



Bulletin

Acquinton Church Restoration

Acquinton Church is one of the earliest King William County churches. It was built around 1734 with glazed Flemish brick imported from England. Time and neglect has taken a severe toll on the church but thanks to Mr. Carroll Lee Walker the exterior will soon be restored. The walls will be filled in using colonial period brick and the roof will be supported by structures erected within the interior of the church.

Mr. Walker has gone above and beyond in his commitment to the progression of this project, particularly given these troubled economic times. How can we ever thank him enough?



Acquinton Church before restoration

Acquinton Church Building Phases

By Summer Chaffman

“Acquinton was always so crowded that people used to bring their seats and fill up the aisle after the pews were full”

When Bishop Meade made this statement about the colonial-era church, he was reflecting on the popularity of the sermons given by one of the last great Episcopalian parsons, Henry Skyren. Parson Skyren was rector of Acquinton Church during the 1770's and 1780's and apparently knew how to draw a large congregation.

Interestingly, the building that stands today as Acquinton Church is only one part of the original structure from Skyren's time, and history had a lot to do with the changes it went through. While popular tradition holds that the church was built in 1734, the present standing structure is actually a northern wing that was added onto the 1734 structure circa 1755. This was in response to a growing population in the area as well as the 'first Great Awakening', a religious fervor that was spreading through the colonies as well as several European countries during the mid-18th

century. At the dawn of the Revolutionary War, Acquinton would have been quite a substantial church, comprising these two sections, complete with pews, baptismal font and a pulpit (which is reported to be preserved in nearby Jerusalem Church).

One hundred years later, the church was still being used, although by different denominations, since the outcome of the Revolutionary War saw a demise in the Episcopalian faith. One of the most memorable events at the church during this span occurred in the summer of 1855, when a popular four day debate entitled "The Punishment of the Wicked and the Kingdom of God: Its Character, Locality and the Time of its Establishment" was held there. The following is an excerpt of a report given of the event which highlighted its importance not only to the citizens of King William, but to those in surrounding counties as well.

“No discussion could have commanded more interest than this had during the four days allotted to it. Hundreds, of both sexes and

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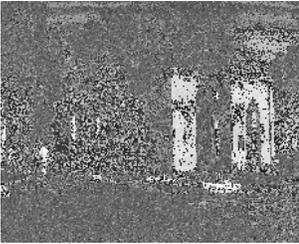
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“At the dawn of the Revolutionary War, Acquinton would have been quite a substantial church, comprising of two sections, complete with pews, baptismal font and a pulpit ”

Harris Book Reprints for Sale:

The best book documenting the history of our county is again available!

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Enclosing the final church window



“Understanding the changes that Acquinton Church has undergone architecturally is important to the overall interpretation of the site on a historical and an archaeological level.”



Acquinton Church during restoration in early November.

from the surrounding counties, were in attendance from the opening to the close of the Debate, and it may be safely asserted, that a more attentive and intelligent audience never before assembled in Virginia, upon any like occasion. The Debate was conducted in the best possible spirit, and the strictest order prevailed throughout. The audience seemed, in fact, as if spell-bound, so novel and interesting were the arguments presented. Several held their Bibles in their hands, referring to the various passages adduced in the arguments, doubtless, with a view to analyze them to their satisfaction at a more convenient time.” -P. Kean Reporter, 1855

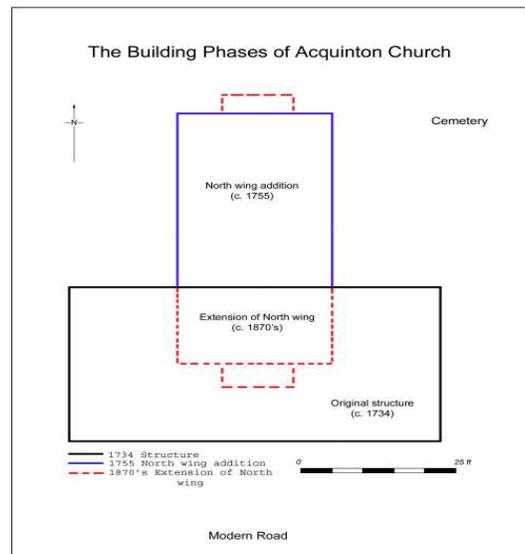
Although events such as the debate might have assured Acquinton survival as a place of worship, the outbreak of the Civil War changed the outcome. The church was abandoned and neglected for a number of years falling into extreme disrepair. Then, during the 1870’s, a group of Methodists decided to renovate the structure and the 1734 portion was torn down and the North wing extended, re-using the older structure’s materials for the project. It is also during this re-building phase that the colonial rounded arch windows were altered to fit the more fashionable pointed arch Gothic style, which can be observed at the site today

