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For Immediate Release:

Trinity on the Green To Celebrate Cornerstone Bicentennial

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America's First Gothic Church To Celebrate 200 Years

May 2014 Marks Bicentennial of Cornerstone Ceremony at New Haven's Trinity on the Green

The year was 1814. James Madison was the fourth president of the United States, and the young country was at war with Britain (the War of 1812). It was the year that Francis Scott Key, inspired by the sight of the stars and stripes unfurled above one of that war's battles, wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner." It was also the year when, on May 17, **Trinity Episcopal Church of New Haven**, the oldest Episcopal parish in New Haven, then located on the southeast corner of Chapel and Church streets (hence the name Church Street) laid the cornerstone of the historic Gothic style church now at the corner of Chapel and Temple streets. On May 3 of this year, Trinity on the Green will commemorate this cornerstone event for one of New Haven's architectural gems.

A Period of Great Change

The turn of the eighteenth century marked a time of great physical change for New Haven's historic Green, today a nationally-recognized historic landmark. In 1784 New Haven was chartered as a city and the Green was first designated as public open space. During this era Temple Street was cut through, forever dividing the Green in two. In addition, the first fence was constructed around the Green's perimeter, the headstones of the former central Burial Ground were moved to the newly created Grove Street Cemetery, and the recently planted elm trees per James Hillhouse's Plan, matured in stature. As part of this extensive rehab, older buildings were removed from the area of Temple St and all three current churches were designed and constructed in the locations where they now stand, joined in 1827 by Ithiel Town's Doric double porch State House replacing an earlier more modest version which had been built in 1763 abutting College Street.

Trinity's Unique Design

Trinity Church, constructed in 1814--15 and consecrated in 1816, is unique in several ways: designed by Ithiel Town, the prominent New Haven architect of the time (who also designed the Center Church on the Green) it is the first example of an intentionally Gothic-style derived church building in our new republic, and predates the Gothic Revival architectural style in England and the United States by more than two decades. Its external walls are constructed of indigenous New Haven Trap Rock (or Diabase), a reddish stone that changes color with light and moisture; the stone was taken from a quarry in Hamden that was owned by none other than Eli Whitney. Since its construction, a number of special features have been added including its stained-glass windows (three by Tiffany), Lee Lawrie's sculptures and the magnificently preserved Aeolian-Skinner organ.

“The cornerstone event in May of 1814 was a watershed in religious tolerance in New Haven, then run by an established Congregationalist church government” said Neil Olsen, a parishioner and church historian. “Despite the War of 1812, and lingering doubts about a denomination derived from the Church of England, the town voted to allow an Episcopal church on the Green next to the Congregational churches, something that had been denied them since the parish was founded in 1723, and because of the war, the Church had to obtain permission from British Commander Hardy, whose fleet was blockading New Haven, to float its great wooden roof beams down the Connecticut River, along the sound and into New Haven Harbor. Commander Hardy reputedly said, ‘If there is any place on earth that needs religion, it is this New Haven. Let the rafts go through!’ ”

Cornerstone Celebration

The celebration scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, May 3&4 will include a Saturday procession from the first site of the first church, at Chapel and Church streets, to the present site at Temple and Chapel, with many parishioners in period costume. Among other attractions that day, “there will be a display of antique toys that would have been popular in 1814--1816, 1866 (50th anniversary) and 1916 (100th anniversary) creating a “soft-sell” history timeline for observers of all ages,” said Peg Chambers an architect and parishioner and one of the organizers of the event. “There will also be a ‘Waffle Frolic & Cider Syllabus’ that will feature Belgian waffles, “which were very popular in the early part of the 19th century in New Haven”, Chambers said “and should suit the taste of our current rector who is Belgian!”

Trinity on the Green

Trinity Episcopal Church, New Haven, Connecticut, is located in the heart of the downtown on the town Green at the corner of Chapel and Temple streets. Growing out of a “house church” parish in 1723, its first church was built in 1752–1753, and the second church, the historic Gothic style 1814-1816 church is known as a busy and well-known center of music, drama, community-outreach, and religion in New Haven with three choirs, a drama group, and four or five services on Sunday, one on Wednesday, and often more during the week. Engaging its location on the Green, every Sunday at 2:00 pm in every sort of weather, its *Chapel on the Green* program provides a simple outdoor service and a nourishing lunch to those in need. For more information about the celebration or about Trinity on the Green, call the church office (203-624-3101) or visit www.trinitynewhaven.org.

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