

Early Virginia Anglican Church History Highlights

- The Anglican Church had emerged out of two great movements in western world history:
 - The Protestant Reformation
 - European efforts to colonize the New World
- Political leaders of empires, nations, principalities, and city states played major roles in determining religious observance.



Aquia Church, Stafford, VA, founded 1711, current church completed 1757.



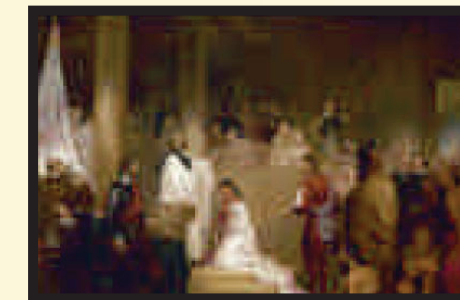
Aquia Church, interior

- When Reformation came to England in the 1530s, Henry VIII showed little interest until Pope Clement VII refused to annul Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon.
- Henry VIII, supported by Parliament, created the Church of England with the King as its head. His son, Edward VI's reforms enhanced the nationalization of the Church.
- The Anglican Church also evolved out of England's efforts to establish New World colonies.
- The first Royal Charters granted to the Virginia Company of London obligated and instructed English colonists to propagate and support the polity, doctrine, and traditions of the English Church.



Christ Church, Irvington, VA, founded 1735

- The first 1607 Church Service in Jamestown was conducted under an old sail stretched between several trees with cut tree logs to sit on as benches as described by Capt. John Smith in 1631. An old tent was used in the event of foul weather.
- The Virginia Company of London was a good steward of the Church of England and between 1607 and 1624 when it was dissolved it had sent 22 ministers to Virginia.
- Sir Edwin Sandys, Treasurer of the Virginia Company of London, preached religious tolerance and recruited settlers accordingly.
- Another imperative was Virginia's profitable cash crop of tobacco which also encouraged peaceful coexistence.
- By 1610 settlers were planting tobacco on any land they could cultivate and were moving out into the countryside; rather than settling into towns. Dispersed tobacco farming settlers resulted in larger colonial parishes (avg. 270 sq miles in 1724) and too distant from central parish church to attend on Sundays.



- In 1614 Pocahontas was Baptized as a Christian and married John Rolfe.
- By 1619, the Church of England was legally established in the Colony, and the Virginia Company of London began recruiting women of marriageable age to send to Virginia.
- Virginia's General Assembly, meeting as an administrative arm of the Virginia Company of London, convened for the first time in 1619 and passed a series of laws to help the Church execute both its civil and religious responsibilities.
- In 1642/43, Legislators established a Vestry System that assumed powers beyond what existed in England. The greatest of which was the right to "elect" and choose their ministers.
- By 1697, the population grew to 63,000 but ministers only served 22 of the colony's 50 parishes. In 1703, ministers filled 80% of the 50 parishes.
- Virginia had the only Anglican Church on the American continent until the accession of William and Mary in 1689. With royal support and the creation of three new missionary societies by Thomas Bray (the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel; and Dr. Bray's Associates), the Anglican Church soon spread to all other English colonies. The last of these focused on ministry to African Americans and would be responsible for schools in Virginia.



Bruton Church, Williamsburg VA, founded 1674

- During this time, the General Assembly continued defining clerical responsibilities, creating new parishes and establishing boundaries.
- By the early 1700's, an annual Parish tax, plus subscriptions and lotteries, were used to build and maintain churches, pay ministers, purchase parish glebes, take care of the poor and sick and was almost twice that of the County government tax. The Colonial Church was the largest and most effective social welfare agency of the period.
- Parish Vestries (boards of local parishioners) maintained local roads, provided ferry service, appointed "Tobacco Viewers," validated private property boundaries, and presented moral offenders to County courts.
- "Chapels of Ease" were built in outlying areas to accommodate rural population but services were held on a revolving basis.
- With the establishment of Hamilton Parish in 1730, there were several hundred people in the Elk Run vicinity of Virginia. A wooden Chapel was believed to already exist by the 1740s.
- In the 1740s, the established Anglican Church had about 70 parish priests around the colony. There was no bishop, and indeed, there was fierce political opposition to having a bishop in the colony. The Anglican priests were supervised by the Bishop of London who appointed a Commissary in Virginia who did his best to supervise.
- In 1786, the Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom," became law and, with freedom of religion as the new watchword, the Church of England was dis-established in Virginia.
- In 1790, the first Episcopal Bishop of Virginia, the Right Reverend James Madison, slowly rebuilt the denomination within freedom of choice of belief and worship.



St. Luke's Church, Smithfield, VA, founded 1674