

## The History of Slash Church, St. Paul's Parish, Hanover County The Oldest Frame Colonial Church in Continuous Use in Virginia.

**1634 – 1728:** There were eight original divisions of land – Shires/Parishes – in Va. set by the Colonial Government in Williamsburg which divided into named counties (government part) with Parish Identities (church part). We are descended from the Charles River Shire. The parish name for this large shire was Blisland or Blissland. In 1654 New Kent County created from the Charles River/York shire and identified as St. Peter's Parish 1679, was too large and was divided as follows: King & Queen 1691, King William 1701-2, Hanover 1720-21. Louisa came from Hanover County in 1742. Hanover officially became solely identified as St. Paul's Parish in 1704. This too was divided into St. Martin's Parish 1727 – western Hanover, Ashland Parish 1923, and Old Church Parish 1952. The community of Old Church however had been the Lower Parish church since 1679 and a new wood building was erected in 1718. Rectors served the entire parish area, riding to a different church each week. Rectors serving St. Paul's Parish are listed in the back of this document. Each landowner became part of an Anglican Parish, the Church of England's system of providing "Cannon Law (church law)" and English Law. Individuals answered to the Rectors (Pastors) of these parishes and the Vestry as elected (by each other) became a branch of the Colonial Government. The Vestry appointed Church Wardens (only landowners could be vestry or wardens) who collected taxes and held "court" in parish churches with the monies and records being forwarded to Williamsburg. Each landowner was required by law to attend church so a legal head count could be maintained for tax purposes. Failure to attend church resulted in fines that were based on the number in your household including slaves. The residents of each parish constructed the churches but the ownership belonged to the British Crown and the Colonial Government. Landowners also received their Grants of Land from England. Vestry records state, "Upon the petition of the upper inhabitants of this parish laying down that they are very remote from the church, it is ordered that a new church or chappell be built on the upper side of Mechumps Creeke adjoining the Kings road. Mr. John Kimburrow assuming to this Vestry that he will give two acres of land convenient to the said road and a spring and likewise all manner of timbers for building the said church..." This log church/chappell (20' x 40') was approximately one and a half miles north of the present Slash Church, near the present Hanover Station site, and served this parish until around 1730. Eventually, the " Mechumps Creek" church was boarded up and abandoned, possibly burned during the War Between the States. The Rev. Brook reported in 1724 to the Bishop of London that St. Paul's Parish was 12 miles wide and 60 miles long, encompassing 1200 families and 4 churches, with their congregations averaging between 200 and 300 individuals. These statistics indicated both the population growth and the resultant need for more churches.

**1729:** The Vestry of St. Paul's Parish convened June 16, 1729, offering to purchase three acres of land from the southeast corner of the farm of William Alsop, Jr., which farm had been conveyed July 9, 1724 by a 400 acre land grant along Stony Run, a branch of Mechumps Creeke. Mr. Alsop was paid 600 pounds of tobacco. This site was selected for a new church, because the land occupied a nice hill with a number of trees and included a spring with a bountiful supply of water. Just a month later, on July 17, 1729, the Vestry reconvened and authorized the construction of a large Upper Church about four miles from the present Hanover Courthouse (built 1735) area. "Saturday, July 19, 1729, gave the order to employ workmen to undertake and build a new church, and that publick notice be given thereof. Ordered that Mr. Thomas Pinchback and Mr. Edward Chambers, Jr. build a Church in the upper part of this parish Sixty feet in length and twenty six foot in breadth; and sixteen foot in height in the Body from the Floor, of the Alley to the Ceiling; and that the Mr's. Thomas Pinchback and Edward Chambers, do meet Cap. Wm. Fleming & Cap. Charles Hudson, on Saturday the Thirtieth of August next, at Col. David Meriwether's, to enter in Articles with the said Fleming, and Hudson, concerning the said Church; and to give Bond and Security for the performance of the said Articles, the said Workmen to have for building the Said Church Sixty thousand pounds of Merchantable sweet Scented Tobacco with Cask, to be paid convenient in this parish, in two equal payments, the first to be paid

