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SOME OLD
COLONIAL CHURCHES
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James Mann

Some Old Colonial Churches in Virginia

By James Mann

(Numbers of paragraphs correspond with numbers in the lower left-hand corner of the respective photographs.)

Three hundred years ago the first Protestant church in America was built at Jamestown. It was burned within a few months, and four others followed it successively. The fourth, the tower of which is still standing, was commenced in 1639, and burned in Bacon's rebellion, in 1676, by a torch, it is said, in Bacon's own hand. It was rebuilt, but the tower and foundations alone remained when the recent restoration was begun. In the church at Jamestown occurred the first English marriage in America, John Laydon and Anne Burras, 1608; the first baptism, Virginia Laydon, 1609; the marriage of Pocahontas and John Rolfe, 1614; and here, in 1619, met the first legislative assembly in America.

This view shows the old tower just before the restoration of the church was begun in 1906. The inner foundation, smaller and lower than the other, was only one brick thick, and was probably the foundation of the wooden church of 1617-19. It was encased in wood for its preservation at the time the photograph was made. The outer foundation was no doubt that of the brick church of 1639. In the chancel the excavations disclosed the grave of a knight, supposed to be that of Sir George Yeardley, an early Governor of the colony, who died at Jamestown in 1627.

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The new church at Jamestown was built upon the foundations of the old church of 1639, and every effort was made to reproduce the church as it formerly stood, except that the tower was permitted to remain in its ruined condition untouched. Even bricks from old Colonial ruins were used, and the old lines were faithfully followed. The church was restored by the National Society of Colonial Dames of America, and was presented by them to the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, by whom it was dedicated May 13, 1907, the three hundredth anniversary of the landing of the colonists at Jamestown, and of the first religious services conducted there by Robert Hunt.

Old St. Luke's, of which doubtless the Jamestown church of 1639 was almost the exact counterpart, is the oldest Protestant church, and, in fact, the oldest building of English construction in America. Built in 1632, it has suffered no material change since it was first erected, and is still in a most excellent state of preservation. It contains many very beautiful windows, memorials to John Smith, Pocahontas, John Rolfe, Sir Walter Raleigh, Robert Hunt, Alexander Whittaker, James Blair, Bishops Madison, Moore, Meade and Johns, George Washington, Robert E. Lee and others.

This old church, which was built in 1657, and is the second oldest church building now standing in Virginia, is situated in Prince George county, about fifteen miles east of Petersburg. It is not far distant from Upper and Lower Brandon, which were situated in the same parish in Colonial days. Merchant's Hope was long in disuse, but has been restored, and the worshippers now gather there at intervals.

Bruton Parish Church was built in 1710, and is the oldest church in continuous use in the United States. It was more intimately associated with Colonial history than any other building in Virginia. Five Presidents of the United States—Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe and Tyler—worshipped there, as did also all of the Colonial Governors and the members of the House of Burgesses for three-quarters of a century. It contains many most interesting relics, among them the Janestown baptismal font and communion service. It has been beautifully restored through the efforts of Rev. W. A. R. Goodwin, the present rector, and on October 5, 1907, in the presence of a most distinguished company, it was dedicated by the Bishop of London. At the same time a lectern, the gift of President Roosevelt, and a Bible, the gift of King Edward, were presented. This photograph was made on the day of the dedication.

St. Paul's was erected in 1739. Its large churchyard, filled with quaint old tombs, is in the heart of the city, and with its green shrubs and magnolia trees presents a scene of peacefulness and rest amidst its busy surroundings. When Lord Dunmore, enraged because of his defeat at Great Bridge, fired on Norfolk, New Year's Day, 1776, a cannon ball lodged in the side of the church, where it can still be seen amid the ivy which covers the walls. The chair in which John Hancock sat when he signed the Declaration of Independence is a relic of great interest which is owned by St. Paul's and is kept in the vestry room.

Hampton, the oldest existing English settlement in America, is the site of one of Virginia's most interesting churches. Old St.

John's was erected in 1727, and is the successor of a church built about 1610. In its keeping and in constant use are a chalice and paten given by Mrs. Mary Robinson, of London, in 1618. They have been in longer use than any other English church vessels in America. It is of interest to note that the oldest free school in this country still exists in this parish, without a break in its history since the year 1634.

This beautiful window is in Old St. John's, Hampton, and represents the baptism of the famous Indian Princess, the first native convert to Christianity in Virginia. The funds with which this window was erected were contributed in part by the Indian girls at the Hampton Normal School.

