Why Easter Monday?

Saint Paul's Church has its official Annual Parish Meeting on the Monday after Easter each year. But why?

Looking back at our Anglican heritage from the eighteenth century, we find that it was customary for English and American colonial parishes to elect Churchwardens and Vestrymen during Easter week, if not on Easter Monday itself. On Easter Sunday greater numbers of church-goers were likely to attend their parish church, even those traveling from the surrounding area to be there. Throughout Great Britain, Easter Monday itself is still a national "bank holiday".

On this side of the Atlantic, the colony of Georgia, founded by a board of Trustees in 1733, had only two churches in the colony for the first twenty-five years: Christ Church in Savannah and "the church erected in the town of Augusta, with the Cemetery or Burial Place thereto belonging . . . " Although established in 1750, the Augusta church did not acquire an official name until an act of 1758, after Georgia had become a Royal colony. The colonial government divided the colony into eight parishes, naming the region around Augusta as the Parish of Saint Paul.

Accordingly, this colonial charter established the Augusta church as the Parish Church of Saint Paul, and its corporate name as the "Rector of Saint Paul, in the Town of Augusta." The charter directed that "the Inhabitants of the said several Parishes respectively, being Free Holders with the same, or Householders, and of Ability to contribute to the Publick Taxes and Charges thereof" shall meet at their respective churches on the Monday in Easter Week and elect between five and ten Vestrymen and two Church Wardens for the coming year.

The American Revolution intervened, and the colonial charter became no longer valid. Saint Paul's entered a period of secular governance by a board of state-chartered commissioners, later called the Trustees of Richmond Academy.

This arrangement continued until the remnant Anglican congregation obtained state charters from the Georgia Legislature, first in 1816 incorporating the "Trustees of the Protestant Episcopal Society in the city of Augusta and the county of Richmond". That charter was amended in 1819, whereby the trustees of the society acquired a new corporate name, "Churchwardens and Vestrymen of the Episcopal Church in Augusta called St. Paul's Church." The act stated further that

> ". . . on every other Easter Monday annually thereafter, the pew-holders and all male persons who shall have joined the congregation, as members in full communion in St. Paul's Church, shall convene at the

> church aforesaid, and there between the hours of ten and two o'clock, elect by ballot . . . two . . . churchwardens, and . . . eight vestrymen" to carry the purposes intended by this act fully into effect."

The State Legislature amended the charter in 1976 to confer upon "all persons, both female and male, (although heretofore historically male persons)" the right to vote at the annual meeting. The act re-stated the time-honored meeting schedule of Easter Monday annually and changed the number of vestrymen from eight to nine.

The church adopted by-laws on Easter Monday April 19, 1954, (last amended in March 1982), which reflect the traditional schedule for the annual parish meeting on Easter Monday between the hours of ten and two o'clock. The by-laws also provide for term limits for the church wardens and vestry; although, according to the state charter, *all* members and wardens, new and old, are elected *every* year.

Thus, in practice, each year the new candidates for office at Saint Paul's Church are actually *nominated* at the meeting the parish usually holds in January; then, *all* Churchwardens and Vestrymen are officially *elected* on each Easter Monday.

[Thomas Heard Robertson, Jr.

Easter Monday

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