

## **A Spot Sacred to Peace and Solitude**

By Bob Josuweit

Standing outside Old Swedes you will probably hear the sound of cars and trucks traveling on I-95 or Delaware Avenue. Step back in time and think of the church yard as a "spot sacred to peace and solitude, whither the charms of nature might invite the steps of the votary of the muses, and where the birds might sing over his grave."

Alexander Wilson was born in Scotland on July 6, 1766. He started out as a weaver, but his interests turned to poetry and walking in the countryside. Wilson used his poetry to comment on what he saw as the unfair treatment of the weavers by their employers. The subjects of several of his poems were judged to be inflammatory and libelous, and he got in trouble with the law more than once.

In May, 1794 he left for America and settled near Philadelphia, where he taught school. He met William Bartram, who got him interested in birds. By 1804, Wilson began working on a nine-volume book, *American Ornithology*, which included 268 illustrations, including 26 new species. He devoted time to observing and painting birds on a journey from Philadelphia to Niagara Falls and back again. He walked the nearly 1300 miles in 59 days. On the last day he walked 47 miles!

By 1813 his work began to take its toll. On August 12, Wilson saw a bird that he wanted. He followed it, swam the river with his clothes on and caught the bird. A severe cold followed. Ten days later the father of Ornithology died.

Wilson had sometime expressed the wish "to be buried in some rural spot, sacred to peace and solitude." He was buried in the church yard of Gloria Dei. The inscription on his tomb reads: This monument covers the remains of Alexander Wilson Author of AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY. He was born in Renfrewshire, Scotland on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, 1766, Emigrated to United States in year 1794 and died in Philadelphia of the dysentery on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1813, Aged 47.

