

St. James' Church

In Memory of the Forgotten and the Unknown

*Ecclesiasticus 44.9: And some there be, which have no memorial; who are perished, as though they had never been; and are become as though they had never been born; and their children after them.*

Since the early 1800's this cemetery honored and received the St James' Church loved ones.

With the passage of time the location of numerous graves was lost.

While, the Church Registry noted the burial of servants, freed slaves and those believed to be in bondage, in many cases it was without names.

This marker is erected in loving memory of their presence among us and may they now rest in peace.

*John 14: Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

*--Wording for a memorial marker suggested by the 2011 St James Cemetery Restoration Committee*

Beneath the soft green lawn next to the new Courthouse in Leesburg lies an undiscovered story of Loudoun County's early history. More than 200 people were buried in the old St James Episcopal Church cemetery, at least half of them enslaved or freed Africans. But few if any of their graves have markers so these people who helped build Loudoun County have never been recognized. Fragments of the stone foundations from the first church are also there along with some of the White parishioners' family monuments and markers.

### **The St James Cemetery Project Subcommittee**

On November 3, 2024, the St. James Cemetery Project Committee was officially commissioned with a blessing service on the grounds at which the names of all those identified so far were read aloud. Once restored, the Cemetery Committee hopes this sacred space will offer:

- **A PLACE FOR REMEMBRANCE** of those faithful members of our parish who lived through volatile and challenging times
- **A PLACE FOR REPARATION** to honor those Black and enslaved people of our community who now lie in unmarked graves and provide a bridge to understanding for all the races in Loudoun County.
- **A PLACE FOR RESTORATION** and peaceful reflection in the midst of a busy divisive world

The new Committee's first goal is to find funding to do a new Ground Penetrating Radar survey and develop a site plan to identify exactly where the unmarked graves are located. From this survey, we will develop a new landscape design plan and seek funding to create a memorial park on the site, complete with benches, a fountain, and shady trees and flowers. Most importantly, with this funding, we will finish restoring the existing headstones, erect a Virginia

Historic Highway Marker to tell the history of the cemetery for all who pass by and a wall or other memorial structure to list the names of as many as possible of those buried there. We will also need to budget for continued maintenance of the cemetery. Our estimated budget for this project is \$50,000 and our goal for completion is 2026, in time for the country's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

### **History of St James Episcopal Church and its Cemetery**

St. James' Episcopal Church was founded in 1812, and located on the street named for it, Church St, adjacent now to the new Court House, formerly the site of the county jail. The original small brick church building was replaced by a larger building in 1835, and was further enlarged in 1848 bringing the front even with the street.

- Members of St James' Episcopal Church and Shelburne Parish were buried in this small plot
- on Church Street throughout the nineteenth century. In 1854, Union Cemetery officially opened. In 1897, a new church building was completed at the current location on Cornwall
- Street. The old cemetery was left to the vines and the honeysuckle. Many of the old headstones were broken or lost.

The worshippers on Church St included many of the early White Loudoun families, i.e., the Lees, Carters, Masons, Claggetts, Grays, Rusts, and Harrisons, as well as their servants, both enslaved and free. After a decade of research in church registries and the archives at the Balch Library and the Courthouse, more than 200 persons have been identified as buried in the marked and unmarked graves, some in family plots enclosed in fenced spaces. We believe most of the unmarked graves are of enslaved persons. The stories behind these structures and gravesites are vivid reminders of the history of Leesburg and Loudoun during the 1800's, marked by the wars, the expansion (and contraction) of the population and economy, the support of religions and the religious in times of distress, and the conditions of enslaved persons before, during, and after the Civil War.