



## The Historic Connections of the Church of the Holy Cross in Stateburg, South Carolina

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Historic Church of the Holy Cross | CC

This historic Anglican church was originally established on land donated by Revolutionary War general Thomas Sumter. The present structure was built between 1850 and 1852, and among its long and varied history are two interesting stories.



Joel R. Poinsett | LOC

### Joel R. Poinsett

Joel R. Poinsett was a famous 19th-century physician, freemason, and statesman. While serving as the United States' first minister to Mexico, he visited an area south of Mexico City in 1823 and saw an interesting plant with a vivid red flower. An avid amateur botanist, he sent samples of the plant to the United States, and by 1836, it became known as the "poinsettia." Poinsett died in 1851 in Stateburg while away from his Georgetown, South Carolina, plantation and was buried in the Church of the Holy Cross's cemetery. It is possible his funeral was witnessed by one of the wealthy church members who had donated money for the erection of the current structure.

### William Ellison

April Ellison was born enslaved in 1790 on the Ellison Plantation in Winnsboro, South Carolina. Apprenticed by his owner at age 10 to a cotton ginmaker, he went on to purchase his freedom on June 9, 1816, using money he earned and saved. He changed his name to William Ellison, moved to Stateburg, and continued to refine his trade of making cotton gins. Ellison also married, had children, joined the Church of the Holy Cross, and began to accumulate wealth and, according to the 1860 U.S. Census, owned 63 slaves, making him, at that time, the largest of the 171 black slaveholders in South Carolina.



William Ellison | CC

At the beginning of the Civil War, Ellison offered the labor of his enslaved people to the Confederate government and converted part of his 1,000-acre cotton plantation to mixed crops in order to supply food to the Confederate Army. He died in December 1861, and his property was divided, including his slaves, among his daughter and two sons.

William Ellison's grandson, John Buckner served as a private in the 1st South Carolina Artillery, according to the National Park Service, the Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System at M381, Roll 5. He joined Company K on March 27, 1863. His family was acquainted with the unit's commander Capt. Alfred Gaillard.

The 1st South Carolina Artillery was present for the April 12, 1861, bombardment of Fort Sumter. A portion of it was also in the works at Battery or Fort Wagner on Morris Island for the famous assault of the 54th Massachusetts in 1863. Buckner's Company K appears to have been located elsewhere at the time of the assault against Fort Wagner. They were stationed on Castle Pinckney, an island that was a part of a network of defensive positions in Charleston harbor, which included Forts Wagner, Sumter, and Moultrie.

John Buckner died in 1895 and was buried at the Ellison Family cemetery in Stateburg, praised for being a faithful soldier.



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