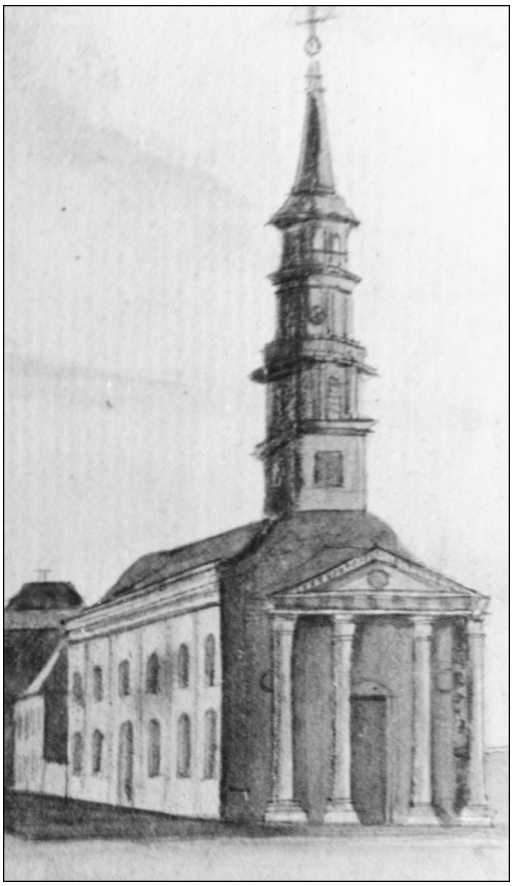
The Building of St Michael's Church



St. Michael's Church is the oldest church building on the Charleston peninsula. It was first commissioned 275 years ago and took ten years to build - from 1751 to 1761. Samuel Cardy, a master builder and carpenter from Dublin, was hired to complete the design and finishing work, including the sanctuary, steeple, and portico. He is considered the architect of St. Michael's by significantly modifying the original structural design, which was allegedly patterned after St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London.

To help complete the interior of the church, Cardy hired two local artisans. Thomas Elfe was a skilled Charles Town cabinetmaker who was responsible for all of the turned work and a small amount of the casework. Henry Burnett was a newly arrived London-trained woodcarver. He designed and carved the pulpit and is responsible for placing the pineapple finial on the pulpit as a symbol of hospitality, a distinct departure from the Anglican tradition of crowning the pulpit with a dove.

Architectural scholar, Louis P. Nelson praised the results of their work "…as one of the most sophisticated and rightfully celebrated churches erected in America."

The original cost of the church construction was allocated to be *L*17,000 with the remaining funds to come from the sale of church pew space. There were significant cost overruns, and the public cost of the building came to *L*31,656 with pew subscriptions amounting to *L*21,877.