



NEWS AND NOTES

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WARRENTON, VIRGINIA

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Stone edifice built in 1918 replaced the earlier church building

Grace Episcopal Church dates back to 1855

By LELIA R. LAWRENCE
Contributing Writer

The New Year is a good time to tell the history of Grace Episcopal Church in The Plains.

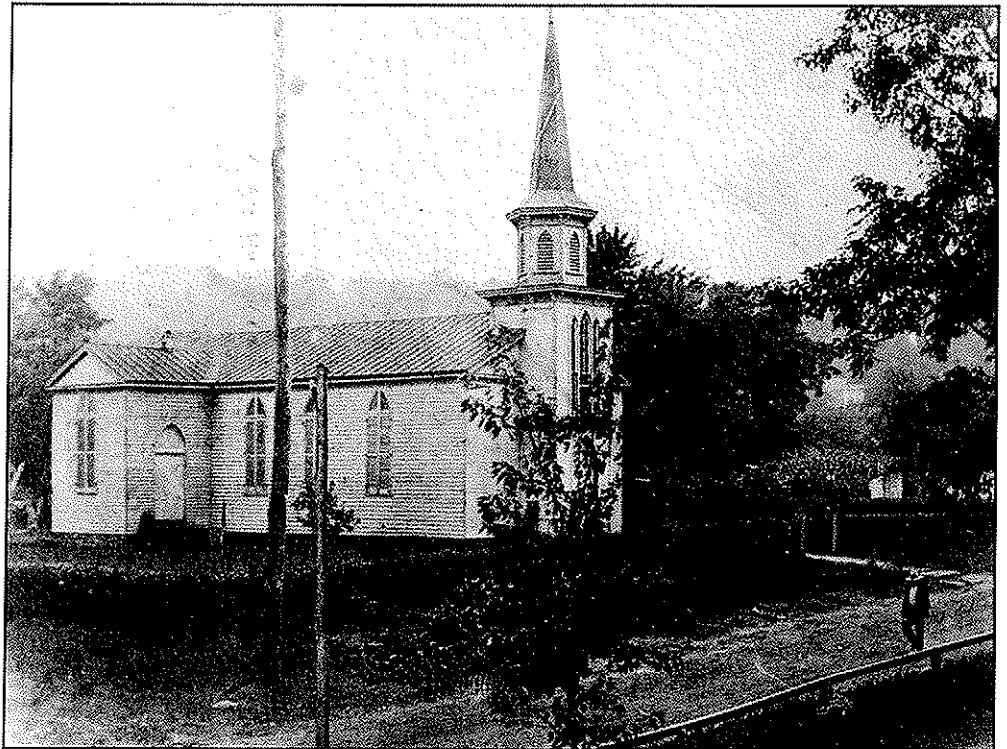
Sometimes, tourists slow down as they pass by the church for the first time, and take out their cameras to record the image of Grace Episcopal Church. It has become a treasured monument.

During the years I walked the stone walkway, passed under the looming stone tower and entered solemnly into the charming fieldstone Episcopal church to attend services, I was not aware of the many facets that merged together to give this church a unique story.

Built in 1918, Grace Episcopal Church was designed by W. H. Irwin Fleming of Washington, D.C. Its architecture is in a rural 13th century Gothic English style. Ivy that once grew on the church was brought over from Kenilworth Castle in England, and adorned the sturdy fieldstone walls.

The tower, built in memory of Robert Beverley of Avenel, houses a church bell from the earlier Grace Episcopal Church, built on the same site in 1855.

For years, an electronic carillon has played melodies heard across



From 1855 until it was replaced by the present stone church building in 1918, parishioners of Grace Episcopal Church worshiped in this frame structure located in The Plains.

The Plains. It was a gift of her friends to Fletcher Harper, who was the MFH (Master of Foxhounds) of Orange County Hunt for 33 years.

A distinguished past

The history of Grace Episcopal Church begins more than 150 years ago. In 1855, the first church was ceremoniously dedicated on the same plot of land where the present church stands. It was a white frame, cross-shaped building begun in April

1854 on an acre of land given by Dr. Alex Chapman.

The church was built to provide a closer place of worship for church members who were then traveling to Trinity Church in Salem (Marshall), the nearest Episcopal church west of The Plains.

