

FRENCH PROTESTANT HUGUENOT CHURCH  
136 Church Street  
c. 1845

1991

The Huguenot Church at 136 Church St. was Charleston's first church structure in the Gothic Revival style.

Built in 1844-45, it was designed by Edward Brickell White, one of Charleston's best architects of the mid-19th century. The structure is the third (some authorities say fourth) Huguenot Church on the site. French Calvinist immigrants organized a church in Charles Town about 1681 and built their first sanctuary on the site in 1687.

One structure on the site was deliberately blown up in a vain attempt to arrest the Great Fire of 1796, which ravaged the area.

Over a period of time many of the Huguenot families had become Episcopalians, but in the 1840's there was a revival of interest in the faith of the Huguenot forefathers, and White was engaged to build a new church edifice.

In 1842, White had gone on an extended business trip to cities in the North, where he had undoubtedly observed new Gothic Revival structures. Gothic Revival, as an architectural style, had been in use in America since 1799, when Benjamin Latrobe designed Sedgeley, a house in New York State. Less important structures had been built in the "Gothik" style during the Colonial period.

Of the several types of Gothic architecture, the Huguenot Church probably follows most closely the English Perpendicular style of the 13th century, a style characterized by strong horizontal and vertical lines, tall and slender buttresses and large windows with simplified tracery.

The interior vaulting of Perpendicular structures, however, tended to be much more elaborate than that of the Huguenot Church. The fan vaulting of the Unitarian Church in Archdale Street would be more characteristic. The Huguenot Church is a stuccoed brick structure rectangular with a gable roof. Windows are wide and tall with simple intersecting tracery.

Between each bay is a slender buttress, and there are diagonal buttresses on the corners. Buttresses on the front have deep panels rising to trefoils. All the buttresses have crockets and finials.

Crockets and finials also appear above the cornice along the front gable and above the dripstones of the front windows. A battlemented parapet extends along the sides of the building. The main doorway is set into a rather low, pointed arch opening. Foils in relief decorate the spandrels above the arch.

FRENCH PROTESTANT HUGUENOT CHURCH  
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In the interior, the narthex is separated from the nave by a pierced wooden screen of lancet arches. A narrow flight of stairs leads from the narthex to the gallery above it. The gallery rail, with balustrading featuring foil motifs, rises above the pierced screen.

There are no columns to create side aisles, so the vaulting rises from decorative consoles on the side walls between windows. The ribs are rather plain and minimal in number. Their intersections are covered with foliated bosses.

Original box pews are retained in the nave. Decorative elements are minimal in the interior, leaving maximum impact to marble wall tablets that memorialize illustrious Huguenots.

In the upper part of the apse is the choir loft, containing a Henry Erben organ designed for the church in 1845.

Edward B. White, who designed the church, was one of Charleston's most prolific 19th century architects. Surviving structures of his design include Grace Protestant Episcopal Church, the east wing of the Old Citadel, the Market Hall, Centenary Methodist Church, St. Johannes Lutheran Church, the wings and portico of Randolph Hall at the College of Charleston, the steeple of St. Philip's Protestant Episcopal Church and the old Charleston High School on Society Street.

