

St. Thomas and St. Dennis Church
Near Wando
Berkeley County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-29

HABS
SC
8-WAND.V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of South Carolina

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office
for District of South Carolina

HABS No. SC-29
HABS
S.C.

J. WAND. V

ST. THOMAS AND ST. DENNIS CHURCH
Near Wando, Berkeley County, South Carolina

Owner: Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina

Date of erection: Early nineteenth century

Present condition: Good; recently restored

Description:

Masonry, plastered; high gable roof covered with tile said to have come from Jamaica; main entrance in gable end; double doors with fanlight in recessed arch; side elevation three bays; two arched-head windows, flanking recessed arch with glazed lunette; cornice and rake mould; a large Greek Revival cyma reversa. Interior very simple, with old woodwork.

Additional data:

The parish, first known as St. Thomas, was made to include a Huguenot group, causing the formation of the church name. The eighteenth-century church was replaced by the present in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Thomas Waterman

11/1/40

ADDENDUM TO:
ST. THOMAS' & ST. DENNIS' CHURCH
(St. Thomas' & St. Dennis' Chapel of Ease)
Clements Ferry Rd. vicinity
Wando River
Berkeley County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-29

HABS
SC
8-WAND.V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

ADDENDUM TO:
ST. THOMAS AND ST. DENNIS CHURCH
(St. Thomas and St. Dennis Chapel of Ease)
1507 Cainhoy Road
Wando
Berkeley County
South Carolina

HABS SC-29
HABS SC,8-WAND.V,1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
ST. THOMAS AND ST. DENIS PARISH CHURCH

HABS No. SC-29

Location: 1507 Cainhoy Road, Wando vicinity, Berkeley County, South Carolina 29492. St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish Church faces west.

The coordinates for the church are latitude: 32.960635 and longitude:-79.857364 and were obtained through Google Earth in July 2012. The datum is WGS84. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Significance: The present St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish Church was built in 1819. The original church was constructed in 1708 and stood until it burned in a forest fire in 1815. The colonial church resulted from the Church Act of 1706, when the Province of Carolina established the Anglican Church as the state church and partitioned the colony into ten parishes.¹ St. Thomas and St. Denis were originally separate parishes. St. Denis, comprised of French-speaking Huguenots, was to be a temporary subparish of St. Thomas. St. Denis Parish, which was located in Orange Quarter, was to be disestablished when the French-speaking generation had passed. The Huguenots of Orange Quarter supported the Anglican Church Act in order to receive public funds for their minister while still being able to conduct their services in French, using a French translation of the Book of Common Prayer.

Upon the death of Reverend John James Tissot in 1768, the French-speaking minister of St. Denis Church, the colonial assembly passed an act disestablishing the church and parish on April 12 of the same year. The title of St. Denis was attached to St. Thomas Church in 1784 by an act of the South Carolina state legislature.

The present church was built in 1819 after a forest fire burned the colonial church. The simple rectangular church was built in the Greek Revival style. It is one of the few churches resulting from the Church Act of 1706 to be rebuilt. Most of the other churches have either fallen into ruins, like St. John's Church, Berkeley, and St. Bartholomew's Church, Colleton County, or have retained much of their colonial fabric.

St. Thomas and St. Denis Church also reflects the changes in ecclesiastical architecture and tastes with its 1850s alterations. The 1819 church had crossed aisles with a prominent south doorway. In the 1850s the south doorway was blocked, the floor was raised, slip pews were added along with a balcony, and a square sacristy enclosed the original semi-hexagonal apse. By blocking the south

¹ Robert F. Clute, *The Annals and Parish Register of St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish, in South Carolina, From 1680 to 1884* (Charleston, SC: Walker, Evans & Cogswell, Printers, 1884), 9.

doorway and adding slip pews, a central aisle was created from the west doorway to the altar.

In the 1930s, wealthy businessman and philanthropist, Harry F. Guggenheim, purchased seventy-five hundred acres surrounding the church's property for a hunting retreat. Guggenheim restored the church and the ruined vestry house in 1937. The restoration was sponsored by the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America. The work was completed by the Dawson Engineering Company of Charleston, South Carolina.²

Description: St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish Church is a simple three-bay church, with a steeply-pitched pantiled roof, in the Greek Revival style. Scored stucco covers its masonry walls and two multi-paned semicircular transoms adorn the church. The double-hung sash windows are fifteen-over-fifteen with semicircular heads, containing fifteen lights. The windows of the north and south sides have green louvered shutters with the semicircular upper portions covered by fixed louvered shutters. The church's dimensions are 37'-4" by 27'-7 1/2", with a semi-hexagonal chancel projecting 6'-6" off the east end. The dimensions of the plan are almost the exact same as the 1708 church. The height of the church is 33'-8".

