

## EXPLORING THE CITY

BY JIM MURPHY

## Old Pine Street Churchyard

Walking through the tranquil churchyard at 4th and Pine Streets one day, I looked down at a small gravestone and felt as if I'd been hit in the stomach.

The flat white stone simply said: "Our Charley."

I wondered: Was this a child? A pet? Who was it? And why was it causing me such an emotional reaction? I'd never seen a stone like this before.

Further investigation and a meeting with Ronn Shaffer, the church's resident historian, revealed many interesting facts about this beautiful Colonial churchyard. "It has the highest density of any graveyard in the city of Philadelphia," Shaffer believes, with 3,000 or more people buried in less than an acre.

Up to four adults or six or seven children are stacked in each grave — 30 inches wide, 7 feet long and 9 feet deep. Heads are placed at the west, feet to the east, so believers can see the Angel Gabriel when he announces the Great Awakening. Shaffer calls the practice of stacking multiple people in the same plot at levels of nine feet, six feet, and three feet "parfait burials."

**Known originally** as the Third Presbyterian Church, Old Pine Street opened in 1768 on land donated by Thomas and Richard Penn, sons of William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, and his second wife, Hannah.

A once-friendly relationship with the First Presbyterian Church on the south side of Market Street (High Street) near 2nd Street deteriorated when Old Pine Street hired a radical minister, George Duffield.

That's when the First Church purchased a large adjoining lot on the west side of Old Pine Street and began burying parishioners there. After selling its Bank Street burial ground in 1823, the First Church reinterred 900 bodies (and gravestones) at Old Pine Street. The First Church also moved 1,000 bodies to a mass grave at Laurel Hill on Ridge Avenue in Philadelphia, above the Schuylkill River. Unable to take the gravestones to Laurel Hill, some First Church members brought their ancestors' gravestones to Old Pine and leaned them against the south and west brick walls, where they still rest today.

With many prominent members in arms, Old Pine became known as the "Church of the



Patriots" during the Revolutionary War. This reputation worked against it when the British used the church as a hospital and later a stable for their horses.

More than 121 Revolutionary War soldiers are buried in the churchyard, and special 13-star flags mark their graves. More flags will be added this Memorial Day by the Sons of the American Revolution.

Others of note buried at Old Pine: William Hurry, sexton who rang the Liberty Bell for one hour on July 8th, 1776, to announce the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence; and Jared Ingersoll, the only signer of the Constitution in the churchyard.

More recent burials: The body of In Oh Ho, a Korean student, killed in West Philadelphia in 1958; Eugene Ormandy, who died in 1985 and whose remains are here along with his wife, Margaret; and Rev. Stephen Gloucester, a former slave and one of the first black ordained ministers in the U.S. His body was discovered during renovation of a vacant 160-year old house nearby and reinterred in a grave next to the foundation of Old Pine Street in 2008.

And finally, what's the story on "Our Charley"?

Sadly, he led a short life, and this "lovely little boy of five years" died on May 20, 1849.

As recounted in the book, *The Life of Rev. Thomas Brainerd, D.D.*, by Mary Brainerd, the death of his youngest son unnerved Dr. Brainerd so much that he had to sit while preaching for the next three years.

"To see his little boy suffering under brain fevers, as the result of his precocious intellect, completely unmanned him." No wonder.

There's far more here than meets the eye.

## FAST FACTS

Name: Historic Colonial Churchyard

Location: 412 Pine Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106

Current Church Name: Third, Scots and Mariners Presbyterian Church

Phone: 215-925-8051

E-mail: info@oldpine.org

Web: www.oldpine.org; friendsfoldpinestreet.org

Open: 7 days a week during daylight hours

Closed: national holidays

Admission: No charge; contributions are appreciated; 13-star flags and flag-holders to adopt a grave of a fallen patriot soldier are \$25.

Recent Claim to Fame: Appeared in the 2004 movie "National Treasure"

