

## ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

### THE FORMATIVE YEARS: 1667-1721

*“The Minister shall preach at Choatank ...”*

In 1634 the General Assembly created the original eight shires of Virginia. By an act of the General Assembly in October 1648 it was ordered that “the Neck of land between Rappahannock River and Potomack River ... be hereafter called and knowne by the name of the County of Northumberland...” [*Parish Lines Diocese of Virginia*, p. 8] Previously this land was part of York County. As population increased Northumberland became the parent of Westmoreland County (1653). Each county had one or more parishes formed with in it. The parish was at the same time both a religious and civil governmental entity. In 1653 the upper parish of Westmoreland County was Potomac Parish which “extended from the junction of Machodoc Creek with the Potomac River up the river to the falls thereof and backward into the forest to include all the land which was drained by the Potomac River.” [*Parish Lines Diocese of Virginia*, p. 149] In 1664 all of Potomac Parish became Stafford County which was divided into an upper parish and a lower parish. These parishes came to be known as Stafford Parish and Chotank Parish by 1680, and later Stafford Parish became known as Overwharton Parish. In 1667 the county court of Stafford ordered the minister to preach at Mr. Robert Townsend’s house near Chotank Creek. The western boundary of Chotank Parish was Passapatanzy Creek.

While the exact date and site are not known, a church building was erected shortly after 1667. Two wood-frame churches constructed about 1690 and 1725 respectively preceded the present building.

The Rev. Morgan Godwyn was the parish’s first Rector, serving from 1667-1670. Morgan Godwyn was succeeded in 1670 by the controversial John Waugh. By 1702 the parish was officially known as St. Paul’s Parish, so named after the Bedfordshire, England, home parish of a leading parishioner, Colonel William Fitzhugh. John Fraser served from 1702 to 1705 and Alexander Scott who served Overwharton Parish also served St. Paul’s from 1711 to 1717. Thomas Phillips served from 1717 to 1721.

### THE GOLDEN YEARS: 1722-1785

On June 17, 1722, the Rev. David Stuart who had been licensed by the Bishop of London to serve in the Colony of Maryland became the minister at St. Paul’s. David Stuart was Alexander Scott’s brother-in-law and most likely was a cousin. They and a number of other Anglican clergy from the Episcopal Church of Scotland came to Virginia in the

18<sup>th</sup> century. David Stuart married Jane Gibbons of Box, Wiltshire. Her sister Sarah Gibbons was first the wife of William Brent and then of the Rev. Alexander Scott. Their brother Sir William Gibbons was Speaker of the Assembly for Barbados. Another brother Sir John Gibbons was a Member of Parliament from Essex but died in Barbados where he left a will naming his sister and brother-in-law the Rev. David Stuart. In 1724 David Stuart reported to the Bishop of London that there were 290 families in his parish. He also reported that “the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is administered thrice every year, viz; at Christmas, Easter, and Whitsunday, and have for ordinary one Hundred and Fifty Communicants.” [Fulham Papers, Lambeth Palace Library]

A new church was built at the present site in 1725 on a 150-acre plot bequeathed to St. Paul’s by John Allan. An adjoining 200 acres was given to St. Paul’s at a later date by Samuel Hayward. While there is no extant record of the church’s construction, it was most likely wood-framed. David Stuart was rector of St. Paul’s until his death in 1748. David Stuart’s son William was ordained in England in 1746 and served as the minister of South Farnham Parish, Essex County, from 1747 until he succeeded his father at St. Paul’s in 1749. He served until shortly before his death in 1796.

The present brick building was erected about 1767. *Virginia Gazette* records show that church wardens advertised for undertakers (contractors) in 1762 and 1766. The building is in the form of a Greek cross, 62-feet long while the arms are 30-feet wide. The walls are laid in Flemish bond with brick thought to have been produced locally. The altar was against the east wall, and the main entrance was through the west wall. (The altar is now to the north.)

### THE AFTERMATH OF THE REVOLUTION: 1785-1831

In 1785 Townsend Dade represented St. Paul’s at the First Convention of the Diocese of Virginia. William Stuart did not attend. Bishop Madison reported to the 1793 Convention of the Diocese that he had made several visitations to parishes including one to St. Paul’s in King George County.

In 1802 the General Assembly of Virginia passed the Glebe Act whereby all but a few of the Episcopal churches’ glebe lands were seized by the Commonwealth, often without compensation. The Act further provided that all churches built prior to 1777 were to be regarded as public property and could be used by anyone who wished to do so. Only those Episcopal congregations who regularly used their church buildings were exempt from the state-sponsored confiscation. St. Paul’s buildings and property were taken over by the county circa 1811. Its glebe lands were sold to finance an academy whose classes

were held here. By that time the church was nearly in ruins. Bishop Meade wrote of an 1812 visit to St. Paul’s, “The roof leaked badly, doors and windows were missing, and flooring had been ripped up by vandals and used for fuel.” [*Old Churches, Ministers, and Families of Virginia*, Vol. II, p. 188-189] He writes of preaching to a small band of the faithful who came on a Sunday morning to listen to his sermon while they stood in pools of water from rain that had fallen the night before.

