

“Not by Bread Alone . . .”
Churches Established in Arlington County before 1900

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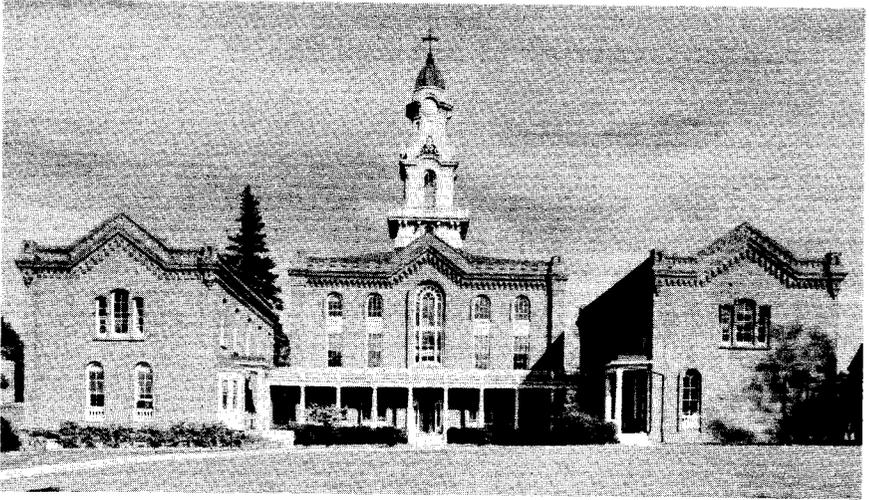
Throughout the ages, the pioneers and trail-blazers who have laid the foundations of our permanent communities have brought their faith with them, to light their paths while they sought their daily bread in new pastures. Undoubtedly, the first religious services held in what later became Arlington County were family prayers before the hearths of pioneer cabins. It took a great deal of courage and fortitude to raise a family in the wilderness, with a daily renewal of spiritual faith to “carry on”.

EPISCOPAL

Arlington's early settlers were predominantly English, and therefore belonged to the “Church of England”. Oddly, this area had a “Glebe” (rectory with farm for the minister's residence and maintenance) before it had a church. A Glebe of 516 acres was purchased to serve both The Falls Church and Christ Church (Alexandria) of Fairfax Parish. A house was erected 1775 at what is now 4527 North 17th Street. This was burned in 1808 and a Williamsburg-style brick cottage built in 1820 on the walls and foundations of the original structure. An octagonal wing was added at a later date. (This home described in detail in Vol. 1, No. 1.)

The first local house of worship was the “CHAPEL OF EASE OF ARLINGTON PLANTATION” built by G. W. P. Custis for the use of his “people”, his neighbors and his own family. It was probably erected soon after the founding of the Virginia Theological Seminary in 1823, which provided student preachers. Burned during the Civil War, we are uncertain of its exact location. Indications are that it was at what is now the northwest corner of Columbia Pike and South Orme Street. A newer building at the site has served as a colored church, and is now an Odd Fellows Hall. The earliest burials in the adjacent cemetery are of Custis servants. The 1864 Civil War map shows a road leading there directly from Arlington House.

One of the Seminary students assigned to Arlington Chapel from 1854 to 1857 was Henry Codman Potter, who later became Bishop of New York. He modestly ascribed his retaining the assignment to the fact that he kept a horse which enabled him to make the 16-mile round trip. He once wrote, “Mr. Custis,



