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## History of Old Swedes Church

1638 - When the Swedes first settled in this area in 1638, they built a fort on a slope of fast land near the Christina River bank. On the next rise of ground they placed the burying ground. That old burial ground was the beginning of the present graveyard.

Not much is known about the early burial ground. It is fairly certain that many of the first settlers were buried here, but no records survive from that period. Also, the early markers were wooden crosses or rough, uncut field stones with carved initials. Most of the markers have disappeared.

1655 - When the Dutch laid siege to Fort Christina in 1655, they placed cannon in the burial ground overlooking the fort. After twelve days of talks and negotiating, the Swedes surrendered without firing a shot. The Dutch would not let the Swedes build a Lutheran Church.

1664 - English conquered the Delaware River region from the Dutch.

1667 - Tranhook (Crane Hook) Church was built by the Swedes.

1698 - The old burial ground was chosen as the site for the new church, now called Old Swedes Church. The church was built right over some of the early graves. When the foundation was being dug and a grave was discovered, the foundation was shaped so as not to disturb the grave.

1718 - The oldest legible stone is that of William Vandever, who died in 1718. The two oldest visible fieldstones are Catharina and Britta Cock, who died of typhoid fever in 1726 within a week of each other.

1777 - An army again occupied the churchyard. After the Battle of the Brandywine in 1777, British soldiers were quartered in the church. Small cannon balls found in the churchyard attest to their presence.

1837 - There are many references in the church records about the need to build a fence around the churchyard. A wooden fence was erected in the early 1700s but it wasn't until 1837 that the stone fence and iron gate on Seventh Street were constructed.

There are over 15,000 people buried in the churchyard. The lot plan was haphazard until 1857, when the land on the west side of the church was measured into square parcels and sold to anyone who wished to be buried at Old Swedes Church.

In the mid-1800s, the houses for the Vicar and the Sexton were next to each other on the corner of Seventh and Church Streets, with an archway between them over the graveyard entrance. The large building on Seventh Street was built in 1893 as the Parish House. The houses and archway were removed in 1947 and the Parish House enlarged.

Many people from prominent Wilmington and Delaware families are buried in the graveyard: Bayards, Grubbs, Stidhams, Jacquetts, and Vandevers. Veterans from every war in which Americans fought, from the Revolutionary War to the Vietnam War, are interred here. Some of the more prominent

individuals are

Major Peter Jaquett, a Revolutionary War hero  
Dr. Joseph E. Capelle, who served with General Lafayette  
The Right Reverend Alfred Lee, first Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Delaware  
James A. Bayard, U.S. Senator for Delaware  
Richard Bayard, first Mayor of Wilmington  
Thomas F. Bayard, Secretary of State under President Cleveland, and later Ambassador to the Court of St. James  
Frank Martine Heal, first Delaware Scoutmaster  
Captain Hugh Montgomery, Captain of the Brig Nancy, first ship to fly the American Flag in a foreign port  
Elizabeth Montgomery, author of REMINISCENCES OF WILMINGTON, Ancient and New and daughter of Capt. Hugh Montgomery  
Mary Vining, Belle of the American Revolutionary period  
Charles Springer, first Warden  
Brewer Seneke, an early Vestryman, is buried in the church under his pew

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