What exactly would the phases of architectural change have entailed? George Carrington Mason, an authority on colonial churches in King William and King and Queen Counties reported that the 1734 church was said to be 58 by 29 feet with walls 22 and a half inches thick. He also found that the northern wing projected from near the middle of this building and it was 34 feet by 26 feet wide. When the 1734 structure was torn down, the northern wing was then extended nearly 15 feet towards the south where the 1734 structure had previously stood. Based on these measurements, there is an accompanying figure which was created to help illustrate the general phases that the building went through (excluding specific details such as where doorways and windows would have been located).

What about the proof? Upon an inves-

tigation to find evidence of the 1734 structure, a three by one and a half feet test pit was dug around seven feet out from the western wall at a location that was believed to be where the northern wing had been extended. Two layers were identified in the soil. The top level was regular soil, while the second was an archaeological deposit in a backfilled foundation trench that had been robbed of most of the foundation (probably for use in the extension of the north wing). It consisted of a mixture of regular soil and pieces of brick, mortar, shell, glass and nails which were indicative of a colonial period foundation as well as late nineteenth century fill. The existence of this previous structure is undeniable after this brief investigation, and only more extensive field work in the future would determine the exact extent of these measurements.

Understanding the changes that Acquinton Church has undergone architecturally is important to the overall interpretation of the site on a historical and an archaeological level. It is also important in terms of how to best maintain the site and represent its past to the community and future generations. Acquinton Church is a great lesson in remembering that the past is not static; and that the heritage that we wish to preserve may have gone through many changes that are not always easily discernible. With an interdisciplinary approach, however, that draws upon historical research, archaeology, architectural investigations, etc. we can begin to see a more complete picture of those sites and the communities they served.



Save the Old County Jail

After serving the County of King William for over a hundred years, the old county jail's roof is about to collapse. Located next to the historical courthouse in the original courthouse complex, the jail housed criminals and suspects awaiting trial. It now sits idle, surrounded by orange fencing and signs that say "danger - keep out". Many of us would like to see the jail saved and used as administrative office space-possibly by our historical society.

Jail House Story

By Steve Colvin

Daybreak on the 18th of January in 1885 most certainly shed light on a scene of utter pandemonium for the residents of King William Courthouse. During the wee hours of that morning, by sheer accident or by arson, the county clerk's office was destroyed by fire. The blaze consumed ninety percent of the records that had accumulated since the establishment of King William's county court in 1702. A reporter for one of Richmond's highly circulated newspapers decried the loss of these records as "irreparable, and will entail any amount of trouble upon the King William people." Indeed, almost three years would pass before the county court would reach a decision in December 1887 to appoint "Judge Roger Gregory to inspect the mutilated records of this county and report to this court at its next term which of said records in his opinion should be re-entered and transcribed." There was one bright spot, however.

King William's government had insured the clerk's office for \$1200. Before the end of 1885, the county would have a new clerk's office and a new jail. The new clerk's office would be built on the site of the county's "old jail," and a "new jail" was constructed where the old clerk's office had stood for several generations before its destruction. The "old" jail may have been considered insecure by this time. In March 1878 a creative correspondent, communicating from *Konig Wilhelm* to the Richmond *Dispatch*, reported that an inmate, a "petty thief,...caged and

Estimates to replace the roof from 3 contractors indicates the cost would be \$35,000 to \$40,000. This is a significant amount of money considering our country's current economic situation. We are working with county officials to see how they can procure funds and restore the roof before it's too late. Time is of the essence. If you have ideas or suggestions, please contact Herb White.

awaiting trial," had "filed the lock of the inner door of the cage," and would have escaped had he not been discovered by the county jailor. The inmate was then placed in irons, but he "was overheard in the night while [again] operating upon the locks." This time the prisoner was "handcuffed and securely fastened to the floor."