The interior of the church was extensively changed in 1813 when it was remodeled to fit the academy’s purposes. There were two stories, eight classrooms, and a small auditorium. New entrances were made in the walls and the old (west) entrance was closed. Evidence of these changes is still visible today. The present interior reflects the “Academy Era” with the wall across the north transept serving as a vivid reminder of those days.

In 1814 Richard Stuart and Cadwallader J. Dade represented St. Paul’s at the annual Convention of the Diocese. Cadwallader J. Dade and John Stith did so in 1815. A parochial report was filed with the diocese for St. Paul’s in 1815 which states “that the church is falling to ruin; that there are no funds for the support of a pastor; but that, however, of late a spirit of religion is reviving in the parish, and Mr. Keith, who officiates on alternate Sundays, has large congregations.” [Journal of the 1815 Convention of the Diocese of Virginia, p. 99] The Rev. Dr. Reuel Keith was a seminarian while covering St. Paul’s. He went on to a distinguished career as a professor at the College of William and Mary and then at Virginia Theological Seminary.

In 1817 Joseph R. Andrus became St. Paul’s first rector since William Stuart. He served until 1820 when he became the Episcopal Church’s first missionary to Africa. On May 20, 1831, Bishop Richard Channing Moore reported to the annual Convention of the Diocese, “I then crossed the Rappahannock and visited King George county, in which place I consecrated St. Paul’s Church—an edifice which has been restored to the worship of Almighty God; and by the generous efforts of the congregation, has been finished with great taste. I preached on the occasion to an immense crowd of respectable and pious worshippers, confirmed twenty two, and administered the Lord’s Supper to upwards of sixty persons. Upon that solemn occasion I was assisted by five Clergymen, whose labours were continued three successive days; and we have every reason to believe, that the Word which was then delivered will not return unto the Lord void; but that many precious souls have received an impulse, which will never cease to shed its good effects in their future life and conversation.” [Journal of the 1831 Convention of the Diocese of Virginia, p. 13]

## 1831 – Present Day

The church building has changed little since 1831. The wine-glass pulpit dates from the 1831 renovation. Minor alterations have been made in the 20<sup>th</sup> and current centuries. The church's roof was reshingled in 1930. Changes have also been made with regard to heating and ventilation, carpeting has been installed and removed, and electricity and plumbing have been added.

In 1954 the pump organ was replaced by one that had been a practice instrument at Peabody Institute in Baltimore. In 1978 the vestry authorized the enlarging of the organ with the installation of six new ranks of pipes in a new "great Chamber" to be built to the left of the pulpit, a new electro-mechanical console with preset pistons and two expression pedals, and a choir organ of 8-foot and 4-foot melodia pipes. Parishioner Dick Gros performed the work, completing it in 1987. This organ was restored in 2010.

## St. Paul's Today

St. Paul's is an active congregation. We have two regular worship services on Sunday morning. From September into June we have a choir at the mid-morning service and Sunday School for our youth. These and other lay ministries are important to us, including acolytes, lay eucharistic ministers, Sunday readers, altar guild members, ushers, vestry members, and officers. Our Advent/Christmas programs span the month of December, and we have an evening adult study program each year during the six weeks of Lent, leading up to Easter. Every year a mixed-age group goes to Shrine Mont, a retreat and conference center in the mountains of Virginia, for a weekend of fun and relaxation.

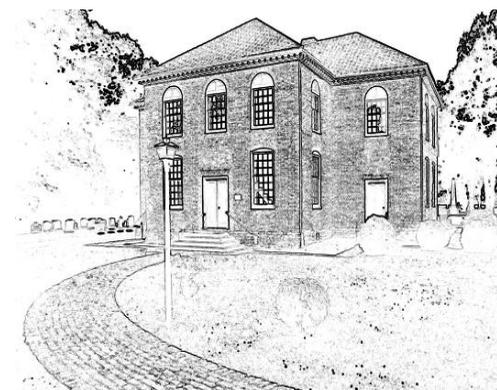
St. Paul's opened St. Paul's Day School in 2008, which offers a preschool program in our Parish House for three- and four-year-olds. We consider the preschool an important part of our mission and outreach program. Another important mission and outreach is the Opp Shop, a thrift shop operated by the Episcopal Churches of King George County. Internationally, we support the Haiti Micah Project, which addresses the needs of impoverished and uneducated children in Haiti.

We are proud of our history. On special occasions we use a circa 1720 English silver flagon, chalice, and paten that Captain Henry Fitzhugh (son of Colonel William Fitzhugh) donated to St. Paul's "for ye use of ye church," and we treasure a 1762 English Bible donated by the Rev. William Stuart in 1769. We look forward to our next 300 years of mission, outreach, and worship!

*Revised: 2020v2*

# Saint Paul's Episcopal Church

## 1667 – Present Day



*Three Centuries of Worship*

**King George, Virginia**

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**ST. PAUL'S**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

5486 St. Pauls Road  
King George, VA 22485  
(540) 663-3085

[stpaulskgva@gmail.com](mailto:stpaulskgva@gmail.com)

[www.stpaulskgva.org](http://www.stpaulskgva.org)

*"Ye are the light of world.  
A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid."  
(Matthew 5:14 KJV).*