

Introduction

The two manuscript volumes hereinafter reproduced in print embody the earliest consecutive records of St. Peter's Parish, New Kent and James City Counties, Virginia, known to be in existence. The first, and older, of the two volumes was known to Bishop Meade and was used by him in the preparation of his *Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia*.¹ The second, and later, volume the Bishop does not mention in his book, and it is most probable that he was unaware of its existence. Both volumes are the property of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia. For many years they were kept in the library of the Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Virginia, near Alexandria; they are now in the custody of the Virginia State Library, in Richmond, and are preserved in the Archives Division of the library. These two old manuscripts were published in two volumes (the register part in 1904; the vestry book part in 1905) by the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Virginia. Both volumes have long been out of print. The present volume, containing much original matter not to be found in the two earlier volumes, is provided with an exhaustive index and with some notes, which together should make the records more easily and more profitably used by historical and genealogical students.

The earlier of the two manuscript volumes (hereafter referred to as MS. Volume No. 1) is a quarto, $13\frac{7}{8} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$ inches in size, and contains 198 leaves, in whole or in part, of heavy unruled laid paper, the watermarks being two in number: the initials PB ($\frac{7}{8}$ inch by $\frac{9}{16}$ inch); and a fleur-de-lis on a shield, surmounted by a crown, the whole over the monogram OH above the monogram WR (6 inches by 5 inches). Originally the volume contained at least twenty to thirty more leaves than

¹ Meade, *Old Churches*, Vol. I, p. 383.

at present. Of this number some twenty or more leaves have been torn out, apparently at random; generally speaking only one leaf at a time is missing, but occasionally two consecutive leaves are wanting, and in one case the gap was made by tearing out three leaves. In addition to the missing leaves above referred to, at least one leaf is missing from the back of the volume, and two, or perhaps three, are wanting at the front. Furthermore, of the leaves that remain (or, rather, that have been counted as remaining) many have been torn or otherwise mutilated to the point where less than half (in some cases less than a fourth) of the sheet is left.

Like the manuscript *Vestry Book and Register of Bristol Parish* (transcribed and published in 1898) this MS. Volume No. 1 served two purposes: what may be called the front part (pages 1 to 247) contains the minutes of the vestry meetings between 1684 (possibly 1683) and 1758; the back part (pages 1 to 143) contains a record, apparently very incomplete, of births, marriages, baptisms, and deaths in the parish between 1685 and 1730 or 1731,² when a new book (MS. Volume No. 2) was begun, the old book containing in addition occasional entries down to the end of the century, and in one case to 1810; while the middle portion (pages 144 to 149, inclusive, counting from the back) contains (1) the wording of the Test Oath, followed by the autograph signatures of some thirty-eight parish officials who had taken the oath, (2) the wording of the Oath of Conformity, followed by some seventeen autograph signatures, (3) the wording of the Oath of a Vestryman, (4) the wording of the Oath of a Church Warden, (5) the wording of three other oaths (of Allegiance to King George, of Abjuration of the Pope, and of Renunciation of the Pretender), each

² Actually there are a few entries dating back years before the establishment of the parish, in 1678 (or 9), but in every such instance the entry was made some distance down the page and below the first entry under the particular letter (A, B, C, etc.) heading the page, a fact which proves that the entry in question was made at a subsequent date.

given twice, and (6) copies of three indentures (of 1738, 1739, and 1740 respectively), the last one being of peculiar interest in view of the light it throws upon interracial relations in Virginia at the time.

MS. Volume No. 2 is a quarto $14\frac{3}{4}$ by $9\frac{1}{4}$ inches in size and contains 49 leaves, in whole or in part, of heavy unruled laid paper, the watermarks being two in number: the Roman numeral IV ($\frac{5}{8}$ inch by 1 inch) and a fleur-de-lis ($2\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches). Originally the volume must have contained at least five more leaves than at present. Of these, two have been neatly cut out of the book, presumably with a knife, only a narrow margin being left, and three have been torn out roughly. Whether or not one or two leaves are missing from the front of the volume, it is impossible to say with certainty. With the exception of pages 10, 22, 44, 45, 80, 86, and 108 (which contain some extraneous matter), the book has been used exclusively as a Parish Register of births, baptisms, and deaths from the year 1733 down to about the end of the century. From page 1 through page 37 (1733-1740) the entries appear to be in the handwriting of the Rev. David Mossom, Minister of the parish, each page having been attested by Mr. Mossom. Beginning with page 39 a new method of making the entries was followed, the handwriting, which changes again after 1767, is different, there are few entries for the period 1740 to 1756, and after about 1767 the entries are again comparatively few and scattering. As can readily be seen from a glance at the printed reproduction, the record is by no means complete for the period ostensibly covered.

