

The Blue Church
Old St. Matthew's Episcopal Church
12th and Byron Streets



This Greek Revival building served as the third home of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Wheeling and was consecrated in 1837. It is part of the Monroe Street East Historic District, a district that bears the historic name of what is now known as Twelfth Street. The historic district nomination from 1979 states that it was designed by a Wheeling house carpenter named James H. White and built by stonemason John Gilchrist and bricklayer Hiram Martin. The "classic temple-form building is brick, covered with scored stucco. The front of the building is extremely impressive with six towering Doric columns and a flight of sandstone steps extending across the entire width."

The interior of the structure has a lower level fellowship hall; the narthex, nave, and pulpit area are on the main level. A "U-shaped" balcony once held seating for slaves, while their masters worshipped below.

During the Civil War, St. Matthew's suffered from the divided loyalties that were common at the time. In 1861, the rector of St. Matthew's, the Rev. E.T. Perkins, reportedly abandoned the church by night, leaving behind his household goods, to take his family to the security of Richmond. Later, he agreed to return to Wheeling if the Vestry would permit him to omit prayers for the President of the United States. The Vestry declined his offer, believing that Abraham Lincoln did, indeed, need the prayers of the congregation.

Despite the controversies during the Civil War, St. Matthew's parish continued to grow and soon needed a larger building. By 1864 St. Matthews moved to its current location at the corner of 15th and Chapline Streets.

The old building was used later as the House of Prayer and then the Church of God and Saints of Christ congregation before Wheeling Heritage purchased it. It has served as an arts facility, hosting various art, music, and other cultural events. The WV Department of Culture and History provided financial support for roof and truss work. Additional work will be needed to complete renovation work on this historic and architecturally significant structure.

Prepared by Jeanne Finstein, Friends of Wheeling
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