

John Pickrell (1783–1851)

John Pickrell was a major subscriber for the construction of the church in 1817, committing to 20 shares valued at \$500, thus placing him among the top tier of founders financially. He was not among the 26 who committed to purchase pews, but he was in fact an original pew owner, and he served as a Warden.

Records variously claim that Pickrell was born in Montgomery County, MD or in Northern Ireland and emigrated to the United States. The absence of records in Maryland on his family suggests that the latter was more likely the case. He first appears in the historical records as buying property in Georgetown in 1807 when he was 24 years old. He continued to buy, build and sell all his life. In addition he ran a major lumber business starting in 1807.

Pickrell married Ann Wilson (1788–1874), the daughter of Zadok Wilson, a prosperous tobacco planter of Scots descent who owned land where Silver Spring, MD is now located. Zadok Wilson had earlier moved to Georgetown, and in 1809 Ann was member of St. John's Church Georgetown. The Rector, the Reverend Walter Dulaney Addison, befriended her when she and Pickering fell in love. Her father opposed the marriage. The couple eloped, and Addison married them near what is now Silver Spring without her father's knowledge. Her father refused to speak to her following the elopement—until the Pickrells' first child was born and only then the father and daughter had a *rapprochement*. Thereafter, records show Zadok Wilson working in conjunction with Pickrell in his lumber and building businesses, and in 1815 Pickrell gave his father-in-law the house that is now 2708 P Street.

The Pickrells had nine children: Addison, Esau, Adolphus, Angelina, Sarah Loretta, Caroline Saloma, Sophronia, John and Zadok Wilson. It is

believed that they have numerous descendants alive today.

Pickrell was active in business affairs around the time of the church's founding. In 1815 he had an interest in the business of John Lipscomb on southeast corner of what is now Wisconsin Avenue and N Street which he sold in 1817. He owned what is currently 3025 P Street before 1817 and may have built the current brick house at the front of that property. In addition, he purchased and flipped what would now be 3258 M Street to fellow Christ Church founder Clement Smith in the months preceding the organizational meeting of the church in November 1817. He also owned a half interest with Clement Smith in a wharf at the foot of Thomas Jefferson Street in 1817 and later sold his interest to Smith. His name appeared on the tax list of Georgetown in 1818, at which time he owned property assessed at \$13,950, a significant sum. Tunlaw Farm, in current Glover Park, also was reportedly owned by the Pickrell family.

The 1834 City Directory of Georgetown lists John Pickrell as a lumber dealer living "near the Bank" on Prospect Street. His house stood on the hill which was cut down to build the Wormley School, probably on the same level as the house just to the west next door there now. The Pickrells later lived at what is now 3233 N Street, which became the Odd Fellows Lodge (still standing). Clement Smith, a church founder, business partner and friend of Pickrell, built the front part of that house in circa 1809.

At his death in 1851, Pickrell left a considerable estate to his widow Ann. His funeral almost certainly would have been at Christ Church, but the church burial records for 1851 to prove it are missing. He is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery.



Pickrell had been a member of Georgetown's Board of Aldermen for many years. Upon his death the Board of Aldermen voted to wear mourning arm bands for 30 days in his honor. At an historical oration given in the Methodist Church of Georgetown not long thereafter, The Reverend P. B. Balch gave this tribute:

“...And there is...the late John Pickrell. He was a successful merchant and for a long time member of our Corporation. His judgment and experience were often called upon in this requisition and favorably esteemed. Upon his departure by death, he was justly favored with testimonials of our Corporation to the purity of his character and his faithful labors on behalf of the Corporation.”

After he died Ann carried on the lumber business with the help of her two older sons for 23 years. She died in 1874, at age 86 at what is now 3233 N Street and is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery with her husband. Her epitaph reads: “She hath done what she could.”