ESTABLISHMENT OF ST. PETER'S PARISH AND TERRITORIAL CHANGES, 1678-1725

Some time during the year 1678 the Vestry of Blisland Parish, having first obtained the consent of the whole parish thereto, made a division of the parish, the lower part retain-

ing the name Blisland, the new parish being called St. Peter's.³ The next year, on April 29th, the General Court, answering a petition of the Parish of Blisland, confirmed the division already made and thereby finally established St. Peter's Parish.⁴ At the time of its establishment St. Peter's Parish was bounded on the north-east by the ridge between the Pamunkey and the Mattaponi rivers, on the south-east by John's (or Jack's) Creek (north of the Pamunkey) and by a line beginning at Capt. Bassett's Landing Creek (south of the Pamunkey), and on the south-west by the ridge between the Pamunkey and Chickahominy rivers. There was no boundary established on the north-west side, the parish extending in that direction, theoretically speaking, indefinitely, while practically speaking it extended only as far as to the farthest point of settlement. Later, when in 1704 St. Peter's Parish was itself divided, the upper (or north-western) portion being established as St. Paul's Parish, the dividing line between the two parishes (Matadequin Creek), which in 1720 became also the dividing line between New Kent and the newly created County of Hanover, became St. Peter's north-west boundary line.

But before St. Peter's Parish had, in 1704, limited itself to the north-west, as above noted, it had already suffered a considerable loss of territory and inhabitants. In 1691, by the Act establishing King and Queen County, the General Assembly cut off from it all that part of its territory lying north-east of the Pamunkey and annexed it to St. John's Parish (established in 1680 or later), thus making St. John's Parish include the whole of Pamunkey Neck; i. e., the present King William County and the other counties lying between the Mattaponi and the north fork (North Anna River) of the Pamunkey.

This transfer of territory from St. Peter's Parish to the Parish of St. John's is interesting as illustrating an early

³ Page 14.

⁴ *The Vestry Book of Blisland (Blissland) Parish, New Kent and James City Counties, Virginia, 1721-1786*, pp. XXXIII and XXXIV.

developing and steadily increasing tendency in the Colony of Virginia, or, to be more specific, in that part of Tidewater Virginia lying between the James (including the Appomattox) and the Rappahannock, to make navigable streams, rather than the ridges between such streams, the boundary lines between county and county, and between parish and parish. This tendency finally resulted everywhere, within the limits mentioned above, in an almost complete change in the north-east and south-west boundary lines of both counties and parishes; for whereas at first in almost every instance county was separated from county and parish from parish by a ridge between two rivers, eventually, by the addition or subtraction of territory as the case might be, rivers and not ridges formed the boundary lines. To put it another way; at first in every case the counties and parishes lay each on both sides of a river (which served as a high road) and sloped up and out on each side to a ridge between it and the next county or parish, but later the counties and parishes are found lying each between two rivers, each county or parish sloping up and in on both sides to a ridge, along which ran in most cases a road roughly paralleling the two rivers.⁵

Making up for the losses of territory and inhabitants suffered in 1691, when that part of St. Peter's Parish north-east of the Pamunkey was annexed to St. John's Parish, and in 1704, when St. Paul's Parish was established to the north-west, the General Assembly in 1723 ordered that on and after March 1, 1725, all that part of the parish of Wilmington lying on the (north) east side of Chickahominy River and above (i. e. north-west of) Blisland Parish as added to by the same Act be added to St. Peter's Parish. From 1725 onward then St. Peter's Parish extended from the Pamunkey on the north-east to the Chickahominy on the south-west, and from Blisland Parish on the south-east to St. Paul's Parish (Hanover County) on the north-west. By this addition of territory the number of

⁵ Appendix D., pp. 696-700.

tithables in St. Peter's Parish was increased at once from 692 to 902, or slightly more than 30%,⁶ and the vestry gained three new members, Capt. W^m Marston, Mr. W^m Brown, and Mr. John Netherland, all of whom had been members of the vestry of Wilmington Parish.⁷

CHURCHES IN ST. PETER'S PARISH

There were two churches in St. Peter's Parish in 1685, when the earliest complete dated minutes now existing were entered in the Vestry Book,⁸ and it is most probable that these two churches had been in existence for several years; indeed it can be assumed that they antedated the establishment of the parish, for a new parish was rarely if ever formed until there were in the district to be set apart as such enough inhabitants to have justified already the erection of at least two places of worship for them. Of these two churches, one was commonly known as the Lower Church, the other as the Upper Church. Other names applied to these churches, such as "Christ's Church in s^t: Peter's ¶ish", "S^t: Peters Church in [] parish," "S^t p,^{ter} parish Church", "S^t ¶eters Church for S^t ¶eters ¶arish",⁹ cannot be taken as definite designations of either building; for under the date Nov. 16, 1685 the name "S^t: Peters Church" is used to designate the Lower Church,¹⁰ and under the date Nov. 25, 1686 the same name is used to designate the Upper Church,¹¹ while the name "Christ's Church"¹² occurs but once, and the entry where it occurs is too fragmentary to warrant any guess as to which of the two churches is meant

⁶ Pages 194 and 198.