With the principal contributions of Edward Turner of *The Netherlands*, Thomas Henderson of *Roland* and

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Grace Church

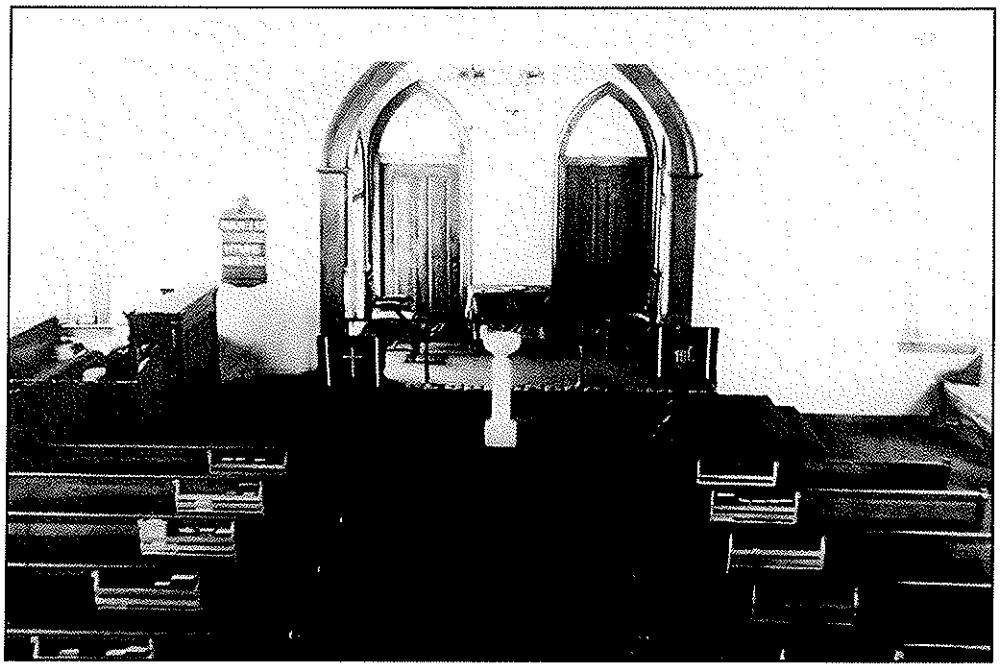
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Robert Beverley of *Avenel* – all vestrymen of Trinity – the new church was completed within a year's time. It was consecrated by Bishop William Meade, the third Episcopal Bishop of Virginia.

A description of the interior of the early church affords a glance into life in Fauquier that has been nearly forgotten.

Plain glass windows lent an air of austerity and simplicity inside. Two tremendous potbellied stoves gave heat during Virginia's harsh winters to faithful parishioners who traveled to services by horseback or buggies. One of the stoves was located to the left as you entered the church, halfway up the aisle; the other was on the right, near the front.

A hand-pumped organ was visible to the congregation. Local boys,



The interior of the 1855 church was simple and austere, and heated by two two potbellied stoves. The hand-pumped organ can be seen at the far left.

barefoot at times, and perhaps wearing knickers – including Charles Turner, Turner Foster, Richard Fleming and George Cochran – were alternately recruited for the pumping task.

The boys hand-pumped, using a stick protruding from the side of the organ, forcing air into it. Only the most energetic organists could pump, pedal and play at the same time.

Changes in the Parish

For a time after Grace Church was built, services were held there only on alternate Sundays, since the congregation shared a minister with the new Emmanuel Church near Delaplane on the other Sundays.

It is said that Emmanuel Church, completed in 1859, was built and consecrated because "...the church at Salem was found to be too distant from the body of the congregation at Oak Hill."

On fifth Sundays only, services were held at Trinity – clearly signaling the decline of the Trinity congregation as a result of the division of

the congregation between the newly built churches at The Plains and Delaplane

Shortly after the devastating War Between the States, in which all three churches were affected, the little frame church entered a period of change. It originally belonged to Piedmont Parish. In 1869, Grace and Trinity churches petitioned successfully to form a new parish named after Bishop Francis McN. Whittle.

In 1917, Trinity Church petitioned to return to Piedmont Parish, along with Emmanuel. Thereafter, Grace Church was left in its own distinct parish.