The brick structure was laid in an English bond with a stucco finish, scored to simulate coursed stonework. The church was constructed on a shallow foundation, five courses (18") below the ground surface. The brick walls on the east and west ends extend to the peaks of the gabled pediments.

The south entry likely contained double-doors as the opening was just over 6'-5" wide. Flanking the former south entry are two compass-headed windows, mirroring the three on the opposite side. The windows on the north and south sides have tooled sandstone sills.

Doric pilasters flank the red west double-doors. Above the doors a semicircular transom window has twenty-nine lights. The doors each have six panels. Radiating from the transom window are five flat paneled coffers. An inscription, "1819 SC," is set in the stucco of the center coffer.

The wainscoting on the west and north walls have a quirked (sharp) ovolo and bead molding with flat panels. The molding was undoubtedly present on the wainscoting of the south wall before the alterations in the 1850s. The quirked ovolo and bead molding continues around the polygonal chancel. These panels are likely original as the Greek form of the ovolo gradually replaced the Roman ovolo in the early nineteenth-century.

The attic of the church contains mill sawn framing. The ceiling joists are about 10 1/2" by 3" and span the width of the church. The joists and the rafters are spaced

² Neilsen, "Harry Guggenheim Saves St. Thomas's Church."

1'-7 1/2" apart. The roof consists of common rafters, uniform in size and evenly spaced along the length of the roof, supporting the sheathing.³ The rafters meet at the ridge, joined by mortise and tenon. Treenails, about an inch in diameter, go through the mortise and tenons of the rafters. Vertical struts rest on the joists and support each rafter. Sheathing nailed to the rafters support the pantiles. Outlookers, double tenoned into end girders and plates, support the cornice beyond the face of the gable. The mortise and tenon joint is secured with a treenail, an inch in diameter, driven into holes bored through both blades and tenon. In the corners of the attic are short dragon beams, diagonal girders, also double tenoned, projecting out to the corners to support the overhang of the cornices.

In the 1850s, the church was significantly altered. The north-south aisle was eliminated, creating a center aisle running west to east. The pulpit moved closer to the altar. Thus, the shorter west side of the church replaced the longer south side as the prominent entryway and focal point of the church. Slip pews were added onto a new raised floor and a rectangular sacristy enclosed the projecting polygonal chancel on the east end. The sixteen slip pews have Italianate moldings on the end panels.

The floor was raised 7 1/8" above the sandstone step at the west entryway. The tongue and groove flooring ranges from 5" to 6 1/2" in width. The altar was raised one step, 6 1/8" above the floor. The original polygonal chancel was contained by a nearly square enclosure, extending 12'-4" to the east and 14'-11 1/2" from north to south. The floor of the sacristy is covered with brick paving tiles. The double-hung sash window of the sacristy is eight-over-eight with eight lights in the upper semicircular portion of the window. The slip pews butt crudely into the original wainscoting, indicating that it was a later alteration.

Also during this phase the south central doorway was blocked off, creating a dead wall. Where the doorway has been filled-in the stucco has not been scored. A balcony was added in the rear of the church in 1858.⁴ The balcony is supported by four square, fluted columns topped with Doric cavetto capitals. A cavetto architrave runs the width of the balcony, which contains six flat panels. These panels match the flat panels on the wainscoting of the south wall of the interior, indicating that both were added during the same period. There is a space between the side of the balcony and the window, where light can shine through. The balcony is four-tiered with the top tier extending to the base of the west transom window. The interior cavetto cornice and coved ceiling were probably added at

³ Carl R. Lounsbury, *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 88.

⁴ "The White Church (Brick Church)/ St. Thomas Episcopal Church," Nomination Form, National Register of Historic Places, March 23, 1972.

this time. Steep steps lead up to the balcony along the western wall of the church in a southward direction.

In the 1930s, Harry F. Guggenheim, northern businessman and philanthropist, purchased seventy-five hundred acres which surrounded the church's property. There he built a simple, one-story, four bedroom house to host hunts and entertain guests.⁵ By this time the vestry house had become ruinous while the church had fallen into disrepair. Guggenheim funded a restoration in 1937, which was sponsored by the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America. The Dawson Engineering Company of Charleston, South Carolina, was hired to renovate and weatherproof the church and vestry house.