⁷ *Vestry Book of Blisland (Blissland) Parish, etc.*, pp. XXIX-XXXI.

⁸ Page 3.

⁹ Pages 1-10.

¹⁰ Page 3, where this Church is distinguished from the "upper Church."

¹¹ Page 8, where the statement is made that the meeting is being held at the "uper Church," and the heading to the minutes reads "At a vestry held in S^t peters Church."

¹² Page 2.

In March 1688 the vestry ordered that the Upper Church be repaired. Two months later they rescinded their action and ordered that a new Upper Church be built. This church, constructed of wood, was completed in 1690.¹³ According to county tradition it was located on the Pamunkey River in what is now Hanover County "about three miles east of the present village of Old Church."¹⁴

Just where the other church, the Lower Church, stood is not known. All that can be said with certainty on the subject is that it was located at no great distance from Black Creek, which empties into the Pamunkey not far from the present Tunstall Station, on the Southern Railway, and probably to the south-east of that stream.¹⁵ This church was used regularly until 1703, when the present St. Peter's Church was completed and opened for services. That it was probably used for occasional services thereafter is evidenced by the last reference to it in the Vestry Book, which appears under the date Aug. 18, 1704.¹⁶

The first mention of the present St. Peter's Church occurs in the minutes of the vestry meeting held Aug. 13, 1700, at which time it was ordered "that as Soon as Conveniently may be a new Church of Brick Sixty foot Long and twenty fower foot wide in the Cleer and fowerteen foot pitch - - - be built".¹⁷ The building was completed (much as it stands today, except that there was no tower at the west end) in the year 1703.¹⁸

With the erection of the present St. Peter's Church, the parish had three houses of worship, if the old and practically

¹³ Pages 14, 15 and 30.

¹⁴ Chilton, *The Colonial Episcopal Church in Hanover County, Virginia*, p. 6 (in manuscript).

¹⁵ Page 9.

¹⁶ Page 104.

¹⁷ Page 68.

¹⁸ Something in the nature of a belfry seems to have been erected in 1722, but just what cannot be determined from the records, which are defective at this point. (See pp. 182-185); the present three-storied tower, consisting of carriage porch, vestry-room, and belfry, was built in 1740 and 1741. (See pp. 261, 262, 265, 266, and 339.)

abandoned Lower Church be counted as such. Meanwhile, answering a petition of the upper (far west) inhabitants of the parish for a church convenient to them, in September 1702 the vestry ordered the erection of a wooden church or chapel forty feet long by twenty wide at a location "upon the uper side of mechumps creeke."¹⁹ This building, it appears, was not entirely finished when the Act of Assembly for dividing St. Peter's Parish was passed (in the session beginning April 20, 1704).

With the division of the parish, Matadequin Creek became the boundary line between St. Peter's and the newly formed parish of St. Paul's. Before the division, St. Peter's Parish contained 947 tithables; after the division it contained only 502 tithables, and it was not until twenty-four years later (and after the addition to the parish, in March, 1725, of a part of the dissolved parish of Wilmington) that the number of tithables in the parish was again as great as it had been before the division. By the division also St. Peter's lost the old Upper Church and the new church, or chapel, on Mechump's Creek, both of which lay within the bounds of the new parish of St. Paul's. From that date until after the Disestablishment of the Church, in 1784, the present St. Peter's was the only Church edifice in the parish with the exception of the old Lower Church (referred to in the Vestry Book for the last time under the date, Aug. 18, 1704), which was commonly known as the "Broken back'd Church"

EARLY DISPUTES WITH BLISLAND PARISH

For five years a controversy was carried on between St. Peter's Parish and the parish of Blisland, from which St. Peter's had been cut off in 1678 (or 9), in connection with

¹⁹ This church, according to Chilton, *The Colonial Episcopal Church in Hanover County, Virginia*, p. 8, (in manuscript) was situated about a mile and a half north of the spot where later "Old Slash (Disciples) Church" was built and still stands, and about four or five miles south of the present Hanover Court House. It has long since disappeared.

