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Greenwich: Witness to history

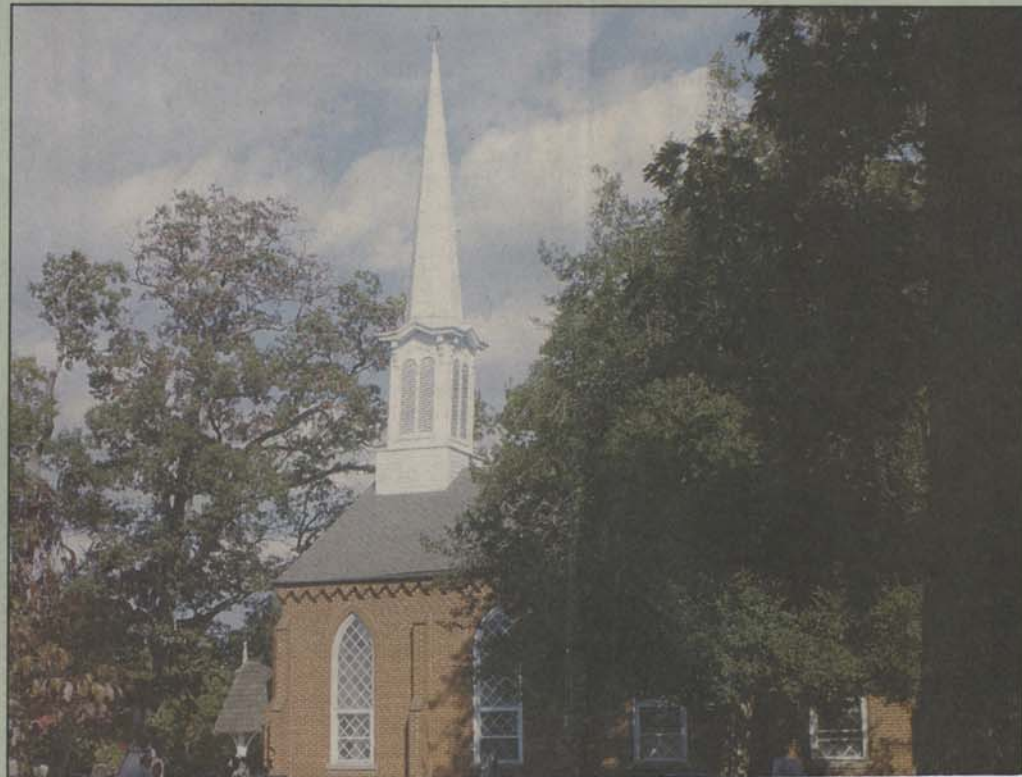
Village pays
homage to
its past

BY TARA SLATE DONALDSON
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When the Revolutionary War ended in 1783, the land in the 13 colonies ceased to be part of the British Empire. Except, perhaps, for a small piece of Nokesville.

Eighty years after independence, the British flag still flew in western Prince William's little community of Greenwich. And it's a good thing it did — that flag and its owner helped save the village church from Union soldiers during the Civil War.

Greenwich isn't a big place. Drivers passing through Nokesville on Vint Hill Road could easily blink and miss the community. But it's a little easier to spot now that a historical marker has been erected by the roadside, explaining the village's unique past.



Greenwich Presbyterian

The community of Greenwich escaped the Civil War essentially unscathed, due to the actions of one of its most prominent citizens.

Charles Green was a British subject and a cotton merchant who flew the British Union Jack over his home on Vint Hill Road. Green donated a piece of land next door for the site of the Greenwich Presbyterian Church, which was built in 1858.

When the Civil War broke out, western Prince William County became a front line and both Union and Confederate forces occupied private property throughout the county.

Churches were often seized by soldiers to be used as stables or hospitals and the Federal Army attempted to commandeer Greenwich Presbyterian, like so many others.

They were thwarted by Green, who claimed that a clause in the church's deed stated that the church would revert back to him if it ceased to be used as a religious institution. That, he said, made it English property.

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Times Staff Photo/Alexis C. Glenn

HISTORIC: Nestled amid the trees on Vint Hill Road in Nokesville, Greenwich Presbyterian Church has loomed over the small community of Greenwich for 147 years.

Greenwich

Greenwich is a tiny community on Vint Hill Road in Nokesville.



Times Newspapers Graphic/Damie Malone
Source: Rand McNally

Greenwich Presbyterian: A little piece of England lives on in Nokesville

BY TARA SLATE DONALDSON
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For two centuries, fire, war and development have periodically ravaged the landscape of Prince William County. Not many of the county's original buildings are left and even fewer are still in use. Those that are carry unique stories, passed along by generations of their inhabitants.

Greenwich Presbyterian Church is one. The one-room structure on Vint Hill Road in Nokesville was built in 1858, but its legacy began decades before, according to Susan Polk. Polk and her neighbor, Nancy Wiita, are the "unofficial church historians" because they've lived in Greenwich all their lives and their families for generations before.

Last Friday, Polk led officials, residents and tourists on tours through her church, flipping through aging photo

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Haymarket sign commemorates Mosby ambush at Ewell's Chapel

BY TARA SLATE DONALDSON
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Confederate Col. John Singleton Mosby was a perpetual thorn in the side of the Union Army. The "Gray Ghost" and his band of partisan raiders rode through Prince William, Fauquier and the surrounding areas, wreaking havoc along the Union supply lines.

But in 1863, rumor of Mosby's next move filtered up to Union commanders, who took the opportunity to lay a trap for the raiders.