Old Blandford was erected in 1735, and was the principal church in Bristol Parish, which was established in 1642. It is now used as a Confederate memorial chapel, with memorial windows representing each of the Confederate States. The church is partly covered with ivy, and presents a most ancient and interesting appearance. John Randolph, of Roanoke, once worshipped here.

This photograph was recently made, and shows the interior of the church as it has been restored, with its old colonial pulpit. It was on the wall in old Blandford that the famous anonymous verses were written, commencing:

Thou art crumbling to the dust, old pile;
Thou art hastening to thy fall;
And 'round thee in thy loneliness
Clings the ivy to thy wall.

The worshippers are scattered now
Who knelt before thy shrine,
And silence reigns where anthems rose
In days of "Auld Lang Syne."

Christ Church was completed in 1773. The architect was James Wren, a descendant, it is said, of Sir Christopher Wren, the architect of St. Paul's Cathedral, London. On February 27, 1773, the pew then known as No. 5 was assigned to Colonel George Washington, for which he paid £36 10s. After the service one Sunday morning, in the summer of 1774, in the shadow of this church, and surrounded by prominent members of the congregation, Washington advocated withdrawing allegiance from King George. In 1853 Robert E. Lee was confirmed in Old Christ Church by Bishop Jones; and here, in 1861, he agreed to take command of the Virginia forces.

"Old Pohick," as it is affectionately called, was erected in 1769 upon a location selected by George Washington, and in accordance with plans prepared by him. The Building Committee consisted of George Washington, George William Fairfax, George Mason, Daniel McCarty and Edward Payne. Old Pohick is familiarly known as the Parish Church of Mount Vernon, and shares with Old Christ Church, at Alexandria, and Falls Church, the honor of being intimately associated with the religious life and worship of George Washington. It was also the parish church of George Mason, author of the Bill of Rights and Constitution of Virginia, whose home, Gunston Hall, was not far distant.

Falls Church was built about 1734, enlarged in 1750, and rebuilt as it now is in 1767. It was in old Truro Parish, near the

Falls of the Potomac. Among its vestrymen were Captain Augustine Washington, George Washington, George William Fairfax and Captain Henry Fairfax, of Mexican War fame. In its yard a portion of Braddock's ill-starred army is said to have once encamped. The present building was used during the Revolution as a recruiting headquarters by the Continentals.

St. John's is the only one of the old Virginia churches now remaining which was built of wood. It stands on Church Hill, overlooking the city, and was erected in 1739 upon land donated by Colonel William Byrd, of Westover, the founder of Richmond. Here, May 20, 1715, met Virginia's most famous convention, in which Patrick Henry made the stirring declaration: "I know not what others may do; but, as for me, give me liberty or give me death."

On a commanding elevation, about three hundred feet back from York River, stands Grace Church, which was built about 1697. Cornwallis utilized it in 1781 as a magazine, and devastated its interior. Tradition says that the bell of this church was the gift of Queen Anne. When the church was partially burned, in 1815, the bell was broken and the fragments were placed in the vestry room. During the Civil War the old bell was removed and ordered to be made into bullets, but this was not done, and after the war the fragments were found in Philadelphia by Bishop Nicholson, who, being attracted by the words "Yorktown, Virginia, 1725," wrote to discover the history of the bell. It was recast, and in 1889 was returned to Grace Church, where, after a silence of seventy-four years, it again peals out its summons to the worshippers.

Eastern Shore Chapel was built in 1754, and was the successor of two wooden churches which had stood on the same spot, the first having been built about 1725. The chapel is located in Princess Anne county, about fifteen miles from Norfolk. Cape Henry, where the colonists first landed and planted a cross, April 26, 1607, is in the same parish as this chapel, and only a few miles distant.

The present St. John's, better known as "Chuckatuck," was built in 1755, upon the site of a more ancient church built many years before. Chuckatuck Parish became famous because of the refusal of its vestry to obey the order of Governor Nicholson to "present its minister for induction," insisting upon its right to select the minister it should "entertain."

The Glebe Church is across the Nansemond River from St. John's, in the same parish, and not far distant. It was built in 1738. This parish is one of the few in the State which holds the original glebe lands that were held prior to the act of disestablishment, which was passed soon after the Revolution.

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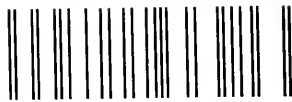
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