

AN ANGLICAN PARISH

In the beginning of the 18th century Queen Anne of England gave the Anglican Communion the right to build the first house of worship north of New York and west of the Hudson River. In 1702, Edward Hyde, Viscount Cornbury, cousin of Queen Anne, arrived in North America as a kind of commander-in-chief. He belonged to a group of royal governors of the late 17th and 18th century bent on advancing Anglicanism as a means of centralizing authority and extending the influence of the home government.

During Queen Anne's War, 1702-1713, Governor Cornbury replaced the wooden fort on the hill with a new one of stone; and unofficially called the new fort "Fort Anne". Aside from his military contributions, Cornbury tried to not only impose the Church of England on the province, but to arrogate to himself the role of overseer of all religious bodies within New York. He chose to interpret his instructions as giving him blanket control over all clerical appointments and insisted on licensing every minister. However, Dutch church authorities told Cornbury that his power extended only to the "Established Church".

In 1708 with the arrival of the Rev. Thomas Barclay, a Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S. P. G.) missionary, Albany's first Anglican parish was established. Barclay's mission was to aid in establishing friendly relations with the Iroquois Confederacy and to bring sobriety to the 200 officers and men garrisoned in the British fort at Albany. In 1714 with Barclay's requests for building a church, Governor Robert Hunter acceded and granted his license for the collection of money to begin building. Governor Hunter gave all the stone and lime required in addition to money. The Governor also assisted in the selection of a site for the building. In October 1714 the petition for a plot of ground in the center of Yonkers (now State) Street, at the foot of the eminence on which the newly build stone fort reposed, was granted by King George I and a patent issued. The church was built in the years of 1715-1717, being opened to the public on 25 November 1717 by Rev. Barclay.

By the middle of the 18th century, immediately prior to the French and Indian War, colonial administrators gathered in Albany at an Anglo-Iroquois treaty congress known as the Albany Congress of 1754. The focus of the congress was the restoration of the Covenant Chain. At the congress, colonial agents participated in rituals of possession to prove to each other their title of tracts of land. Sessions were held at St. Peter's. However, the Albany Plan of Union, presented by Benjamin Franklin, as a plan of unity among the colonies did not pass the colonial assemblies or the home government in Great Britain. Today, inside the sanctuary, historic flags of the original colonies, plus others of relevance to our history are hung above the tall columns on either side of the center aisle.

In 1758 during the French and Indian War Lord George Augustus Viscount Howe, a brigadier general in the British Army, with British forces and colonial militia, a force of 15,000 set sail on Lake George in northern New York to attack the French controlled Fort Carillon (now Fort Ticonderoga). Upon landing, in a skirmish with the French before reaching the fort, Howe lost his life. The skirmish occurred the day before the Battle of Carillon, an ultimately disastrous attempt by the British to capture the fort. Lord Howe's remains are interred under the vestibule at St. Peters. He is the only British Lord buried in the United States.

The first church stood until 1802 when a second church was erected at the northwest corner of State and Lodge Streets. The foundation stone for the present church, the third to stand, was laid on St. Peter's Day, the 29th of June 1859. A classic example of Gothic architecture, it is listed in the National Registry of Historic Landmarks.

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