November next, and the Other, the next November Following.” \*St. Paul’s Vestry Book pg.122-3. Payment actually was made Sept. 27, 1729 and Sept.16, 1730. At that time, only receipts for these transactions were tendered, these receipts being used in place of real currency and being the established practice of the era. The topography of Pine Trees, sandy clay soil that drained poorly, numerous ravines/slashes, gave Slash its name. Construction was to be of wood cut from the property (southern Yellow Pine) mortised and fastened with wooden pegs. Windows and doorframes as well as doors are all hand wrought. There is no millwork in the entire structure. The roof is quite steeply pitched at 53 degrees. The roof supports consist of a main beam that runs diagonally rather than straight across the church, the vertical supports are in triangular form and there is no ridge beam. Some of the glass is original. Most of the wainscoting (of horizontal boards) is original, as are the stairway to the gallery, the gallery itself, which is a distinct architectural feature of churches of this period, and its balustrade and balusters. Two original pews remain in this gallery. The flooring in the nave succumbed to termites and was discovered after the fire in 1970. The architectural style is early Georgian, with typical nine over nine double-sash windows and exterior shutters, with deeply paneled double entrance doors. Exterior locks were replaced in 1954 with reproductions used in the 18th century. The liturgical style of the building follows that of Greek temple design with three steps separating nave from chancel and the placement of the altar/communion table on the east wall. In 1953 - 1954, Lena Stafford Williams, church historian and mother of the pastor, Rev. George A. Williams, Jr., undertook an ambitious restoration project with help from the congregation to return the interior of the sanctuary to its initial appearance, insofar as could be ascertained. 19<sup>th</sup> century furnishings were replaced with reproductions of 18<sup>th</sup> century types. A central aisle replaced the double aisle configuration, wood-burning stoves and two chimneys were removed and the two upper windows on the west wall were repositioned (separated); paneled pews, lectern, pulpit, and altar were installed, along with paneled chairs for the clergy. On the east wall, behind the altar, the large wood panel containing The Lord’s Prayer and the pair of wood flower brackets were placed. This covers over another window. Some of the 19<sup>th</sup> century sanctuary furnishings, which were removed during the restoration, are now preserved in the adjacent 1954 structure. Still in use for worship services is the early 19<sup>th</sup> century communion plate, consisting of silver flagon, chalice and paten. No other authentic items remain as Anglican valuables were sold back to the public.

The first rector of Slash Church was the Reverend Zachary Brook, who had first served Mechumps Creeke Church and served Slash until 1737, when the Rev. Patrick Henry (uncle of the famous orator) was called and served until his death in 1777. Slash was singled out especially by the Hanover Patriots who met before and after the revolution at Merrie Oaks Tavern nearby and at Hanover Courthouse and tavern there. During this time, the church became Protestant Episcopal but attendance dwindled and Slash, carrying a historical association with England, was abandoned. The congregation relocated their services to the Hanover Courthouse area. In 1840 St. Paul’s Episcopal Church was built of brick but was destroyed by fire 1893, was rebuilt May 4, 1894 of wood, and continues in their use today. During this time of religious and governmental upheaval (1780-85) Slash became a free for use church. Newly formed religious dissenters used Slash for their worship services. Although other protestant denominations used Slash for several years, the Methodists and the Disciples of Christ emerged as the principal users. In 1842, these two groups agreed that the Disciples would purchase the Slash building and property while the Methodists would buy nearby land, where they erected Lebanon Methodist Episcopal Church (Lebanon United Methodist). Their wood church was destroyed by fire in 1851 and was rebuilt about 1860. Siding covers the exterior and a new sanctuary has been erected. Current use plans for this old sister church sanctuary are undetermined.