A new jail had been completed by April 1885, when Rachel Roane was confined in the rude brick structure for sixty days under a sentence of petit larceny handed down by Dr. Tomlin Braxton, a justice of the peace. Perhaps the wildest cause for imprisonment came many years later in April 1932, when one Effie Collins was charged with the murder of her husband, Archie Collins, a Pamunkey Indian.

In testimony provided to David Nelson Sutton, King William's attorney for the commonwealth, Mrs. Collins confessed that she had fractured her husband's skull "by striking him with a piece of wood." According to his wife, Archie Collins had "made himself obnoxious after returning home from a party." Collins' dead body had been found the next morning "in the road of Pamunkey Indian Town, near Lester Manor." Twenty years earlier, Archie Collins had been implicated in the robbery and shooting of one Otto Kucera, a Hanover County farmer.

By 1887 the job of Jailor of King William County was held by one Augustine Browne Hill (1846-1909). Hill had *continued on next page*



The Old Jail roof is about to Collapse

"Effie Collins was charged with the murder of her husband, Archie Collins, a Pamunkey Indian."



Rear of the Old Jail



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WE'RE ON THE WEB!
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MUSEUM OPEN HOUSE AND ANTIQUE TOY EXHIBIT

Our Christmas open house will be Sunday, December 13th from 2 to 6PM at our museum and will feature an antique toy collection on loan from Mr. Herb Collins, curator emeritus of the Smithsonian Div. of Political History. Some of Herb's wonderful toys included: an 1850's Jenny Lind doll crib and trunk, a doll cradle signed 1872, an 1850's child's rocking horse, a toy pull horse and cow, a reproduction of the 1903 teddy bear as presented to Theodore Roosevelt, an 18th century Tester doll bed, a cloth "old woman in the shoe" with cloth children and many other items.

This event is presented jointly by the Hanover Historical Society and the King William Historical Society with invitations to Essex, King and Queen and Caroline counties. We look forward to a fun afternoon of fellowship with the members of our sister organizations. Refreshments, including "home made" goodies, will be served in the lobby of the county administration building adjacent to the museum and courthouse.

Jail Story Continued

married the daughter of the county clerk, Octavius Madison Winston. Under the style *Hill & Winston* the two men had operated a mercantile establishment in an "old brick store" that stood in what is now a graveled area near the approach to the court square. Hill was the proprietor of the "King William Courthouse Hotel," housed in an eighteenth century tavern that is no longer above ground. Hill's wife, Nannie Madison Hill (1851-928) assisted her husband by preparing meals for the county's jailed residents.

The jail would play an auspicious role in the life of Augustine Browne Hill. Tragedy struck his life in March 1896 when the old tavern that housed his family and provided his livelihood burned to the ground. Hill and his family escaped with little more than the clothes on their backs. Like most of his neighbors, Hill carried no insurance on his home. Consequently, after the fire he relocated to a rented house in Newport News and worked briefly for the Newport News Shipping and Dry Dock Company.

At some point in his life as a tavern-keeper, Hill had had an altercation with an inebriated patron. During the fracas, Hill was hit hard over the head by a beer bottle. It

is believed that this caused some brain damage, as Hill became subject to fits of melancholy after this injury. He eventually gave up his job in Newport News and returned to his position as Jailor in King William. One morning before sunrise he retrieved his pistol from the jail and shot himself twice in the head. His stunned family buried him at St. James' Church.

When his wife died, Gus Hill's children moved his body to Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond. The man is forgotten now, but one wonders whether he may still exert a benevolent presence on the court square. A benevolent presence or just plain common sense prompted a rejuvenation of "Hill's" jail when the building was abandoned by the county government in 1947.

The building itself hasn't earned the veneration that attaches to King William's old courthouse, where for more than 280 years justice has been meted out to King William's citizens. The jail was where this "justice" was served for several decades, including the early days of Jim Crow, the Era of Prohibition, and the Great Depression, all periods of unrest in our country. It would be a shame for this building to crumble. King William's court square would not be complete without the county's old jail.

Harris Books: Reprints of Dr. Malcolm Harris's 2 volume book on "*The Planters, Plantations and Places in Old New Kent County* (originally included King William and King and Queen)", is now available through the Historical Society. If interested, please contact Carl Fischer at 843-9294.