

Strawberry Chapel Short History

Information Attributed to Senior Warden Dr. Robert Ball, Rev. John Scott, and the SC Picture Project.

Strawberry Chapel and its surrounding area have a rich history dating back to the early 1700s when the Carolina Assembly established St. John's Parish Berkeley. The town of Childsbury, later known as Strawberry, was founded by James Child, a planter in the parish, who laid out the new settlement along the Cooper River. The first church in the area was Biggin Church, built in 1710, but as Childsbury grew, the need for a closer place of worship arose. In 1725, the General Assembly passed an act to construct a Parochial Chapel of Ease at Childsbury, which became known as Strawberry Chapel. Funded by the Carolina Assembly, services officially began the same year.

It is an architectural marvel, featuring a classic colonial church design with symmetrical doors, fanlight-topped windows, and a cruciform pattern. It is rectangular in plan, with an anteroom at the rear allowing the minister to prepare for services. The ceiling is domed, and the floor is paved in stone. Entrance doors exist on three of the four walls, aligning with each other for proper ventilation in the Lowcountry's heat and humidity. Inscribed on the altar wall, under a circular window above the pulpit, are the words "Glory to God in the Highest," crafted using miniature pine cone scales hand-sewn on canvas backing. The receiving vault, used to temporarily store bodies before burial, was built circa 1750 by the first Edward Harleston of Fishpond Plantation.

An anteroom was added to the northwest of the chapel in the early 1800s, serving various purposes including Vestry meetings and priest rest areas. In the 1850s, a balcony was built at the rear of the chapel, though it collapsed during the 1886 Charleston earthquake and was donated to Taveau Methodist Church. The chapel held historic silver, including the Miles Brewton chalice and paten. This silver was buried at Comingtee Plantation during the Civil War, and the location was forgotten until it was rediscovered in the 1940s, under a barn, with the help of a metal detector. The silver is now on permanent loan to the Charleston Museum.

Since 1725, the chapel has played a significant role in the community, hosting services, baptisms, and funerals, and serving as a gathering place for local residents. However, over the years, the chapel and grounds have suffered from severe vandalism. Despite its challenges, it has remained a symbol of the area's history, with efforts made by the Wardens, Vestry, Friends of Strawberry, and other local organizations to preserve and restore it.

Contributions and support from the community to aid in Strawberry Chapel's preservation are encouraged and welcomed, as it helps to ensure that future generations can enjoy it.

Have a question or want to make a contribution? Please contact Friends of Strawberry:
info@friendsofstrawberry.org



Service At Strawberry Chapel, c. 1900, Ball Family Papers at the South Caroliniana Library



Strawberry Ferry, c. 1900, Berkeley Photograph Collection at the South Caroliniana Library



Strawberry Chapel Silver by Miles Brewton, c. 1705-1715, Charleston Museum