On May 26 & 27, 1862, Slash became the headquarters for Conf. Brig. Gen. L. OB Branch. Two battles in the vicinity on May 27, one on Mr. Kinney’s land (the old Cross home), the other at Peake’s Turnout (RR lines near Lebanon Church) resulted in a victory for the 12,000 Union forces vs. 4500 Confederate troops. Four local homes and Slash Church were used as hospitals for the over 300 wounded. Old trees cut around 1950’s contained bullets from these battles. This encounter became

known as the Battle of Slash Church in the South and the battle of Hanover Courthouse in the North. Book avail. [www.michaelchardy.com](http://www.michaelchardy.com). School was taught during the week - 1830's or 1840's.

While Slash proclaims Patrick Henry, Dolley Payne Madison, and Henry Clay as famous worshippers, the lesser-known people, who have worshipped there and dedicated themselves to this church's preservation and progress in the last two centuries, should be noted. First were the conscientious souls who reclaimed the building and saw to its restoration and repair in the 1842-45 periods. Later congregations repeatedly raised money to scrape, paint, and repair the original clapboards and maintain the interior - this done again as recently as 2010. In the 1950's, Rev. George Williams sold shingles for \$1.00 each as a fundraiser to put on a new slate roof. In 1954 a church member donated an educational building, which was attached to the North door of the original structure by an enclosed passage. The new structure so closely replicated the old that it was difficult to detect the age difference. A furnace fire in 1970, between the 1954 structure and the 1729 structure damaged the south wall of the 1954 building and the north wall of the church, some flooring and a small part of the roof. Many people from the congregation and the community worked diligently to repair 'like new or old' the damage done. Original lumber that had to be removed was reused as much as possible in the repairs to the north wall and beams. The 1954 structure is still being used for Sunday school, history room, and choir room downstairs and large Sunday school room upstairs. In 1972 and 1977, two connected brick structures were erected on the grounds to house additional educational facilities and a fellowship hall. Slash has helped shelter/foster the following churches: St. Paul's Episcopal, Brown Grove Baptist, Lebanon United Methodist, and the Stone-Campbell denomination (D. O.C.). The following new denominational speakers are believed to have spoken at Slash: Alexander Campbell – D.O.C. founder, Elder Reuben Ford - noted Baptist Pastor and speaker on religious liberty, Bishop Francis Asbury - organizer of the Methodist Church in US, Rev. George Whitefield - early leader of the Methodist movement. \*Quoted text from St. Paul's Vestry Book 1706 – 1786. Tours available by appointment: 804-746-3949 Please visit our church & website <http://www.slashhcc.org> PH: 804-798-4520. Revised: Sept. 29, 2010 Dianne A. Jones, Historian [dajonesholdstl@gmail.com](mailto:dajonesholdstl@gmail.com)

May 22 & 23, 2004, Slash celebrated its 275<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the building and the 162<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of the ownership by The Disciples of Christ. The Saturday program included a group of re-enactors of the 1760s – 1770s period from the Living History Foundation, The Rev. Canon John McDowell, Rector of the Church of St. James the Less, Ashland, VA. and the presentation of a plaque by The Honorable Frank D. Hargrove, 55<sup>th</sup> House District giving recognition of Slash Church by The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The service was followed by an old fashioned homemade ice cream social in the fellowship hall with colonial dancing. The Sunday worship was filled with music of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with an old Disciples of Christ service. Speakers were the Rev. Dr. Peter Morgan, Rev. Dr. Myron Kauffman, Rev. George A. Williams, Rev. Lee Parker and Rev. Donald L. Richardson. The service was followed by dinner on the grounds for all present. Antique automobiles were also on display as well as those choosing to dress in colonial attire. Weather was warm both days.

### Historic Highway Marker

Slash Church is on the Virginia (08-15-1972) and United States (09-22-1972) Historic Registers and a Historic Highway Marker was erected and dedicated at the intersection of the northwest corner of Peakes/Ashcake and Mount Hermon Road, Hanover County, Ashland, Virginia October 4, 1998. The highway marker site was procured from the property owners via agreement with the Virginia Department of Transportation, which agreement became effective on the 269<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Slash Church, July 17, 1998. That document permitted the establishment of a roadside and woodland park surrounding the marker and the turnout for off-road parking for visitors to the site. Augmenting the highway marker location with park supported the objective of increasing public awareness and

appreciation of the historic significance of the 1729 edifice.

