



## St. George's Church Pennsville, NJ (1714)

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Although the colony of New Sweden was established first in Wilmington, DE in 1638, it was not until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century that settlers from Sweden and Finland came permanently to New Jersey. In 1697 the Church of Sweden renewed its mission on the Delaware and sent three Lutheran priests to the area. Holy Trinity in Wilmington, then called Christina, was built in 1699 replacing the former Crane Hook church that had been erected in 1667. Parishioners in New Jersey were assigned pews at Holy Trinity but often had to face a difficult trip across the river. The Pennsville, NJ name "Church Landing Road" preserves the memory of the area from which the church-boats transported people across the Delaware. Finally in 1703, Lars Tolstadius, a priest who had come from Sweden without episcopal approval, established a congregation at Sveaborg/Swedesboro on the Raccoon River. He dedicated a log church in 1705 but died soon thereafter. With the population of Swedes and Finns growing in "Penn's Neck," it became desirable to have another congregation, thus St. George's was established in 1714 on land donated by Jean Jacquette. By March 31, 1717 Dean Andreas Sandel dedicated a log church. The church name reflected the name of the patron saint of England and the recently crowned King of England, George I, who was simultaneously Defender of the Anglican faith, and a German Lutheran as Duke of Hanover. The New Jersey Swedish Lutheran parish had a rectory at Pilesgrove Township from 1720 and the pastor served people in both Swedesboro/ Sveaborg/Raccoon and Penn's

Neck/ Pennsville. By 1742 the mixed Protestant population of the area made it necessary to have all services in English according to the *Book of Common Prayer*, which the Swedish pastors had used frequently.

The last Swedish Lutheran pastor to serve in the congregation was Nils Collin (1770-1786) who then moved across the river to become rector of Gloria Dei, Old Swedes Church at Wicaco in South Philadelphia. St. George's then became a member of the newly formed Protestant Episcopal Church in 1792. In 1808 the present brick church replaced the log church and was rebuilt and renovated in Gothic style with a steeple in 1877. A Carrara marble altar was made by Thomas Jacquett and consecrated in 1902. A parish house was built in 1896 and then replaced in 1953. Nine acres of land were donated on the south side of the rectory to increase space. Further renovations to church took place in 1976 and 1987.

In 1964 a Swedish delegation associated with the American Order of Vasa, presented the congregation with a Bridal Crown, which may be worn by any woman of the parish. This is an ancient Swedish tradition that is still followed in many Swedish Lutheran congregations in this country that have 19<sup>th</sup> Century origins.

St. George's will celebrate 300 years of service to the community in 2014.