
The fight to save Trinity Churchyard represents one of the earliest preservation battles in the City of New York. This document is an examination of the nineteenth century legal and social fight to preserve Trinity Churchyard. The full history and significance of the preservation of the churchyard has not been unraveled until now.

The northern burial ground of Trinity Churchyard, at the intersection of Broadway and Wall Street in lower Manhattan, is one of the few remaining sites of the original seventeenth century Dutch colonial settlement of New Amsterdam. It is exceptional that such a valuable piece of real estate retains its original use and is not fully exploited for the economic value afforded by its location.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, many businessmen and property owners in this area of New York submitted proposals for the city to connect Pine and Albany Streets, requiring the destruction of the churchyard. The connection of these streets would have created an easier passage between commercial activities on the Hudson River shore and the East River shore.

The preservation battle for the churchyard that lasted from 1832 to 1859 was a radical departure from the early nineteenth century when no efforts were made to retain colonial- era graveyards. Trinity Church’s Vestry fought the destruction of the churchyard based on the conditions of its deed to the burial ground. Other groups, including the veterans of the War of 1812, were mobilized to defend the churchyard because they believed it contained a mass grave of casualties of the sugarhouse prisons run by the British as part of their occupation of the city during the Revolutionary War.

Though it was not the primary means of preservation for Trinity Churchyard, the Soldiers-Martyrs’ Monument, designed by Frank Wills and built at the site of the proposed connection of Albany and Pine Streets, has more significance than has previously been ascribed to it. The resolution to construct the monument was a joint effort of the vestry, city government, and populist defenders of the churchyard. This thesis reveals that previous accounts of the origins of the Soldiers-Martyrs’ Monument and the complicated battle to preserve the churchyard were not complete.