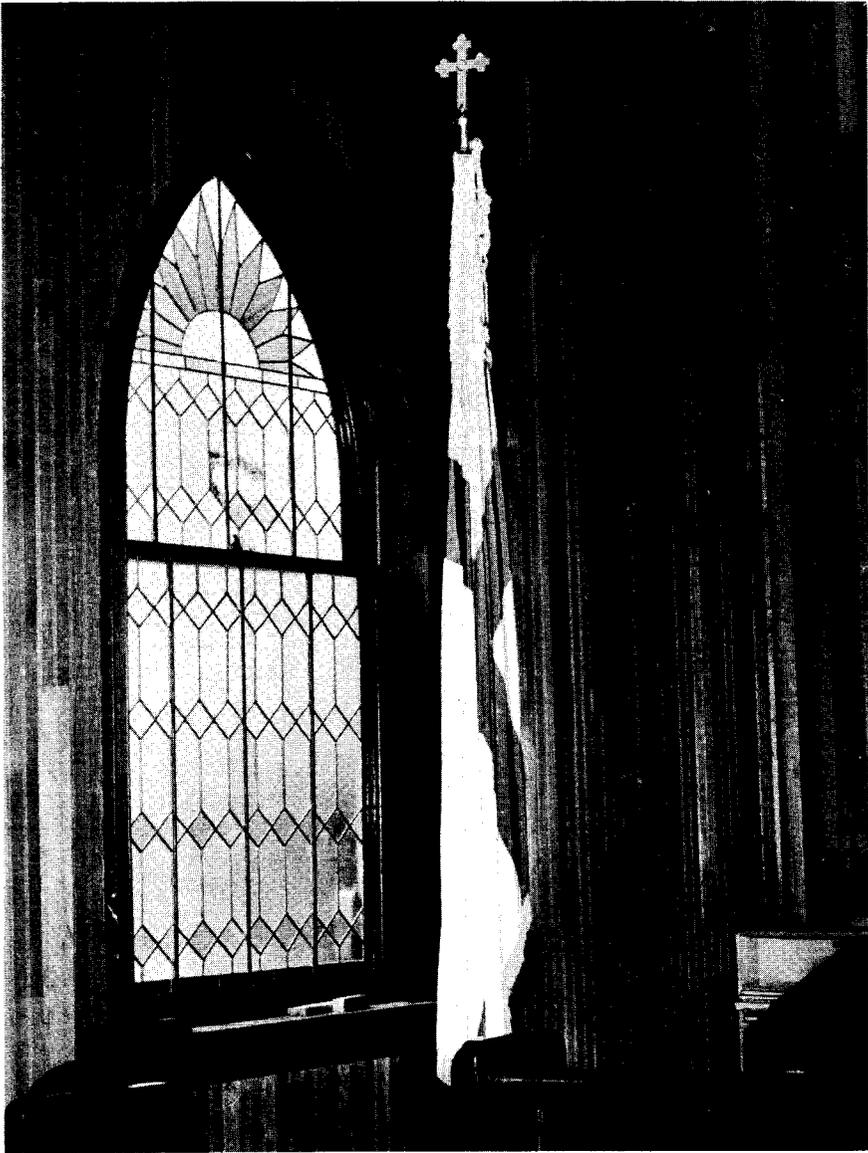
Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Va.

who was an old man, often went to sleep when I spoke in Arlington Chapel and was fortunate in being able to do so, for very poor preaching it was, but his son-in-law, Colonel Robert E. Lee, afterwards the great Confederate General, was always singularly alert and reverent in his bearing. I shall never forget the constant kindness I received from the inmates of Arlington House."

Toward the beginning of the Civil War, the Chapel was burned, and for nearly ten years, the southern part of the County was without an Episcopal Church. Following the war, Trinity Chapel was established by the former Arlington Chapel congregation, in a barracks left by the Federal troops on the south side of Columbia Pike. This was probably the one shown on the crest of a rise between Forts Richardson, Craig and McPherson, now at the northern boundary of the Army-Navy Country Club golf course, between South Court House Road and Rolfe Street.

That building was likewise destroyed by fire, and in 1877, John R. Johnson gave land on the north side of Columbia Pike between Rolfe and Scott Streets for a new chapel, which was built with neighborhood contributions. When Bishop Potter learned that the chapel in which he had conducted services had apparently been a casualty of the war, he was deeply distressed, and contributed a stained glass window for the new edifice.

In 1902, the entire building was moved intact to a new location at the corner of Columbia Pike and South Wayne Street.



Bishop Potter's Window

This edifice was replaced in 1957 by a large modern church. The "Bishop Potter Window" did not blend with the architecture of the new building, hence was discarded. It was given to an employee of the construction company from Darcos, a village near Petersburg, West Virginia. It has been installed in the Darcos Hill Baptist Church.