the matter of the dividing line between the two parishes. Just what the point at issue was is not clear from the records, but that the quarrel was an acrimonious one appears plain from the ten or more references to it, dating between 1686 and 1690, that are to be found in the Vestry Book. There was also a difference between the parishes on the subject of the division of the church plate (i. e., the Communion vessels), but this matter seems to have been settled promptly, for there is but one reference to it in the existing records.²⁰

Evidently the vestry of St. Peter's had learned a lesson from their boundary line dispute with Blisland, for when in 1704 St. Peter's Parish was itself divided, all questions between it and the newly formed parish of St. Paul's concerning the dividing line and the division of the church plate and ornaments seem to have been settled promptly and amicably.

THE PARISH FERRY

For the first twelve or thirteen years of its history St. Peter's Parish embraced territory on both sides of the Pamunkey, the part lying north of the river extending as far as to the ridge between the Pamunkey and the Mattaponi. The inhabitants living north of the river were few in number²¹ compared with those on the south side (in the present New Kent County); but few though they were, it was necessary to provide some means by which they might easily get across the river to attend church, to appear at court, and to be present on occasions when the militia of the county were mustered.²² Accordingly the parish maintained a ferry, as was done by other parishes similarly circumstanced.²³ The Vestry Book contains some fifteen or more

²⁰ Page 1.

²¹ Page 22, where the parish inhabitants living north of the Pamunkey (in "Pamamuck Neck") are listed after those living on the south side of the river.

²² Page 26.

²³ cf. *The Vestry Book and Register of Bristol Parish, Virginia, 1720-1789*, pp. 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 11, etc., etc.

references to this ferry, beginning with the first entry in the manuscript volume as it exists today and running through to the year 1691, when King and Queen County was established and all that part of St. Peter's Parish lying north of the Pamunkey (in what is now King William County) was cut off from St. Peter's and annexed to St. John's Parish.

BEQUESTS TO THE PARISH

As was the case with other parishes²⁴ St. Peter's seems in the early days to have had its difficulties getting possession of bequests made to it. An interesting instance is that in connection with the last will and testament of John Bruster. This matter crops up in the records from time to time between 1694 and 1699. In the end the vestry apparently grew weary of the affair, or perhaps they despaired of getting anything by their efforts; in any event they decided to drop the business, and as far as one can now see, the parish was never a penny the richer for Bruster's good intentions.

CHANGES IN COUNTY CONNECTION

From its establishment until the year 1725, St. Peter's Parish lay entirely in New Kent County. In that year, as has been already stated, Wilmington Parish was dissolved, and all that part of the parish lying north of the Chickahominy (in James City County) was divided between James City Parish, Blisland Parish, and St. Peter's Parish, the most westerly portion falling to St. Peter's. Accordingly, for some years thereafter St. Peter's Parish as a whole lay partly in New Kent County and partly in James City County.²⁵ Finally in 1767 the General

²⁴ cf. *The Vestry Book of Christ Church Parish, Middlesex County, Virginia, 1663-1767*, p. 163; and *The Vestry Book of Petsworth Parish, Gloucester County, Virginia, 1677-1793*, pp. 338 and 370.

²⁵ cf. *The Vestry Book of Blisland (Blissland) Parish, New Kent and James City Counties, Virginia, 1721-1786*, pp. XIX-XXXI, where the text of the Act for dissolving the Parish of Wilmington is given in full.

Assembly made a change in the boundary line between James City and New Kent counties, whereby the lower end of New Kent County on the York River side (extending from Ware Creek down to Scimino Creek) was cut off from New Kent and added to James City, while at the same time the upper end of James City County on the Chickahominy River side (i. e., all that part of the county lying above, or north-west of, Diascun Creek) was cut off from James City and added to New Kent.²⁶ By this rearrangement of county territories and boundaries, St. Peter's Parish became once again, what it has since remained, a New Kent County parish in its entirety.

FURTHER AND LATER HISTORY

For the further history of St. Peter's Parish, students are referred: (1) to the within reproduction of the official parish records (including the appendices to the volume); (2) to *The Life of the Reverend Devereux Jarratt* (Baltimore, 1806); (3) to Hening, *Statutes at Large . . . of Virginia*; (4) to Meade, *Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia* (Philadelphia, 1857); (5) to *Colonial Churches* (Richmond, 1907), article on St. Peter's Church; (6) to Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers* (Richmond, 1934-); (7) to Swem, *Virginia Historical Index* (Roanoke 1934-1936); (8) to *The Vestry Book of Blisland (Blissland) Parish, New Kent and James City Counties, Virginia, 1721-1786* (Richmond, 1935); (9) to *Minutes of East Hanover Presbytery*, Nov. 6, 1933-July 9, 1934, (Richmond, 1935), p. 91, letter of Elder Geo. P. Haw; and (10) to Chilton, *The Colonial Episcopal Church in Hanover County, Virginia* (in manuscript).