The roughly 15'-9 3/4" square vestry house is brick covered in stucco and scored to simulate coursed stonework. Only the west wall remained prior to Guggenheim's contribution. The historic west wall is laid in a Flemish bond, though the brick does not always line up. Wooden French doors, each with six glass panes above two flat panels, open into the vestry house through the center of the south wall. The panels on the lower sections of the doors initially had molding. The north and east sides of the vestry house each have window openings, 3' by 5'-6", covered by louvered shutters. Behind the shutters are six-over-six double-hung sash windows. Portland cement is evident on the brick on the south, east, and west walls. A chimney extends from the base to the west wall 2'-3 1/2". The interior floor of the sacristy is covered with brick, arranged in a herringbone pattern. Like the church, the half-hipped roof is covered with pantiles.

As a result of the Guggenheim restoration the profile of the exterior cornice of the church changed. Instead of keeping with a coved cornice, wire metal lath replaced the original wood cove (concave or scotia) to a chamfered profile. New pantiles were installed. The pantiles were coated in tar. Furthermore, the interior of the church was replastered, doors and tombstones repaired, and a railed fence was erected to keep out animals and to conform to the "ancient" structural plan.⁶

Another visible remainder of the Guggenheim restoration is the brick paved terrace, which extends twenty feet from the front of the west elevation. The terrace butts up against the historic masonry of the church's foundation, signifying that it was a later addition.

History: St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish Church was constructed in 1819, four years after the original 1708 church burned in a forest fire. It was built upon the foundation of the original church. The church was built as a result of the Church Act of 1706.

⁵ Irwin and Debi Unger, *The Guggenheims: A Family History* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 243.

⁶ "Do You Know Your Lowcountry: St. Thomas and St. Denis Church," *The News and Courier* (Charleston, SC), Monday Morning, September 20, 1937. From Charleston County Public Library [microfilm].

St. Denis Parish, originally a separate parish from St. Thomas, was located in Orange Quarter, South Carolina, also known as French Quarter Creek. This was where many Huguenots, or French Protestants, settled in the colony. These Huguenots constructed a wooden church around 1687 in Orange Quarter.⁷

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, chartered in 1700 by King William II of England as an Anglican mission to the American colonies, led rural Huguenot congregations toward Anglican conformity by using its financial resources and political shrewdness to send French books of Common Prayer and Bibles, appoint French-speaking missionaries to Huguenot communities, and financially help conformist pastors in their posts.⁸

The Church Act of 1706 established the Anglican Church as the state church, partitioned the colony into parishes, and dedicated £333 of public funds per parish for the erection of parish churches and parsonages. The 1706 act erected Huguenot parishes and appointed a higher number of French commissioners.⁹

By the early 1700s the Huguenots impoverished circumstances made it increasingly difficult to remain Huguenots. The Anglican Church catered to the Huguenots, seeking to win their support and allegiance, by distributing public offices to the French. The Church Act created ten parishes.¹⁰

The Huguenot church in Orange Quarter became a temporary subparish for the French. The Parish of St. Denis was defined linguistically and was authorized to be disestablished when the parishioners spoke English. They were to join St. Thomas Parish when this occurred.¹¹

Another reason the Huguenots joined the Church of England was to fund their pastor. It was difficult and costly for the Huguenots to find a minister and the Church Act required that each Anglican church be provided with one.¹²

Upon the death of Reverend John James Tissot in 1768, the French-speaking minister of St. Denis Church, the colonial assembly passed an act disestablishing

⁷ Clute, *The Annals and Parish Register*, 9.

⁸ Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, *From New Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and Their Migration to Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 124.

⁹ Arthur Henry Hirsch, *The Huguenots of Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), xix.

¹⁰ Hirsch, *Huguenots of Colonial South Carolina*, 127.

¹¹ Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in New World Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 115.

¹² Van Ruymbeke, *From New Babylon to Eden*, 131.

St. Denis Church on April 12 of the same year. The land and wooden church belonging to the French congregation was sold to Dr. John Mayer, who used the church as a residence, shortly after being disestablished.¹³ In 1784, the title of St. Denis was renewed and joined with St. Thomas via an act of the South Carolina state legislature. Thus, St. Thomas and St. Denis became one parish.¹⁴

In March 1815 a forest fire destroyed the original St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish Church. It is unknown how much of the church survived the fire. The present structure was built in 1819, almost the exact same dimensions in plan.