The only other Episcopal church to be established within the County before the turn of the century was a Seminary Mission in Glencarlyn in 1890, with an average of 40 to 50 communicants who first met in Carlin Hall. ST. JOHN'S CHAPEL was built in 1910. A resident minister was appointed in 1955, and a new building completed in June 1957 at 415 South Lexington Street.

The Episcopalians of north Arlington attended "THE FALLS CHURCH" in the adjacent village just over the Fairfax County line. We take the liberty of mentioning this historic edifice in a record of our own county because of the many local communicants. The first church on the site was built in 1734. The present edifice built in 1768 became part of Fairfax Parish which had been created three years earlier. George Washington was a vestryman. The church was also a Revolutionary recruiting station, and was used by Union troops as a stable 1862-64.

The Alexanders and other early families of south Arlington attended CHRIST CHURCH, Alexandria, and it shared the later Custises and Lees with Arlington Chapel. Christ Church was built 1767-73 on land given by John Alexander.

METHODIST

Again we take the liberty of including a site just beyond the Fairfax County line, attended by members of pioneer Methodism of national importance. First services were held in "CHURCH HILL", the private home built about 1750 by Colonel William Adams (1723-1809) who owned over 3,000 acres including all of Chesterbrook and extending well into Arlington County. This home is beautifully preserved at 318 Leesburg Pike near Munson Hill, between Bailey's Crossroads and Seven Corners.

The Adams home was a favorite stopping place of the first Methodist Bishop, Francis Asbury whose memory is perpetuated by an equestrian statue in Washington at the corner of 16th and Mt. Pleasant Streets.

Services were conducted at "Church Hill" until the erection of "FAIRFAX CHAPEL" about 1780 on the north side of what is now Seven Corners. The land was given by George Minor of Minor Hill who had married Ann Adams. The first building was of wood; later rebuilt of brick. It was demolished in 1861 by the 121st New York Regiment which was stationed nearby at Fort Buffalo. The churchyard is now Oakwood Cemetery.

The Adams family were communicants of The Falls Church



Church Hill

(Episcopal) until 1773 when they changed to Methodist through the influence of Francis Asbury (later bishop) and young William Watters (who later married Sarah Adams), the first native American itinerant Methodist Preacher. Mrs. Adams was the first member of her family to make the change; she was considered the "Saint" of pioneer Methodism.

William Watters was born 1751 in Baltimore County, Maryland. In May 1778, he attended the Sixth Conference of American Methodism (and the first in Virginia) in Leesburg at what is believed by some to be the first Methodist Church in the

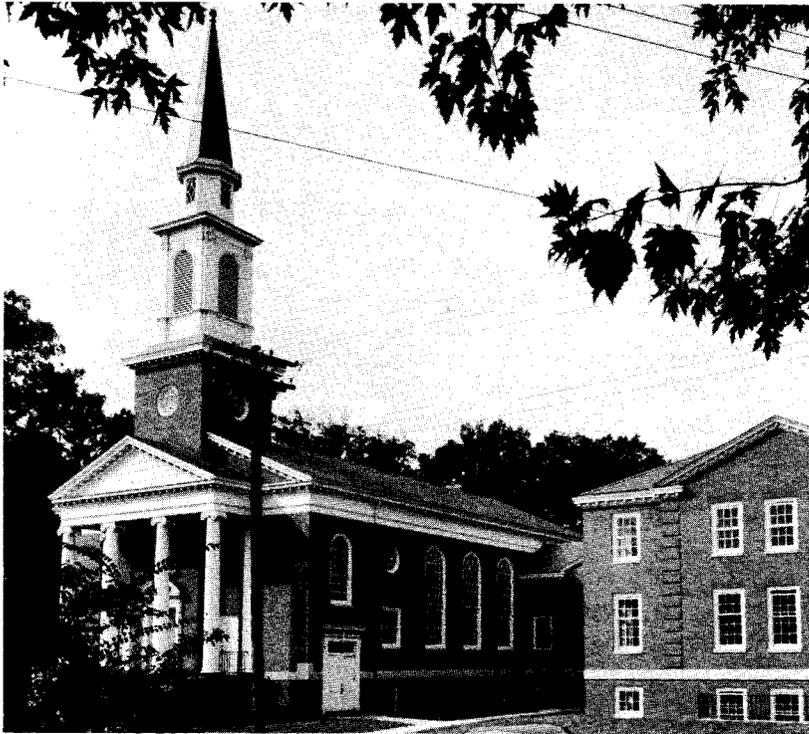
nation. It was abandoned after 1900 and torn down. He died 1827 at his home, "El Nido" at Chesterbrook; a portion of his house remains extant. His grave and that of his wife are on private property behind St. John's Catholic Church. It is marked by a stone erected by the Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The early Methodists in the southern part of Arlington attended TRINITY METHODIST CHURCH of Alexandria. It was another outgrowth of the Adams Congregation and was formed with the aid of Rev. John Littlejohn, an English youth then 18 years old. (He later moved to Leesburg where he became a County Judge, and was entrusted with the keys to the vault where the Government Archives were kept during the War of 1812.) The first Methodist services in Alexandria were held in the Presbyterian Meeting House at 321 S. Fairfax Street, until their own building was erected 1791 on Duke Street at "Chapel Alley." The second edifice was built on Washington Street in 1803; later remodeled and finally moved, brick by brick to its present location at 2909 Cameron Mills Road.

