

## **A History of St. Paul's Summerville**

Now more than 175 years old, historic St. Paul's, Summerville, the oldest established church in the town of Summerville, began as a summer church. The pineland ridge, which would become Summerville, had been settled as early as 1790. Families found it a healthful summer retreat from the malaria that took such a tragic toll on their low-lying plantations. Although the village drew from the neighboring parishes of St. James', Goose Creek, St. Andrew's, and St. George's, Dorchester, most residents came from adjacent St. Paul's Parish.

In 1829 the Reverend Philip Gadsden, a deacon serving at St. Paul's, Stono (a chapel of ease to the original parish church established on the flats of the Stono River in 1706), began to hold regular summer services for his parishioners in private homes and other available public buildings in the village. The following year the first Summerville church was built, a small 40 ft. x 30 ft. structure with a columned portico and a gallery (balcony), just a few feet south of the present church building. That same year, Mr. Gadsden was ordained priest and became rector of both the Stono and the Summerville churches.

In 1855 the congregation incorporated as St. Paul's Summerville, and in 1857 a larger church, the present building, was completed. The cost, \$5000, was raised primarily by an Aid Association formed by the women of the parish. A gallery, wide enough for one row of benches, extended across the north and south walls, and over the east entrance. The gallery was supported by non-descriptive, possibly 4x4, posts.

The Summerville church shared a joint vestry with St. Paul's, Stono until after the War Between the States. In 1866, the Summerville church became independent from St. Paul's, Stono (now abandoned) and was named St. Paul's Church in St. George's Parish, Dorchester. (The old St. George's Church, established in the village of Dorchester in 1717, had become dormant by the early 1800's. The Summerville church eventually inherited its name and properties.) The name used today, St. Paul's, Summerville, was reinstated in 1875.

In 1878 the galleries were removed. The present columns, made of cypress from Tennessee, were installed. The church was enlarged by a twenty-foot extension, and the stained glass window behind the altar was added. Permission was received from the Gadsden family to build over Mr. Gadsden's grave (under the present altar).

The Great Earthquake of 1886 caused considerable damage to the building. The foundation shifted several inches. Earthquake rods visible overhead, and similar ones beneath the floor were installed to restore and strengthen the structure.

In 1953, the building was extended an additional ten feet to build the sacristy, altar guild room and the clergy vesting room, again covering more graves. There is a monument just behind the church building that lists the names of those buried under the church.

Extensive restoration was completed in 1986, and in the spring of 1988 an historic tracker organ with 1266 pipes was installed under the direction of George Boseman, organ-builder of New Hampshire. The floors, pews and many of the glass panes you see today are original to the building. Beautiful Greek Revival columns, Federal style fanlights and a Gothic tower parapet grace the exterior of the church. The 400-pound bell, given in 1855 by St. Paul's, Radcliffboro in Charleston, rings each Sunday to begin worship services.

The church properties are located on a ten-acre tract in the heart of Summerville's Historic District. The church building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

To the south of the church building is Ambler Hall, St. Paul's first parish hall, named for the Reverend Francis Ambler, rector of St. Paul's for 32 years (1908-1940). The site of many beautiful receptions, parties and dances, Ambler Hall has served the parish and community since 1924.

On the other side of the church is Skardon Hall, built in 1974 and named for the Reverend Stephen L. Skardon, rector of St. Paul's from 1962-1970. Today this building is used for administration and adult education.

Doar Hall lies opposite the church across the plaza. Completed in May of 2002, it provides beautiful space for contemporary worship services as well as meetings, receptions, dinners and recreation.

The newest addition to St. Paul's campus, dedicated in the fall of 2004, the Children and Youth Education Building, which has allowed for significant expansion of children and youth ministries, as well as St. Paul's preschool program, the Christian Learning Center.

The center of the St. Paul's campus is Lumpkin Plaza, a lovely green space that unites the classic and contemporary architecture of the surrounding buildings. The plaza was dedicated in 2005 in honor of the tenth anniversary of the current rector of St. Paul's, the Reverend Michael R. Lumpkin.

St. Paul's is the only church in the town with a cemetery on its grounds. The churchyard holds more than nine hundred (marked and unmarked) graves dating from 1847.

Inscriptions on the tombstones are quoted in *Tombstones and Tablets*, available at the church office. Pamphlets are also available for a self-guided tour of the churchyard.

St. Paul's, Summerville is a vibrant community rooted in the Anglican tradition. Reminders of the past are found not only in the buildings and graveyard, but also in the membership, which includes descendants of the early planters, and in the church silver, which includes a communion service from early St. George's, a chalice from the original St. Paul's Parish Church, and two alms basins donated to St. Paul's, Stono by George Sommers Esq. in 1766.

Today St. Paul's counts more than 800 active members. We have embraced a dynamic vision of *Impacting the World in Jesus' Name*. We offer rich, traditional worship services in the historic church building, as well as joyous, contemporary services in Doar Hall.