

# Epsom Chapel and Cannon

## Epsom Chapel



Drawing of Epsom Chapel, done by Henry Banning Chew ca. 1837. (*Memorial Journal, Chew Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.*)

*"It is a plain structure, built of stone, which is rough cast; shape oblong; and it is capable of seating one hundred persons. This Church was built on the site of an old powder magazine, the stones of which were used in its construction. The lot was donated by Mr. Henry B. Chew, the owner of 'Epsom', from which estate it derives its name."*

— Dr. Jackson Piper  
(Hampton Archives, HAMP 15022, Dr. Jackson Piper's Manuscript History of Trinity Church to 1899)

The land on which Epsom Chapel was built had been the site of a powder magazine built by General Nathan Towson during the War of 1812. The land became part of the Epsom farm when it was inherited by Harriet Ridgley Chew in 1829.

Henry Chew and his second wife, Elizabeth Ann Ralston Chew, donated the land for the construction of the Chapel. The Chapel was constructed on the foundation of the old arsenal north of Joppa Road and was dedicated on 30 November, 1839. It was the first place of worship in Towsontown.

Originally called "Union Chapel," it was open for the use of all Evangelical Christian denominations and their ministers, though it was used primarily by Methodists and Episcopalians. There was great difficulty in finding non-Methodist ministers and efforts to find Episcopal ministers were not very successful. Soon after the chapel's first Episcopal minister, Rev. Charles R. Howard, arrived in 1857, the Episcopalians broke off and began their own church, meeting at the Odd Fellows Hall from 1858 to 1860.



The Epsom Chapel congregation in 1899. (*Baltimore County Historical Society, reprinted in Towson and the Villages of Ruxton and Lutherville, Arcadia Publishing, 1999*)

Towson's Methodists, however, soon faced problems of their own. The years before the Civil War saw a split in the Methodist Church into two factions: one called the Methodist Episcopal Church, and another called the Methodist Protestant Church. The two continued to worship together until the Civil War broke out, when the southern-leaning Methodist Protestant Church left Epsom Chapel to worship at Odd Fellows Hall.

After the war, this group returned to Epsom Chapel. However, the Methodist Episcopal Church soon left and built their own church. The remaining Methodists had their own church by 1909. The town's Presbyterians met at Epsom Chapel during the 1920s until their own church was also constructed.



Epsom Chapel in 1900, sixty years after its construction. One can tell that it was in some disrepair by this time, from the peeling plaster and the broken window. (*Baltimore County Public Library.*)

Soon, the chapel ceased to be used for religious purposes, and was returned to the Chew Estate. When Goucher College purchased the Chew Estate in 1921, the chapel passed to Goucher College's ownership. During the 1920s and 1930s, Towson Boy Scout Troop # 28 used the chapel as a headquarters.

During the Second World War, the college allowed the government to use Epsom Chapel as a daycare center for the children of mothers employed in war-related industries. The chapel continued to be used as a day nursery after the war, and in 1949, Goucher College also allowed a Christian Science congregation to use the building.

Goucher sold the land upon which the chapel stood to the Hutzler family by 1950. The chapel was torn down in the early 1950s to make way for an office building and parking lot.



Epsom Chapel in 1920. (*Baltimore County Public Library*)

## The Goucher Cannon

The cannon today known as "the Goucher cannon" was probably cast between 1776-1780 at the Northampton Ironworks, just north of Epsom in the area of what is today the Loch Raven Reservoir.



Captain Charles Ridgley owned and operated the ironworks which supplied cannon, shot, and other military supplies for American forces during the Revolution. This cannon was typical of those used from the Revolution until the early nineteenth century. Because of errors in casting, the cannon was never used in warfare, but discarded so that it would not be used by American troops.

When Goucher College purchased a portion of the old Epsom farm in 1921, the existence of the "old cannon" was noted on a topographical map of the grounds. Others knew of the presence of the cannon as well. During the Second World War, a representative of the Salvage Section of the War Production Board wrote to Goucher President David A. Robertson:

*"In the efforts of this office to expedite the movement of scrap metals to the steel mills, it has been called to our attention that there is an old iron cannon about a half mile off the Dulany Valley Road, near the entrance to your new property [...] Should you decide to dispose of this article, I suggest that you contact a regular scrap dealer [...] We shall be glad to supply you with the name of a dealer if you have not one in mind."*

(Jack S. Ewing to David Robertson, 17 June 1942, Robertson Correspondence, Goucher College Archives.)

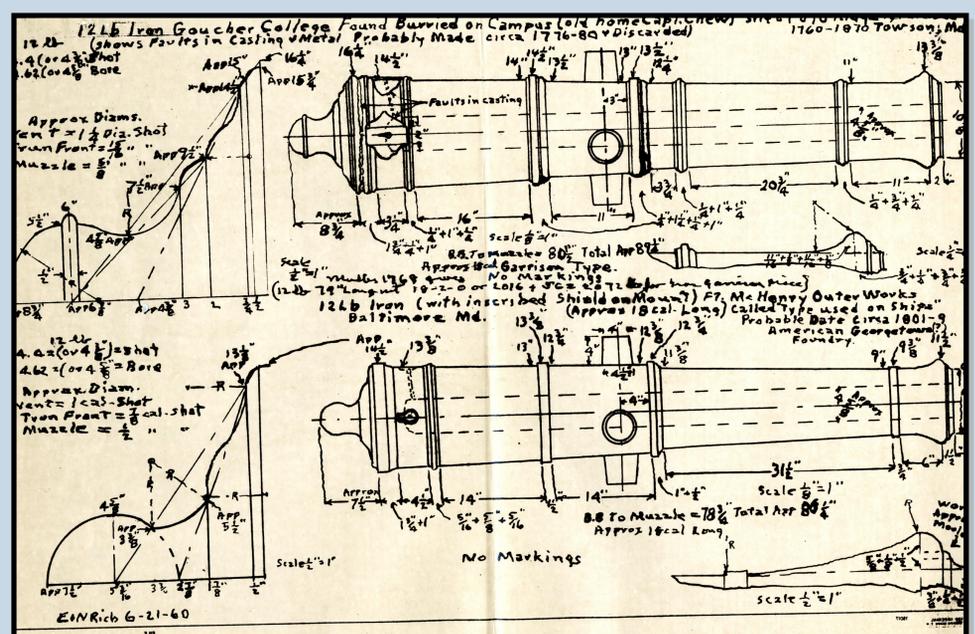
President Robertson replied: *"Of course Goucher College has been cooperating with the National Government in the effort to win this war and has been attentive to the salvage program as well as others. For the present, however, we desire to retain that cannon."*

(David Robertson to Jack Ewing, 25 June 1942, Robertson Correspondence, Goucher College Archives.)

The cannon remained in the ground until the 1950s, when it was unearthed during the building of the Julia Roberts Library. It now sits outside of the Hoffberger Science Building.



The Goucher cannon today, in front of the Hoffberger Science Building.



A Twentieth Century drawing and structural analysis of the cannon. Goucher College Special Collections and Archives.