The five-line heading to page 1 of this volume is, of course, not a transcript from the original record. The manuscript record begins with the words:

y^t W^m: Atkinson keepe y^o parish ferry this next

²⁶ *Hening*, Vol. VIII, p. 208.

Blanks in the manuscript which were left by the Clerk to be filled in later, but were never filled in, are indicated in the printed reproduction by blank spaces. Gaps in the manuscript resulting from tearing, rubbing, or other kinds of intentional or unintentional mutilation are indicated by blank spaces enclosed in brackets. A question mark enclosed in brackets indicates a word or words, or a date, which the editor was not absolutely sure that he had read aright. Unintentional omissions in the manuscript and all other mistakes of whatever kind are, as far as it was found possible to do so, reproduced exactly. Pages in the manuscript are indicated in the printed reproduction by Arabic numerals enclosed in brackets. In the index the number of times an item occurs on a page is indicated by a small Arabic numeral above, and to the right of, the numeral indicating the number of the page.

As is well known, the court records of New Kent County prior to 1865 disappeared many years ago. It is believed, and with good reason, that these records were transferred to Richmond for safe-keeping sometime during the period 1861-1865 and were deposited, along with the records of several other counties, in the building housing the General Court. This building, with most of its contents, was destroyed in the great fire accompanying the evacuation of Richmond by the Confederate forces on April 2-3, 1865. This loss of the Court records made the parish records of the county all the more invaluable to the historian and the genealogist. With the publication of this work those records are now all in print and accessible to the public. It is the belief of the editor that within the covers of this book and its companion volume, *The Vestry Book of Blisland (Blissland) Parish, New Kent and James City Counties, Virginia, 1721-1786* (published in 1935) will be found, with few exceptions, copies of all the more important documentary source materials for the history of New

Kent County from 1653 to about the close of the eighteenth century that are at present known to be in existence.

The worth of a publication like the present one depends in large part upon the suggestions made to the editor, and the help and encouragement given him, by others during the progress of the work. In the preparation of this book for the press, many persons coöperated with the editor to make his task easy. Deeply grateful to all of them, he wishes to make here particular acknowledgment of his indebtedness to the Rev. Arthur P. Gray and Dr. Malcolm H. Harris, of West Point, Virginia; Dr. George Bolling Lee and Mr. Frank V. Baldwin, of New York City; the Rev. S. B. Chilton, of Hanover Court House, Virginia; the Rev. G. MacLaren Brydon, D. D., Historiographer of the Diocese of Virginia, and Miss Mary F. Goodwin, of the Church House, Richmond; the Rev. Edward Mack, D. D., of the Union Theological Seminary, Richmond; Mr. S. W. Lacy, Clerk of the Circuit Court of New Kent County, and Mr. R. C. Richardson, Commonwealth's Attorney of New Kent; Miss Elizabeth F. Coalter, of "Marengo" and Mrs. Lena Gregory Patterson and Mrs. Natalie Gregory Johnson, of "The Castle," New Kent County; Mr. J. Ambler Johnston, Architect, of Richmond; Miss Isabelle W. Harrison, of St. Christopher's School, Richmond; the Honorable J. Fulmer Bright, Mayor of Richmond; Mr. Charles R. Lewis, of the Division of Purchase and Printing of the Commonwealth of Virginia; and Mr. Wilmer L. Hall, State Librarian of Virginia, with his staff of assistants, especially Miss Virginia E. Jones, who compiled the index and thereby has made every student of New Kent County history her debtor.

The editor has read the proof sheets of this volume several times, the first time using the original manuscript and not his transcript of it as his guide; furthermore, in every case of doubt that arose in his mind while he was reading proof the second time, he consulted the original manuscript again. How-

ever, he is well aware of the fact that in work of the sort that this publication represents some mistakes are bound to occur, and he can only hope that the mistakes made, whether of judgment or of oversight, in this printed reproduction of a very battered old manuscript are few in number. In this connection he would refer the reader to the list of errata to be found inserted between the Appendices and the Index. Anyone wishing to check up on the editor in his work can do so by comparing the following printed copy of the manuscript with the original manuscript volumes, which are now in the custody of the Archives Division of the Virginia State Library, in Richmond.

C. G. CHAMBERLAYNE.

Richmond, Va.,
November 11, 1937.