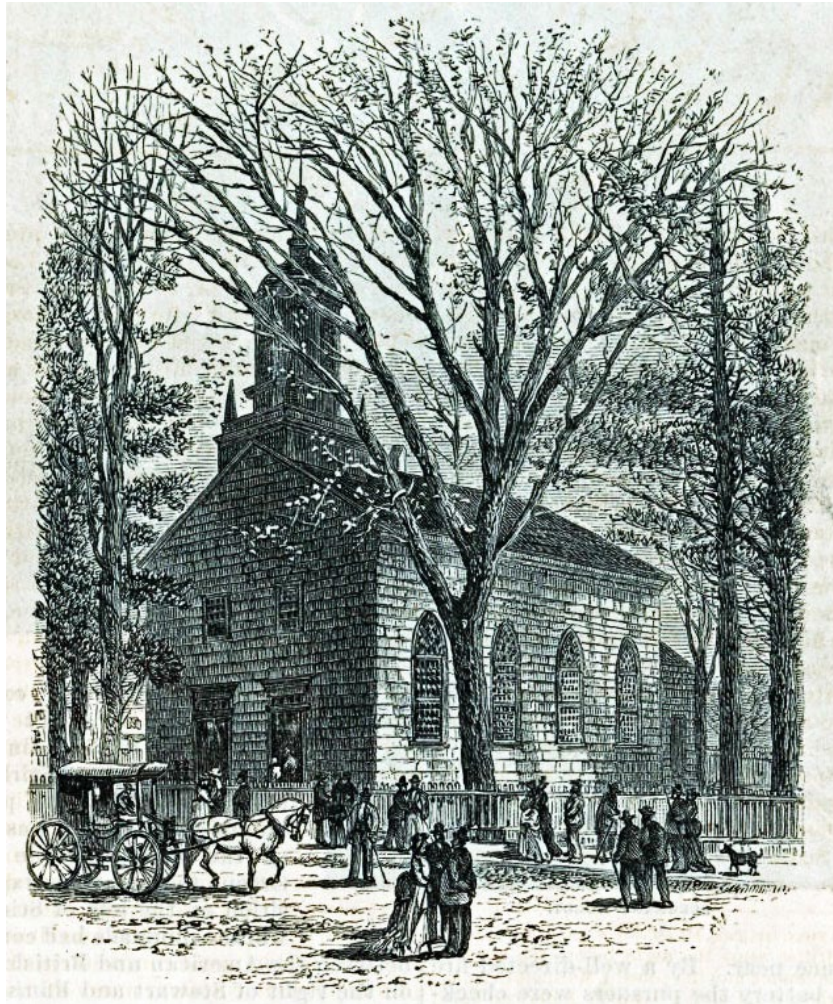
Detail of the south canopied pew. Note the entasis or slight tapering of the support column. Author's image.



Detail showing the paneled square and long pew parts as reconfigured in 1844 into slip pews of uniform length. Author's image.

St. Peter's Church was not made fit for use until the 1790s. Its initial floorplan placed a high pulpit in the center of the long north wall opposite a large arched window in the south elevation that was flanked by two entrances. This transverse orientation, more like a meeting house, was unusual for an Anglican church, but not unique. Between 1838 and 1841, the building was completely transformed by removing all interior fittings, lowering the high arched ceiling, and reorienting the sanctuary to a longitudinal arrangement with a chancel and pulpit located against the east wall. New pews were provided, with two entrances created in the west elevation. The cupola also underwent modification at this time. Four pointed-arch windows in the south elevation and four rectangular windows in the north elevation completed the transformation of St. Peter's into a more traditional Anglican/Episcopal church of the day with its longitudinal axis and a few restrained carpenter Gothic features. The years 1878 and 1879 saw another complete renovation of St. Peter's into a full statement of the Gothic Revival. An extension of the building to the east, plus a chancel recess, significantly enlarged the building. A single entrance with Gothic tracery in the west elevation replaced the two entrances of 1838. The square-headed windows in the north elevation were changed to pointed arches to match those in the south elevation, and all openings were furnished with stained glass. Interior work included restoration of the high arched ceiling, reconfiguration of the pews using existing material wherever possible, and general upgrading of all interior trim and finishes. A large open Gothic arch to the new chancel was flanked by two blind arches. Further enlargements of the chancel area took place in 1892 and again in 1896, when a chapel in the northeast corner of the church was constructed that also provided meeting rooms above. Severe deterioration of the cupola discovered in 1996 forced it to be dismantled. It was restored using as many parts of the original fabric as could be salvaged. Otherwise, the church

frame raised in 1771 remains intact, except for those elements of the east wall removed in 1878 when the building was extended.



St. Peter's Church, Freehold, following extensive remodeling finished in 1841, and before a second comprehensive remodeling in 1878. From Benson J. Lossing, "The Battle of Monmouth Court-House," published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, June 1878, 43. Author's collection. There is no known representation of St. Peter's in its first phase transverse arrangement with two entrances on the long south elevation flanking a large rounded-arch window.



St. Peter's Church following construction of the chapel on the left in 1896. The main body of the church retains the details of its 1878 Gothic Revival renovation. From a post card view. Author's collection.



The interior of St. Peter's Church, Freehold, as it appeared between 1892 and 1896. The high arched ceiling, restored in 1878, follows the profile of the original ceiling. Courtesy St. Peter's Church.



The exterior of St. Peter's Church today reflects its 1878 Gothic Revival remodeling even though the octagonal cupola structure, restored, dates back to the initial frame construction of 1771. Courtesy St. Peter's Church.

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Joseph W. Hammond writes on New Jersey history topics from his retirement home in northern New Hampshire. His interests include decorative and fine arts, architecture, and social history. A resident of Freehold for more than 40 years, he has, in the past, served the Monmouth County Historical Association as executive director, consulting archivist, curator of museum collections, and director of collections. From 1995 to 1997, Hammond served as Restoration Chair for \$1.2 million in structural stabilization and repairs at Christ Church, Shrewsbury. He also prepared New Jersey State and National Registers of Historic Places nominations for Christ Church, Shrewsbury (1995), and St. Peter's Church, Freehold (1998). Hammond holds a BA in American history and civilization from Boston University, and an MA in history museum studies from the Cooperstown Graduate Program of the State University of New York, College at Oneonta. He can be reached by email at jwhammond@aol.com.