Slash is a Religious and Historical treasure of Hanover County, of Virginia and of The United States.

Erected at the intersection of northwest  
corner of Peaks Road and southeast  
corner of Mount Hermon Road.

**E 105**  
Department of Historic Resources  
Commonwealth of Virginia  
**SLASH CHURCH**  
Erected in 1729-32 as the Upper Church of Saint  
Paul's Parish, Hanover County, Slash Church's  
location next to swampy woods (a "slash" in 18-  
century terms) gave it its name. The Reverend  
Patrick Henry, uncle of the famous patriot, served  
as rector from 1737 until 1777. Among its early  
worshippers the church claims Patrick Henry, Dolley  
Madison, and Henry Clay, all once residents of the  
area. During the Civil War, Slash Church was used  
as a hospital and gave a nearby cavalry battle its  
name. This white weatherboarded structure  
survives as the oldest and best-preserved frame  
colonial church in Virginia, and the only one to  
escape enlargement.  
July 1998

#### THE MINISTERS OF SLASH CHURCH

Early Ministers - St. Paul' Parish  
1701-1785

Rev. James Bowker; Rev. Richard Squire;  
Rev. James Breechin (or Breckin); Rev.  
Daniel Taylor; Rev. John Monro;  
Rev. Thomas Sharp - 1708/1720; Rev.  
Zachery (or Zachariah) Brook - 1721/1736;  
Rev. Joseph Blunfield - 2 mos;  
Rev. Patrick Henry - 1737/1777;  
Rev. William Dunlop - a few months of 1778,  
left and called again with new vestry;  
Rev. Jesse Carter to 1785.

Disciple Circuit Riders - Hanover  
Rev. C. B. Moore and Rev. Silas Shelburne  
Virginia Convention Delegates 1873  
Mr. N. Waldrop and Mr. J. L. Dyson

#### Ministers 1890 to 2005

Rev. Z. Parker Richardson 1890's  
Rev. W. J. Hall 1910  
Rev. W. S. Hoye 1913 - 10/1915  
Rev. J. F. Moore 09/1916 -  
09/1917  
Rev. R. A. Atkins 10/1917 -  
10/1926  
Rev. Richard A. Fox 10/1926 -  
02/1930  
Rev. Alvin R. Reynolds 06/1930 -  
08/1943  
Rev. J. H. Knibb 09/1943 -  
07/1947  
Rev. George A. Williams, Jr.  
10/1947 - 09/1955  
Rev. Larry E. Whitley 09/1956 -  
01/1958  
Rev. Robert B. Johnson 06/1958 -  
07/1961  
Rev. Wm. F. Abernathy 08/1961 -  
09/1962  
Rev. William Whitehurst 6/1963 -  
08/1967  
Rev. L. Carlton Lyon 07/1968 -  
10/1975  
Rev. Carl G. France 02/1976 -  
10/1980  
Rev. Robert L. Bohannon 6/1981 -  
06/1987  
Rev. Richard Cline 02/1988 -  
03/1995  
Interim: Rev. Robert Maphis 1995 -  
05/1996  
Rev. Donald L. Richardson  
6/19/96 to 9/30/2004  
Interim: Rev. Robert Maphis  
10/1/2004 to 08/31/2005  
Rev. Steve Leshner & Rev. Jyn  
Leshner 09/01/2005 to 2008  
Interim Rev. Jim Burton - 4/2009  
to 12/27/2009  
January - June 2010 Our own  
congregational members served &  
Rev. Don Richardson, Rev. Keith  
Boyer, Rev. Lyle Predmore, Rev.  
Nancy Dunn, Rev. Moses Joshua.  
Rev. Michael Weeks - 6/13/2010 to  
present.