According to local historian Jim Burgess, of the National Park Service, Mosby had stopped in at Ewell's Chapel outside Haymarket. There, he was overheard telling a resident that he'd be back in the morning. The eavesdropper reported the information to Union Gen. George G. Meade, who ordered a trap set.

Early the next morning, June 22, 1863, Mosby did return with 25 of his raiders. Riding from the Bull Run Mountains and passing through the Ewell farm, Mosby saw the 17th Pennsylvania Calvary near the chapel and ordered his men to attack.

But the Pennsylvanians were just the bait.

The 14th U.S. Infantry was hiding nearby and as Mosby attacked, they sprung the trap.

According to Burgess, wet weather was partially responsible for Mosby's escape. Many of the Union muskets, damp from the night before, didn't fire. Three of Mosby's Raiders were wounded but all escaped with their lives and the ambush ended as quickly as it had begun.

"The action of Ewell's Chapel didn't really take any longer than it probably takes to read the sign," Burgess said.

The only fatality was Sgt. Martin Aumiller of the 17th Pennsylvania Calvary. He'd been stationed in a tree as a lookout and Mosby reportedly shot him down as he approached. Aumiller is buried near the chapel.

The chapel itself was built for members of the Methodist Episcopal Church around 1847 on land donated by Dr. Jesse Ewell. The church was used until the turn of the century and stood until the 1980s. It was called Rescol when it was first built and Ewell's Chapel during the Civil War. It later became known as Grace Episcopal Chapel.

GREENWICH

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War. According to local historian Mark Trbovich, of the Bull Run Civil War Roundtable, the soldiers remained in Greenwich off and on during the war.

Union troops were stationed in Greenwich in 1862 before moving towards Bristoe Station and Manassas Junction to catch Stonewall

ceremony was held in Greenwich, there were actually two Civil War signs erected last Friday. The second commemorated the ambush at Ewell's Chapel, just off U.S. 15 above Haymarket.

During that skirmish in 1863, Union troops attempted to ambush the famed



Times Staff Photo/Alexis C. Glenn

SIGNS OF THE TIMES: Long-time Greenwich residents Ada and David McGlothlin check out the new historical marker for Greenwich and a replica of the marker that has been placed at Ewell's Chapel in Haymarket.

been laying in wait for Mosby all night through damp weather. By the time Mosby and his band rode in the next morning, many of the Union rifles were too wet to fire. The ambush failed and Mosby's Raiders escaped unharmed.

Thus the Federals missed out on their "prettiest chance to dispose of Mr. Mosby."

Preservation Division opted to commemorate both Civil War events with a single ribbon-cutting in Greenwich.

Neither the ambush at Ewell's Chapel nor the troop movements in Greenwich were major turning points in the war and neither are widely remembered as significant events.

But they were important

both to the locals who witnessed them and to the overall war effort, said Gainesville District Supervisor John Stirrup.

"While these might not be the most significant events in the history of the Civil War, these are like pieces of a picture puzzle that all fit together to become our Civil War history."

GREENWICH

From Page A1

Hoping to avoid a quarrel with the British, the Union troops relented. Thus Greenwich Presbyterian was the only church in the county not damaged by soldiers during the Civil War.

That event was commemorated last Friday as officials and dozens of Greenwich residents gathered outside the church to dedicate an historical marker that details the village history.

"Like so many 19th-century Prince William villages, little of Greenwich remains to serve as a monument to the history that happened along this prominent bend in the road," said Brentsville District Supervisor Wally Covington. "Greenwich Presbyterian Church stands as a silent witness to the movement of both Union and Confederate troops through western Prince William during the Civil War."

Before the battles

The attempt to seize the church wasn't the only action at Greenwich during the Civil

War. According to local historian Mark Trbovich, of the Bull Run Civil War Roundtable, the soldiers remained in Greenwich off and on during the war.

Union troops were stationed in Greenwich in 1862 before moving towards Bristoe Station and Manassas Junction to catch Stonewall Jackson's troops after his Aug. 27 raid. The Federals did not find Jackson because he had already moved his troops to Brawner's Farm on the eve of the Second Battle of Manassas.

The following year, the Union troops were back again, stationed in Greenwich in October 1863 as the two armies once again prepared to converge in Prince William.

The Federal soldiers hastily retreated from Greenwich ahead of the advancing Confederates and met up with other Union troops, who were marching from Warrenton to Bristoe Station. The advancing Confederates were also headed for Bristoe Station, where the two armies clashed the following day.

Ewell's Chapel

Though the dedication

ceremony was held in Greenwich, there were actually two Civil War signs erected last Friday. The second commemorated the ambush at Ewell's Chapel, just off U.S. 15 above Haymarket.

During that skirmish in 1863, Union troops attempted to ambush the famed Confederate raider, Maj. John Singleton Mosby.

Local historian Jim Burgess, of the National Park Service, told the story of the ambush during the dedication, explaining that the Federal soldiers had

been laying in wait for Mosby all night through damp weather. By the time Mosby and his band rode in the next morning, many of the Union rifles were too wet to fire. The ambush failed and Mosby's Raiders escaped unharmed.

Thus the Federals missed out on their "prettiest chance ... to dispose of Mr. Mosby," Burgess said, quoting Union Gen. George G. Meade.

The sign commemorating the ambush is located on private property, near Loudoun Drive and U.S. 15. Rather than hold two separate ceremonies, the county's Historic

Preservation Division opted to commemorate both Civil War events with a single ribbon-cutting in Greenwich.

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"While these might not be the most significant events in the history of the Civil War, these are like pieces of a picture puzzle that all fit together to become our Civil War," he said.

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Dr. Anne E. Bush
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