In 1870, the congregation of Grace Church built Whittle Chapel at Hopewell for parishioners living far off in an obscure part of the northern end of High Point. Mrs. Georgia Hart of Columbia, S.C. wrote in her *Historical Sketch of Grace Church*, "From first to last, the little mission church carried on for 25 or 30 years but...conditions caused it to fall into disuse, and then

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Grace Church

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to be torn down.”

Charles G. Turner Sr. recalled the little chapel. “My family would go to the frame church at The Plains for services in the mornings, and in the afternoons attended services at Hopewell Chapel.” The same minister officiated at both services, traveling by buggy over dirt roads to meet his obligations.

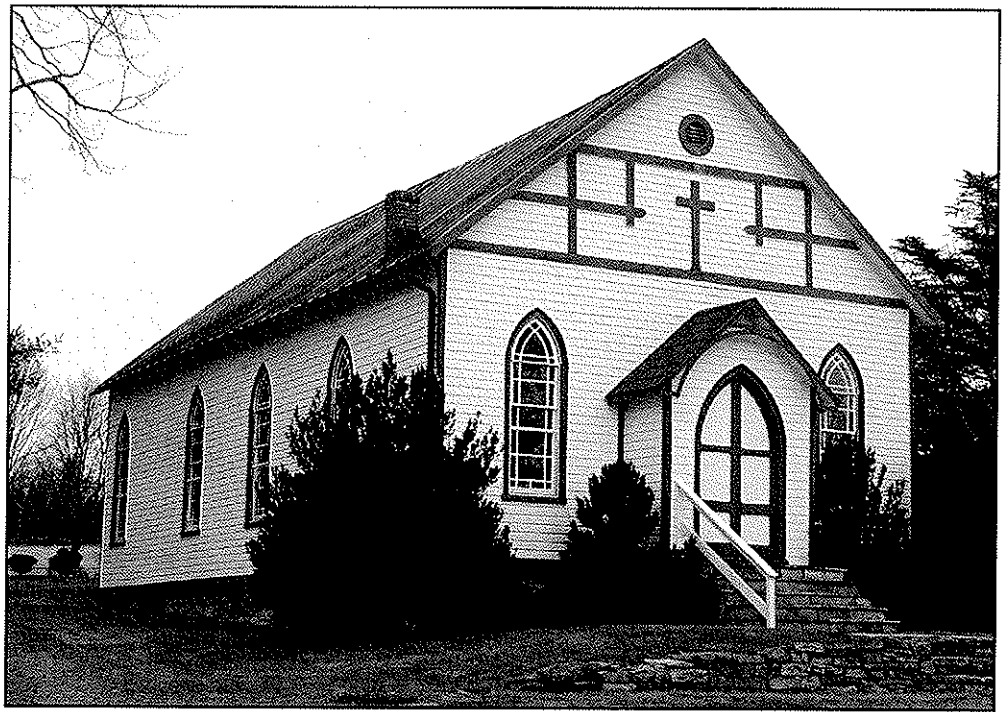
In addition to building the Whittle Chapel for those living in the destitute mountain area, in 1887 the parishioners of Grace Church constructed The Church of Our Savior at Little Georgetown, but for quite a different reason. Mrs. Hart gives a colorful account of the origination of this church.

Its inception occurred as a result of the waltz. The Rev. James Grammer, eighth rector of Grace Church, was known to be very religious. The waltz, believed by many to be “sacrilegious, immoral and indecent,” had recently come into fashion. The parishioners of Grace Church developed divided feelings and opinions on the “round dance,” as the waltz was called, especially Rev. Grammer, who was stoutly against it.

The minister eventually refused communion to certain parishioners who indulged in waltzing, including James Bradshaw Beverley, who lived near Little Georgetown, a crossroads near Thoroughfare Gap.

Out of indignation, a group of parishioners ceased attending Grace Church, and some asked permission to build the Church of Our Savior at Little Georgetown.

Today, only one service is regularly held there – on All Saints’ Sunday in November – in order to



The Church of Our Savior at Little Georgetown was built in 1887.

preserve its consecration. However, the chapel at Little Georgetown remains an important part of Grace Church.

The cemetery around the chapel has been enlarged, and funerals are conducted there for members of the parish and others who have found it to be a place of lasting peace in the rolling hills.

