

Gloria Dei History Article

It started with a plan

By Bob Josuweit

When Rev. Andreas Rudman arrived from Sweden in 1697 he found the church at Wicaco "decayed and scarcely habitable." He immediately began to prepare a plan to build a new church. On October 20, 1697, he wrote home to Sweden " In order to build our church, we are about to raise the sum of four hundred pounds sterling, but that will not be difficult. They are so very glad to have us among them. They look upon us as if we were angels from heaven. Of this they assured me with many tears, and we may truly say that there is no place in the world where a clergyman may be so happy and so well beloved, as in this country."

There was disagreement on the location of the church. "Wicaco" or "Passyunk." On May 17, 1698, the congregation settled the dispute by placing each name on a piece of paper. They were folded, shaken in a hat, and thrown on the ground. "Wicaco" was selected.

A stone foundation was laid cellar deep. When completed the interior of the church would be sixty feet long, thirty feet wide, and twenty feet high at the eaves. Work began in late May, 1698 and was completed on July 2, 1700.

The building was dedicated by the Rev. Eric Biork. He said "Thus through God's blessing we have completed the great work.....superior to any built in this country." It was at this service that the church was named "Gloria Dei," meaning Glory of God.

The Swedes lived far apart and traveled a great distance to church. Each Sunday they would make their way up and down the river in boats to attend church. The service began with the morning hymn "We praise thee, O God. The first sermon was preached between the first and second ringing of the bell, and during the summer the sermon was repeated at the second service. Those in attendance were examined on what had been said at the first sermon. Teachers would go through the aisles catechizing the congregation. After the service the young people returned to their homes while the adults lingered about talking about religion or discussing the last letters from home.