"MT. OLIVET" was the first Methodist Church organized and erected through community effort in this county. By the mid-1800s, services were being held in private homes by the itinerant preacher, Rev. E. J. Drinkhouse. By 1854, the local Methodists organized and chose a site for a church. They decided to place it on the main thoroughfare between Alexandria and the upper Potomac communities (Glebe Road) at Brown's Bend Road (16th Street). The chosen southwest corner was claimed by both William Marcey and John B. Brown, neither being able to prove full title to it. Therefore, a committee composed of the Ball brothers and William Minor was appointed to ask each contestant for the ground for the church, which resulted in an amicable settlement of their dispute.

The first contribution was \$100 from George C. Wunder, a Presbyterian who had recently established his farm further up the Pike (Glebe Road) at the present intersection of Lee Highway, which was for many years called "Wunder's X-roads". Other men contributed funds and volunteered their own labor to erect the church. The women gave lawn parties and oyster suppers to raise funds.

Rev. Oliver Cox was assigned to the new congregation. He served two years during construction and also conducted a private day school in the same building. Reverend Hoblitzell officiated when the building was completed in 1860. It was a two story frame structure about 36 by 50 feet. The first floor had a front vestibule and a large Sunday School room. Staircases on



Mt. Olivet Methodist Church

each end of the vestibule led to the main auditorium on the second floor, which had the customary balcony for colored people.

During the summer of 1861, McDowell's 22nd New York Regiment, retreating from the First Battle of Bull Run encamped nearby, and the building was commandeered for their use. It served as a hospital for about three months, then as a commissary. Later, it was used as a guard post, and the lower floor as a stable for officer's horses. During the winter, troops tore the building apart, using the lumber to floor their tents, to build bunks and to burn for firewood.

During the tragic 1860's, services were again held in homes. In 1870, Rev. W. C. Ames was appointed, and the congregation made plans to re-build. This time it was more difficult; homes and fields had been ravaged by war, stock and equipment destroyed. Self-sacrifice and cooperation prevailed and a long one-story church arose from the original stone foundations. This served the congregation until 1895 when the third building was constructed; with additions in 1920. The present handsome church was completed in 1948.

In 1904, Congress approved \$3,400 to settle a claim for the destruction of the original church by Federal Troops. The funds were used to build the parsonage at the corner of Glebe Road and North 15th Street.

HUNTER'S CHAPEL is the only church other than Mt. Olivet which shows on the 1864 Civil War map. It was on the northeast corner of Columbia Pike and Glebe Road, which was at that time called "The County Road", and later "Telegraph Road". Funds were raised by the local residents and the chapel was built by Joe W. Angus for approximately \$2,500, in 1857-58. Louisa Hunter, a widow, deeded the land May 24, 1859 for the Methodist Episcopal Church of the Baltimore Conference of what was then known popularly as "The Northern Methodist Church". In the suit papers in National Archives, the Chapel was described by Mr. Robert Dyer who lived a quarter of a mile from the site. The building was approximately 30 by 40 feet, with double door and two windows facing south, three large windows on each side, and a windowed recess for the pulpit on the north. The roof was "of good cyprus shingle, and siding of white pine", the interior "wainscoated three feet from the floor and the rest plastered."