Couples and their families who have seen the charming country chapel from the road while passing through Thoroughfare Gap have been granted permission to conduct small wedding ceremonies there.

Building the stone church

The present stone church and parish hall were built during World War I, and provide a noble story. In a display of strong community spirit, neighboring farm owners and people of The Plains all pitched in, under the leadership of the Rev. Edmund Lee Woodward.

“It was built of 1,000 four-horse loads of local fieldstone hauled from the neighboring farms of R. H.

Downman and others as free will offerings,” according to the memorial program of the Consecration held on June 28, 1918.

“I remember the Carters, Turners, Fosters and others were asked to give stones. Each was asked to send in 20 four-horse (or mule) wagon loads,” recalled Charles Turner Sr. “Mrs. Downman, the largest donor, gave fieldstone from *Ravenscroft* (later J. D. S. Coleman’s *Archwood*, now Wakefield School Inc.) from falling down stone walls, and off the fields. Mr. Furcron, who ran the Furcron Academy for boys off present-day Route 55, was another donor.”

And there were other sources, according to Mrs. Hart. “The old stone house, the Glebe (once of Leeds Parish) collapsed, having been erected around 1772.”

The fieldstone is vividly evident in the structure of Grace Episcopal Church. The variegated green and brown tinted stones give the church a rugged appearance; the unhewn

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Grace Church

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effect presents a rare beauty.

Architect Irwin Fleming directed the stonemasons to pick the green stones, and discard the other stones in prominent places on the church walls. The more recent church, however, was not just built of donated stones. Funds were solicited from the neighborhood continuously, as Whittle Parish leaflets printed during the early 1900s attest.

A silver trowel was used to lay the cornerstone of the church. This was the same trowel used by George Washington in 1793 to lay the cornerstone of the National Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., and which now reposes at the Washington Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, Virginia.

Slate for the roof was hauled from freight cars on the railroad tracks at The Plains to the church in two-horse wagons. Turner Foster recalled as a boy he helped haul the slate. A scar on his arm caused by an injury while handling the slate commemorated the experience.

The grounds that extend back from the road in front of the stone church were once a well-worn spot; where the church stands today was once the location of



Lelia Clark, daughter of the author, photographed in front of Grace Church about 20 years ago. Note the ivy on the building.



A Luca Della Robbia bas relief given in thanksgiving for the ministries of Rector Edmund Woodward and architect Irwin Fleming is found above the fireplace in the Parish Hall. Photo by Howard Pyle IV.

a well-used hitching rail. "We would drive up in a buggy and tie the horses," Turner Foster recalled. After church, the men went out back, got the horses from the hitching rail, and drove around front for the ladies.

The 1855 structure was left nearly intact while the present church was being built right up against it. If the old church were still there, the present stone walkway to the front of the new church would extend through it.

Only the vesting room for ministers – a little room on the back of the frame church – was torn down to make room to erect the front of the new church. When the new church was completely constructed, only then was the old church leveled. Some tell a different story: that it was burned down mysteriously.

When the old church was torn down, parts of its timber and windowpanes were used in building the Alfred Sudduth house, located on Hopewell Road.

With the demolition of the 1855 church, a former age

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Remembering 'Warrenton's Grand Old Man'

On July 1, 1887, James Woodford "Pete" Shirley (1857-1945) was selected to serve a one-year term as Town Sergeant. However, he would hold this position until mid-1914, at which time he was appointed superintendent of the town water works and cemetery.

Other responsibilities included operating the hay and cattle scales at the railroad yard (fees collected by the town), and maintaining the town clock.

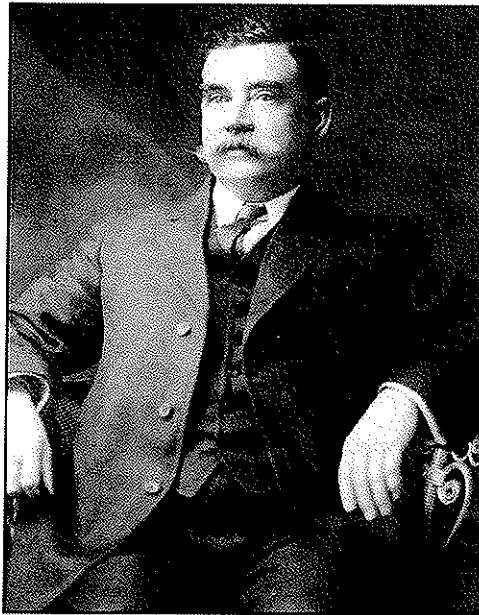
Later that year, he was appointed a deputy sheriff and county jailer. Like his predecessor, R.M. Pattie, he lived in the 1808 building of the jail with his wife, Janette A. Brodie Shirley (1860-1929). He was responsible for the operation of the jail and the care of the prisoners for the next 30 years, retiring in 1944.