# Church In Gothic Revival Style

By ROBERT P. STOCKTON

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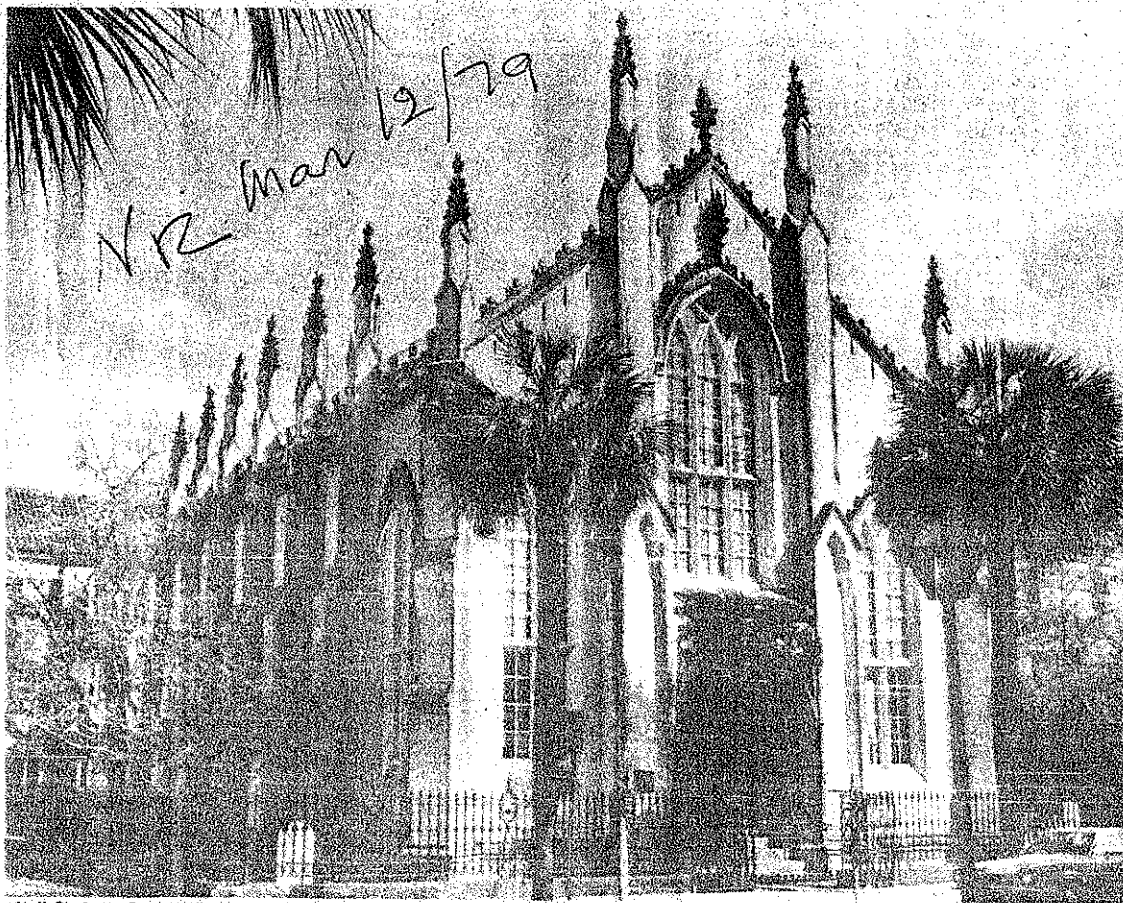
Gothic Revival in ecclesiastic architecture, however, did not become generally popular in America until the 1830's and 1840s, when the ideas of A.W.N. Pugin were imported from England.

Pugin, an architect of French descent, began publishing a series of books on Gothic architecture in 1821. One book in particular, "Contrasts," made Pugin famous.

In "Contrasts" Pugin compared the classicist church structures of his day, which he characterized as vulgar parodies of pagan temples, and the Gothic cathedrals that recalled "the glories of the Catholic past."

It is ironic that the latter-day Huguenots would agree with Pugin that Gothic was the most proper style for "Christian" architecture. Other books by Pugin, including his "True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture," published in 1841, dealt with the structural nature of Gothic architecture.

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Staff Photo by Brad Nettles

## Huguenot Church, 136 Church St.

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Photo by Frank G. Cain Jr.

## Under The Church

This small footstone inscribed "Capt. P.M." was found underneath the French Huguenot church. The stone is thought to be related to a large monument to Capt. Philip Messervy now located near the walkway on the north side of the church.

# Church Renovation Yields Footstones

By JANE E. ALLEN  
Post-Courier Reporter

When workmen dug beneath the floor of the Huguenot Church on Church and Queen streets to install air conditioning this spring, they came upon footstones and original foundations of an earlier church on the site.

The present church, Charleston's first pure Gothic structure and the only Huguenot church in the country, was built in 1845 by Edward Brickell White. It was founded by Huguenots who arrived in Charleston in 1680 and built a first structure there by 1687.

In 1796, the church on the site was destroyed deliberately to break the flames of an extensive downtown fire. A structure erected in 1800 was torn down in 1844 to make way for the present building.

Last October, regular church ser-

## Do You Know Your Charleston?

vices were resumed there for the first time since 1950. To keep the church open year-round, air-conditioning ducts were installed. While work was under way, members of the church crawled beneath the heavy, solid pine floorboards to explore the area below.

With camera and clipboard, Frank G. Cain Jr. descended to a space that varied from 18 inches to 2½ feet high. He came upon rubble from the demolition of the previous church and footstones that match tombstones thought to have been moved before the 1845 church was erected on that ground.