In the spring of 1861, the church was taken possession of by Federal Troops under Captain Brackett and Lieutenant Drummond who used it as a picket post. It was also loopholed for use as a blockhouse or fort. Other troops of the Northern Army occupied it during the next four years. Its seats and gallery were torn out, and it was used as a commissary. Then, the floor was broken up and the building used as a stable. Later, the troops tore the building apart to build barracks.

From 1874, the church trustees started a series of claims for reimbursement, which was finally approved March 19, 1900 in the amount of \$3,000.

After the war, the congregation held services in the one room frame Columbia School House on the northwest corner of Columbia Road and South Wayne Street, where services were held until 1893. At that date, Mr. Bradbury donated ground on Columbia Pike 100 feet east of South Fillmore Street for a new edifice. Mrs. Sarah E. Bailey mortgaged her own farm to finance the building. The new church suffered a catastrophe when the steeple blew down September 29, 1896. During the intervening years, the church became known as the COLUMBIA PIKE METHODIST CHURCH, and finally evolved to the present handsome Arlington Methodist Church of Glebe Road and South Eighth Street.

WALKER'S CHAPEL was the next church in our county, and was located at what is now 4102 North Glebe Road. It was erected 1871 as a "junior" church of the Mt. Olivet Circuit. Sunday School classes started by Mrs. Jane Bowen Edwards in 1869 and held in private homes were the forerunner of the Walker Chapel congregation. She was a widow, living at the home of her half-brother, Henry Lockwood of "Easter Spring Farm", now 3722 N. Glebe Road.

On July 9, 1871, 58 men met at Mount Olivet Methodist Church to pledge their resources to build a chapel at or near "Walker's Grave Yard", the burial site of David Walker who had died Oct. 30, 1848 at the age of 54. His sons, Robert and James Walker gave the land for the new chapel, and other members of the congregation offered to contribute their labor, including Rev. Ames of Mt. Olivet Church. Some gave cash, and the ladies worked to raise funds by benefit suppers and strawberry festivals.

The first building was a small frame structure near the upper part of the cemetery. Past it on the west side went Little Falls Road, to connect with the MacLean Road near Fort Marcy. In 1903, a new church was built by volunteer labor. About 1930, the original building of 1871 was dismantled and the material used to construct a little house at 3816 N. Glebe Road. An Educational Addition to the Church was completed in 1952, and a Church School Unit added two years later. Preliminary plans are now being drawn for a new sanctuary. The focal point of the present church is a painting of Christ by Mrs. Cherry Ford White, presented May 4, 1936. It is described as "a mural which is in itself a powerful sermon".

PRESBYTERIAN

The FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ARLINGTON was founded February 22, 1872 with the neighborly assistance of The Falls Presbyterian Church. It was organized by a Ladies' Mite Society at the home of Mrs. Alonzo G. Hayes. The first services were held in June 1872 above Mortimer's Blacksmith Shop on the southeast corner (now Hecht) of Ball's Crossroads, where Wilson Boulevard and Glebe Road intersect. Rev. Dr. David H. Riddle of Falls Church officiated, as the new congregation became a mission of his church. Ground was broken April 18, 1873 for a church edifice at the northwest corner of Balls' Crossroads. Services were held within the year in the partially completed building. The dedication took place Oct. 22, 1876, and the basement was made into a Sunday School room the following year, first used for the Christmas Eve Festival 1877. On



Original First Presbyterian Church — Since Demolished



Sanctuary of Present First Presbyterian Church Showing Organ which Incorporates Earlier Smaller Organ from Original Church

July 5, 1895, the congregation organized under the name of the First Presbyterian Church of Ballston.

This is a record of only the churches which were serving our community before the turn of the century. Since then, Arlington has been one of the fastest growing communities in the nation, and its churches of practically every familiar denomination have kept pace. At this time, beautiful new edifices are in use throughout the county, with a number under construction and others contemplated. Our county shall continue to flourish and stand high as a home community as long as our spiritual life keeps at this high level.