Over his long tenure in public service, he became known as "Warrenton's Grand Old Man." He was also a bit of a character.

"Mr. Shirley had a large, ugly dog of unknown mixtures, more like a boxer, named 'Rex,'" wrote Lee Moffett in *The Diary of Courthouse Square*. "He knew everyone in town, and everyone knew him. Once Rex and a small boy were looking at each other. The boy made an ugly face at Rex, and when asked why, he replied, 'He did it to me first!'"

In his later years, Mr. Shirley had a bob-tailed, yellow and white jail cat, which he called "John Stone," that accompanied him around town. Unfortunately, the cat was killed, a victim of a hit-and-run driver on a street near the cemetery.

Accustomed to parking his old Chevrolet on Courthouse Square in front of the jail, Mr. Shirley was hailed as a hero after two men in another vehicle coming up the hill



**JAMES W. 'PETE' SHIRLEY
1857-1945**

failed to negotiate the turn and slammed into his car, demolishing it.

"Mr. Shirley said that if his car had not been parked there, the Mosby Monument would have been taken down, or the Courthouse would have been hit," wrote Mrs. Moffett.

By all accounts, prisoners in Mr. Shirley's custody were treated well. Those he considered trustworthy were allowed to leave the jail on the promise to return, and they always did. He would send other prisoners on errands in his car, or have them drive him around town when he had places to go.

The Shirleys had a small garden in the yard in front of the 1808 building. Inside, they added homelike touches, but it was still a jail, and at times, a dangerous place.

While making an inspection of the jail on May 17, 1938, "Pete" Shirley fell down the tall steps leading to the second floor of the cell-block, breaking several ribs.

A more serious incident followed on Sept. 5, 1938, when a prisoner

struck him on the head and took his keys while he lay senseless on the floor. Five prisoners escaped, but four were recaptured by Sept. 20, and the last one by Sept. 21.

There was another escape from the jail on March 21, 1943, which ended when the fugitive was caught in Maryland on March 25. By then in his mid-80s, "Pete" Shirley was ready to retire.

He had become increasingly feeble, and "... was often seen walking with his hand on a prisoner's arm, the inmate helping him," according to a story picked up by the Associated Press in 1944. "So loved was he locally that the community gave a surprise banquet for him... people from all phases of Warrenton life attended."

In September 1944, Town Officer Turner Grimsley assumed the additional duties as a deputy sheriff and jailer, and on Sept. 18, 1944, moved into the jail residence with his wife and two sons. The Grimsleys would live at the jail until Mr. Grimsley was appointed Warrenton's Chief of Police in early 1954.

"Pete" Shirley's retirement was brief. After leaving the jail, he lived with his daughters in a house he owned on Falmouth Street. He died on March 3, 1945, and was buried next to his wife in the Warrenton Cemetery.



Shirley home on Falmouth Street

Grace Church

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passed in The Plains; however, its presence will always be recorded.

The vestry book for November 12, 1918 noted that the congregation planned to seal records of that little church in the cornerstone of the new church – a copy of the Holy Bible, a hymnal, U.S. coins of 1917, lists of births, marriages and burials to that time, and lists of rectors and officials of the church.

The records of the little frame church now long gone have been preserved in the church that replaced it.