The burial markers were sketched

and photographed to record their locations. Among the footstones found were those of "J.W.B. 1835" and "E.B. 1834." He found the stones "in mint condition. They hadn't had an acid bath every time a cloud went by," Cain said.

He consulted records of The Huguenot Society of South Carolina, an organization that bears no direct relation to the Huguenot Church, to try to identify who had been buried.

According to Huguenot Society records published in 1952, J.W.B. would have been James W. Bounetheau, who died Jan. 8, 1835. E.B. corresponds to Elizabeth Bounetheau, who died Nov. 9, 1834. Cain found the

headstones from these graves in the walkway on the northeast side of the church. He linked another stone, marked "M.M." 1815, with the grave of Mary Mazyck.

Her headstone, near the walkway on the south side of the church, reads, "Sacred to the memory of Mrs. Mary Mazyck who was born on 5th day of Sept. 1743, and departed this life on the 15th of February 1815 aged 71 years and 5 months. Near her lies entombed the remains of her deceased husband ISAAC MAZYCK Esq. who died in the year 1784. They were beloved in life, lamented in death."

Cain found a small undated stone inscribed "Capt. P.M." "stuck in a masonry border" that probably is associated with a large monument to Capt. Philip Messervy now located near the

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*News & Courier 5/30/83*

*140 Church St.*

# Rich Huguenot Church

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appears to be the lower portion of the east wall lies exposed, he said.

This spring, the church had liturgies reprinted for the first time since 1886. Bryant, who also serves as director of development at Baptist College, said the church historically has had ministers of many denominations. However, he said, "I'm the first Baptist in the 300-year history."

The church membership includes members of other denominations who claim Huguenot descent, including Baptists, Episcopalians and Presbyterians. Many different denominations have worshipped in the Huguenot sanctuary while awaiting construction of their own churches.

Bryant says his is "the only independent Huguenot Church in America. I'm told we are the only active Huguenot church outside of France. We use a 1713 liturgy, first used in Reform churches in Switzerland."

A French service is conducted annually the last Sunday in March by Dr. Herbert Stein-Schneider, a Huguenot and the pastor of St. John's Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. — the "Church of the President." Sunday school children, who study conversational French and French songs, perform at the annual French service.

The church is open daily. Visitors come to trace their own Huguenot roots and read memorial tablets placed to help raise funds for the church. Historical names on the tablets include George Washington, whose mother was of Huguenot descent and Sidney Lanier, a writer from Macon, Ga., whose mother's portrait is in a home on Tradd Street.

Today, Huguenots from all over the world come and worship in the church, Bryant said.

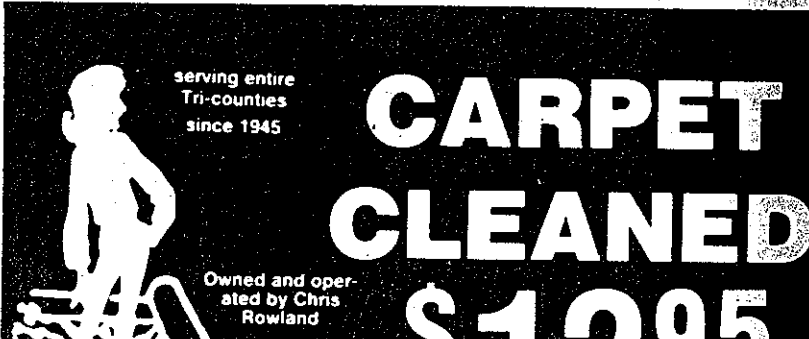
A group of Huguenots, including a number from Charleston, will travel to Paris in 1985 in commemoration of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.

At one time there were five Huguenot churches in the various parishes around Charleston. All of them dis-

solved, closing their doors and uniting with Episcopal churches in the outlying areas. People lost interest because the early Huguenots insisted on conducting services in French. When people stopped speaking French, the foreign liturgy became a liability to the churches.

"This church has always been very Calvinistic, always very independent, and it refused to dissolve," Bryant said. He is trying to re-inject vitality to the Sunday services: "I try to bring in ideas and illustrations from Calvin's life and from the Reformation Era, as well as poetry. I quote Sidney Lanier quite often and other literary persons of Huguenot descent."

Since its reopening, the historical shrine again has become a "living congregation," Bryant said.



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