

Around the corner from Spotsylvania Courthouse stands Christ Episcopal Church. Built by ancestors of some members of the current congregation, it was completed and consecrated in 1841. Each Pentecost Sunday the congregation celebrates the church's founding and service to the community. We welcome you and are pleased to offer you a brief glimpse at our rich historic heritage.

The 1754 Bible Arrives

The 1754 pulpit Bible that Christ Church now proudly displays was printed in London by the King's appointed printer. This Bible was shipped to Virginia and, as tradition has it, was used in worship for more than 75 years in the colonial Mattaponi Church, affectionately known as the "Old Mother Church" of Spotsylvania County. Through the efforts of the Boggs family this Bible was destined to find its way to Christ Church.

In 1828 the last Mattaponi minister, the Reverend Hugh Corrans Boggs, died, and the church closed its doors. In accordance to Virginia law at the time, the church's buildings, land and silver were sold off, with the proceeds going to support the poor of the County. The Bible, however, probably could not be auctioned off, and thus Hugh's son, Lewis A. Boggs, likely retained it in the hopes of keeping the memory of the Mattaponi church alive in another church home. Several years later, Lewis was elected to the first Vestry of Christ Church. It is highly likely that Lewis brought the Mattaponi Bible with him, and it became the first pulpit Bible of Christ Church. The Bible, which survived the nearby Civil War battle of 1864, continues to be used on special occasions to this day, over 250 years after its publication.

Christ Church Joins the Civil War

When it became clear in May of 1864 that Union forces has turned south and were headed for the Courthouse area, Christ Church may well have been used by Confederate Officers in order to escape the torrential rains outside. During the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse, the Church was also utilized as a hospital for those dying and wounded at the nearby Bloody Angle. Regardless of its role in the conflict, Christ Church was a target of both artillery and rifle fire. Extensive artillery damage to the roof was repaired soon after the war, but pockmarked bullet holes still adorn the original brick exterior.

A Church Member Fights for His Home

To the right of the Sanctuary are the four graves of Pvt. Edgar Harrison (E Company of the 9th Virginia, CSA), his wife, and their two daughters, ages 3 and 6 at the time of the Battle of Spotsylvania. They lived on the Harrison Farm, about a mile north of the Church. Pvt. Harrison chose to leave his unit during the winter encampment preceding the Battle, probably in order to plant crops for his family and others dependant on the Harrison Farm. He quickly returned to his unit, however, as it moved on to Myers Hill, located behind Christ Church, into positions set up to defend the Confederate flank.

Only a few days thereafter, Ann Harrison and her daughters watched as Robert E. Lee's staff led their horses to her doorstep and declared the house to be Lee's headquarters. As they prepared defenses to counter the encroaching Union Army, the Confederates encircled the Harrison Farm with trenches, effectively ruining Edgar's recent planting. The ensuing sounds of battle were loud enough to drown out

even the cries of the Harrison children. From his position on Myer's hill, scant miles from the Harrison Farm, Edgar watched in horror as flames and smoke consumed his home. His wife and daughters, however, miraculously survived.

A Parishioner Remembers the Past

Arlene Dickerson, a Christ Church parishioner, recalled that a Confederate veteran who was wounded on the Spotsylvania battlefield visited her grandfather's home sometime following the War. His name was Morris and he asked to be taken to Cool Spring. This spring, a popular picnicking area before the War began, was now closed to the public. As Arlene recounted in an interview, "My grandfather hitched up the horses and invited me to come along. When we got to the spring, Mr. Morris went off and sat by himself for a long time. Then he said to us, 'The last time I saw my brother was here at this spring. He was in the Union Army. I had been slightly wounded and crawled to this spring. I was aware that someone had come to the other side of the spring and was also bending down to drink. I didn't look up until I had satisfied my thirst. When I did look up, there was my brother.' Each had been wounded and crawled to the spring. They stayed and talked for quite some time, then each crawled back to his own lines and they never saw each other again."

A Spotsylvania Church Is Born

Built in 1841 of bricks made in a nearby clay field, Christ Church is the sole survivor of the three original buildings (church, courthouse, and jail) of the Courthouse area. It was built on an acre of land donated by the Leavells family. Two additional acres were purchased from Harold and Dorothy Peters in the 1960s, and four more were acquired with the purchase of the adjacent Harris House in the 1980s. The church campus has had room to now consist of the original Sanctuary, church offices in Booth Hall, the Harris House, and the newly completed All Saints Hall.

During its over 165 years of existence, Christ Church has been temporarily closed several times. When it first closed in 1884, one mother complained, "This is the worst place in the world, where the cuckoo never sings, the primrose never blooms, and the babies are never baptized." The last time the Church closed was in the late 1950s, when the congregation has dwindled to just six women. These women kept the church clean and donated dimes for the privilege of doing the cleaning. It was at this time that the Reverend Arthur Booth was assigned to reopen and serve Christ Church. During his tenure, the congregation grew from just a handful to around 35 parishioners. The Reverend Booth spearheaded the effort to build the present parish hall, which is named in his honor.

At the church's beginning, services were held as often as clergy from nearby churches or students from the Virginia Seminary were available and there were funds to pay them. Initially, services were held quarterly, usually on a Sunday afternoon, growing more frequent as time went on. By the late 1970s, its congregation was too large for a church with fewer than 100 seats. Transepts were added and dedicated in 1988, expanding the seating to its current 200 seats.

In 1912 the church received its first organ, acquired from a Chancellorsville church that also gave its altar, prayer stool, and two chairs. The pump organ was replaced with an electric organ in the 1940s,

when Elwood and Deborah Gayle wired the church for electricity and donated the organ. But, with due patience, the congregation waited 20 years until Bob and Jackie Craven replaced it with a quieter one.

Before air conditioning, the men of the church refinished the pews, painting them with a homemade stain that failed to dry. During the hot summer months, parishioners were known to remain “glued to their seats” during services.

The Future Awaits Us

Much has gone on at Christ Church in the more recent past. Harris House has featured the Christ Church Food Bank for many years, providing necessities to needy families throughout the year and garnering the attention of local media outlets for its success. All Saints Hall, featuring an expansive ballroom and educational rooms, was finished and dedicated in 2005. Used by various scouting and civic groups, the building has become both a form of outreach and a venue for parish functions, including wedding receptions. Booth Hall was entirely renovated in 2007 and now houses the church offices in an attractive and accessible location. Every day brings new developments in the life of historic Christ Church, and the congregation eagerly awaits to see what else the future has in store.