



# THE HISTORY OF CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH



*We're deeply committed to the spirit of our past. Enjoy that rich history here.*

Around the corner from Spotsylvania Courthouse stands Christ Episcopal Church. Built by the ancestors of some members of the current congregation, it was completed and consecrated in 1841. Each Pentecost Sunday, the congregation celebrates the church's founding and service to the community. We welcome you and are pleased to offer you a brief glimpse at our rich historic heritage.

## The 1754 Bible Arrives

The 1754 pulpit Bible that Christ Church now proudly displays was printed in London by the King's appointed printer. This Bible was shipped to Virginia and, as tradition has it, was used in worship for more than 75 years in the colonial Mattaponi Church, affectionately known as the "Old Mother Church" of Spotsylvania County. Through the efforts of the Boggs family, this Bible was destined to find its way to Christ Church.



When the Mattaponi Church closed its doors in 1828, Lewis A. Boggs, son of the last priest to serve at the church, likely retained it in the hopes of keeping the memory of the Mattaponi church alive in another church home. Several years later, Lewis was elected to the first Vestry of Christ Church, and the Bible became the first pulpit Bible of Christ Church. The Bible, which survived the nearby Civil War battle of 1864, continues to be used on special occasions to this day, over 250 years after its publication.

## A Spotsylvania Church Is Born

The original congregation of Christ Episcopal Church was formed in 1839 when several families separated from St. George's parish in the city. Lewis Rawlings and his wife, who lived in a small home adjacent to the original tavern, were devoutly religious and held church services in their home. The Rawlings and Leavells families donated land a short distance away and helped build Christ Episcopal Church. The church was built in 1841

from bricks made at a nearby clay pit. Christ Church is the sole survivor of the original three buildings (church, courthouse, and jail) of the Spotsylvania Courthouse area. Two additional acres were purchased from Harold and Dorothy Peters in the 1960s, and four more were acquired with the purchase of the adjacent house from the Harris family in the 1980s. Although the house has been home to several families over its history, it is referred to as the Harris house by the church. The church campus now consists of the original Sanctuary, church offices in Booth Hall, and All-Saints Hall.



At the church's beginning, services were held as often as clergy from nearby churches or students from the Virginia Seminary were available and there were funds to pay them. Initially, services were held quarterly, usually on a Sunday afternoon, growing more frequent as time went on. By the late 1970s, its congregation was too large for a church with fewer than 100 seats. Transepts were added and dedicated in 1988, expanding the seating to its current 200 seats.

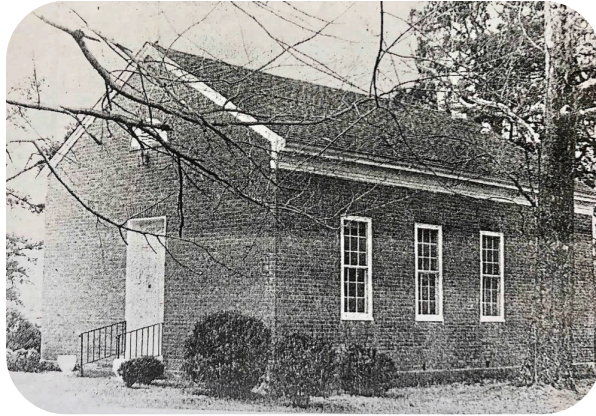
During its over 185 years of existence, Christ Church has been temporarily closed several times. When it first closed in 1884, one mother complained, "This is the worst place in the world, where the cuckoo never sings, the primrose never blooms, and the babies are never baptized." In the late 1950s, when the congregation had dwindled to just six women, the church was closed again. These women kept the church clean and donated dimes for the privilege of doing the cleaning. It was at this time that the Reverend Arthur Booth was assigned to reopen and serve Christ Church. During his tenure, the congregation grew from just a handful to around 35 parishioners. Most recently, the church building was closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, services were held online and outside on the lawn when the weather permitted. As the pandemic subsided, services were held in the Great Hall before the church was fully reopened in 2021.

## Christ Church Joins the Civil War

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It became clear in May of 1864 that Union forces had turned south and were headed for the Courthouse area. During local battles, Christ Church was used as a hospital and shelter for those dying and wounded at the nearby Bloody Angle. Regardless of its role in the conflict, Christ Church was a target of both artillery and rifle fire. Extensive artillery

damage to the roof was repaired soon after the war, but pockmarked bullet holes still adorn the original brick exterior.



## A Church Member Fights for His Home

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To the right of the Sanctuary are the four graves of Pvt. Edgar Harrison (E Company of the 9th Virginia, CSA), his wife, and their two daughters, ages 3 and 6 at the time of the Battle of Spotsylvania. They lived on the Harrison Farm, about a mile north of the Church. Pvt. Harrison chose to leave his unit during the winter encampment preceding the Battle, probably to plant crops for his family and others dependent on the Harrison Farm. He quickly returned to his unit, however, as it moved on to Myers Hill, located behind Christ Church, into positions set up to defend the Confederate flank.

Only a few days thereafter, Ann Harrison and her daughters watched as Robert E. Lee's staff led their horses to her doorstep and declared the house to be Lee's headquarters. As they prepared defenses to counter the encroaching Union Army, the Confederates encircled the Harrison Farm with trenches, effectively ruining Edgar's recent planting. From his position on Myer's hill, scant miles from the Harrison Farm, Edgar watched in horror as flames and smoke consumed his home. His wife and daughters, however, miraculously survived.

## The Future Awaits Us

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Much has gone on at Christ Church in the more recent past. The Harris House originally housed the church offices, Sunday school classrooms, and food pantry until the All Saints Hall building was completed. The Harris House was then transitioned to serve as our thrift store until 2024, when the house had to be closed and demolished due to health and safety concerns.

All Saints Hall, featuring an expansive ballroom and educational rooms, was finished and dedicated in 2005. This building currently serves as the home to our Sunday School classrooms, nursery, choir room, food pantry, and quilters' room. The building is also used

by various scouting and civic groups. The building has become both a form of outreach and a venue for parish and community functions, including meetings, wedding receptions, and parties.

Booth Hall was entirely renovated in 2007 and now houses the church offices in an attractive and accessible location. Every day brings new developments in the life of historic Christ Church, and the congregation eagerly awaits to see what else the future has in store.