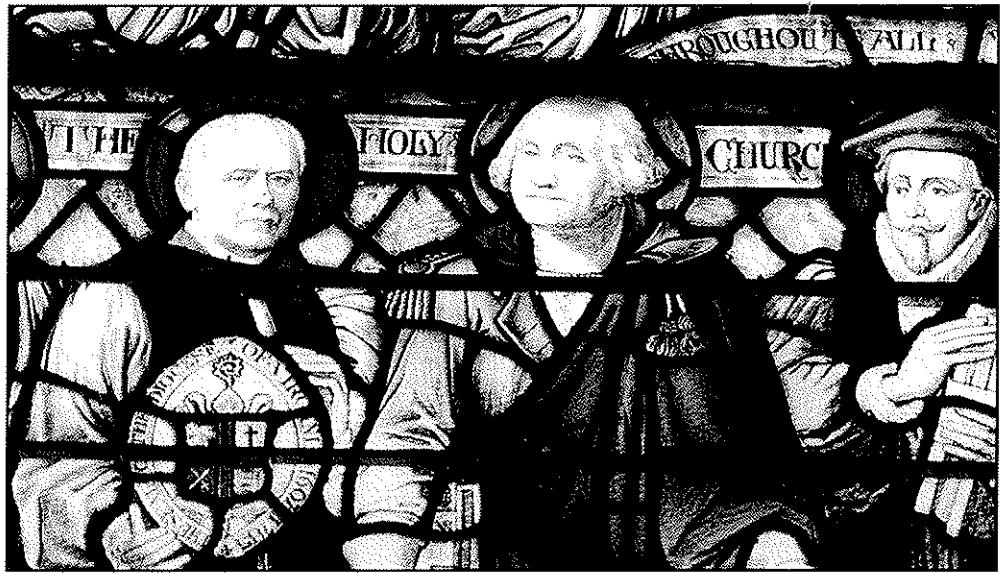
Of late, the choir from the African American Baptist church in The Plains has sung at Grace Church, particularly at funerals. A member of the Baptist church, Daniel Taylor (called “Moses,” and a well-liked person around The Plains), attended Grace Church for the funeral of Elizabeth Cox.

My parents, Mr. and Mrs. Robert de T. Lawrence III, attended Grace on occasion, as well as the James Wileys, the James Rutledges, the Ohrstroms, Ambassador and Mrs. Charles Whitehouse, and others.

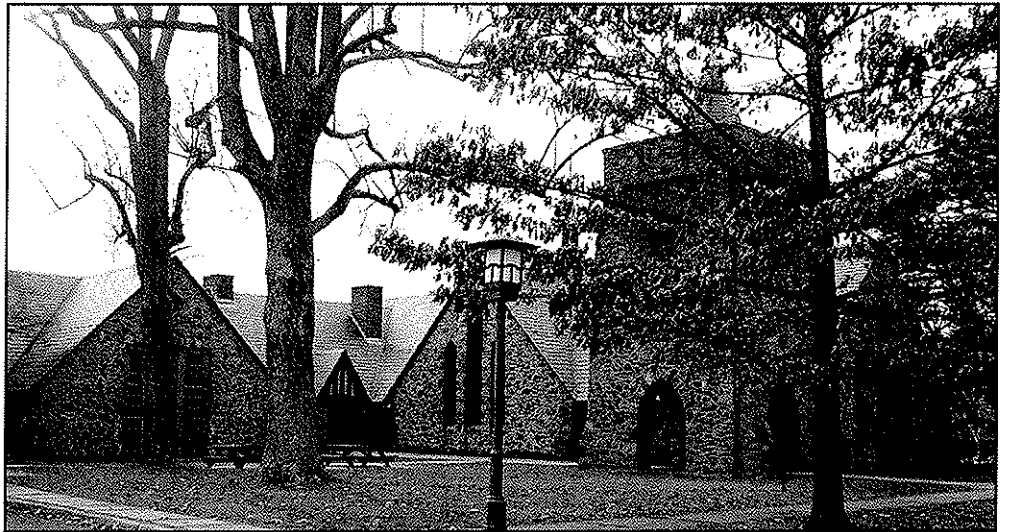
This is a church building where the faithful congregate to worship God, to learn to live doing God’s will, to learn of Jesus’ miracles and to experience them, and for fellowship.

One Founding Father said in his own words, “It is better to be ruled by God than governed by tyrants.”

According to the Founding Fathers, our form of government – a Republic – is upheld by the people governing themselves by the Ten Commandments.



Detail of a panel of the *Te Deum* window representing The Right Reverend Robert Gibson, Bishop of Virginia who consecrated the 1918 building, George Washington, founder of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S., and Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury.



Grace Episcopal Church today. Ivy no longer covers the church walls or tower at right.

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