Due to an increase in population in the parish and changes in worship styles, the church was altered in the 1850s. The north-south aisle was eliminated, creating a center aisle running west to east. The pulpit moved closer to the altar. Thus, the shorter west side of the church replaced the longer south side as the prominent entryway and focal point of the church. Slip pews and a balcony were added onto a new raised floor and a rectangular sacristy enclosed the projecting polygonal chancel on the east end.

St. Thomas and St. Denis was the site of the Cainhoy Massacre of 1876, one of the more violent events of Reconstruction-era South Carolina. The massacre occurred in an election year which found white Democrats defeating “carpetbaggers, scalawags, and blacks,” with the election of General Wade Hampton as governor.¹⁵ On October 16, 1876, Democrats, which consisted of mostly white men, held a meeting at St. Thomas and St. Denis Church. Before the meeting got started black Republicans began firing at the Democrats.¹⁶

In the 1930s, Harry F. Guggenheim, northern businessman and philanthropist, purchased seventy-five hundred acres which surrounded the church’s property. There he built a simple, one-story, four bedroom house to host hunts and entertain guests.¹⁷ By this time the vestry house had become ruinous while the church had fallen into disrepair. Guggenheim funded a restoration in 1937, which was sponsored by the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America. The Dawson Engineering Company of Charleston, South Carolina, was hired to renovate and weatherproof the church and vestry house.

¹³ “Deed of Conveyance to the Society of Old ‘Orange Quarter (St. Denis)’ Huguenot Church Site,” *Transactions of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina* (1922), 22.

¹⁴ Clute, *The Annals and Parish Register*, 15-17.

¹⁵ Jack Leland, “Reconstruction-Era ‘Cainhoy Riot’ Bloodied Berkeley County Church,” *The News and Courier* (Charleston, SC).

¹⁶ “Brick Church: The Parrish of St. Thomas & St. Denis,” vertical file from the South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library.

¹⁷ Irwin and Debi Unger, *The Guggenheims: A Family History* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 243.

In June 1939, Thomas Tileston Waterman (1900-1951) photographed and surveyed St. Thomas and St. Denis Church for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). Waterman was a restoration architect who was one of the four draftsmen hired to design reconstructions of vanished or altered eighteenth-century buildings in Williamsburg, Virginia, in the late 1920s and early 1930s.¹⁸

In 1991, the church, located at 1507 Cainhoy Road, was annexed to the City of Charleston and in February 2002, the church was incorporated into Charleston's Landmark Overlay Zone. St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish Church and its surrounding 4.25 acres, which are geographically located in Wando, Berkeley County, is now part of the City of Charleston and a protected structure that cannot be demolished or altered without the Board of Architectural Review's approval.¹⁹

In 2010, Julian V. Brandt III, of Charleston, founded the Society of St. Thomas and St. Denis. The Society's purpose is "to lend material aid and support to the Diocese of South Carolina in the preservation, and maintenance of the Church of St. Thomas and St. Denis, Cainhoy, and its Churchyard. Another purpose is to celebrate the Christian faith of those early French and British parishioners who made Carolina their home," and to hold occasional surrices.²⁰

Sources: Brandt, Julian V. III. "A brief history, The Society of St. Thomas and St. Denis, 1706." (2010).

"Brick Church: The Parrish of St. Thomas & St. Denis." Vertical file from the South Carolina Room, Charleston County Public Library.

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"Do You Know Your Lowcountry: St. Thomas and St. Denis Church." *The News and Courier* (Charleston, SC), Monday Morning, September 20, 1937. From Charleston County Public Library [microfilm].

¹⁸ Fay Campbell Kaynor, *Thomas Tileston Waterman: Student of American Colonial Architecture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 108-09.

¹⁹ "Rezoning Application," Planning and Zoning Commission, City of Charleston, SC, November 26, 2001.

²⁰ Julian V. Brandt III, "A brief history, The Society of St. Thomas and St. Denis, 1706," (2010).

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"The White Church (Brick Church)/ St. Thomas Episcopal Church." Nomination Form, National Register of Historic Places. March 23, 1972.

Historian: Shelton Converse. This historical report was written as part of the author's thesis for the Master of Science in Historic Preservation program at the College of Charleston/Clemson University.