

THE HISTORY
AND BACKGROUND OF
ST. GEORGE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
FREDERICKSBURG,
VIRGINIA



by

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This Edition is Dedicated to
WILLIAM TURNER PRATT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS HISTORY was written at the suggestion of the vestry. In making this request the vestry was probably motivated by the fact that no history of the church had been published since 1890—the date of R. A. Brock's edition of the Reverend Philip Slaughter's *A History of St. George's Parish . . .* which had originally appeared in 1847. Copies of either edition of Slaughter's pioneer work are extremely scarce.

In hammering this modest study into final shape I have had the benefit of helpful criticism, for which I am deeply grateful. I am especially indebted to Dr. George MacLaren Brydon, historiographer of the Diocese of Virginia; the Reverend Clayton Torrence, director of the Virginia Historical Society; Mr. George Carrington Mason, historiographer of the Diocese of Southern Virginia; Mr. Benjamin W. Early of the English department of Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia; Mr. William K. Goolrick and Dr. Gordon Jones, vestrymen of St. George's Church; the Reverend Thomas G. Faulkner, Jr., rector of St. George's and my wife, Lula Ashworth Quenzel, who read the entire manuscript.

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INTRODUCTION

ONE OF THE notable trends in the present-day study of the history of the American people is a growing realization of the importance of local parish histories. The story of the life of any congregation of Christian people of whatever denominational name, if that congregation has existed for a hundred years or more, will bring to light actions and experiences, and modes of thought, which though seemingly insignificant in their relationship to larger issues, yet serve well in throwing light upon the common life of the whole period.

For this reason a history of Saint George's Parish in Spotsylvania County, over a period of two hundred and thirty years will be welcomed by many students of Virginia history. That in the later period since the War Between the States it becomes more directly the history of the one mother-congregation of Saint George's Church in Fredericksburg, rather than a continuation of the history of the whole parish, covering half the county, is but an illustration of the general trend towards centralization and urbanization which has become one of the most striking features of our present generation.

Old Saint George's Parish has had a varied experience in the near quarter of a millenium of its life. It was founded at first in 1714 to include a new group of German settlers, as a means of releasing them from the payment of tithes to the Established Church, and to enable them to have their own forms of worship under their own ministers. Seven years later, under Governor Alexander Spotswood, the first definite movement to check the French advance of settlement and domination in the Ohio River Valley was put into effect by the creation of a new county as the first to extend into territory beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains. This new country was named Spotsylvania County, and according to general custom of the colonial period in Virginia a parish of the Established Church was formed to cover the whole territory in order that as new settlers began to come into the new territory they might have from the first some opportunity of religious worship. In this case the little parish established for some German people, having served its purpose, was enlarged to cover the whole county. Thus it became the first religious organization beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains; and so Spotsylvania County became the grandmother of all the counties formed in the far southwest.

From the beginning Saint George's Parish, and its home town and city of Fredericksburg have taken part in all the life of Virginia. The uncle of Patrick Henry, the orator of the Revolutionary period, was one of its first ministers, and later the boy George Washington, came from his home on the opposite side of

the River to attend school in Fredericksburg. During the Revolution the largest gun factory operated by the Commonwealth of Virginia was in the town. Saint George's Church and the parish suffered all the experiences of devastation and prostration of the Episcopal Church in the post-revolutionary period. Again, during the War Between the States, when the town was bombarded by Federal forces, Saint George's Church and her people suffered along with the rest of the community.

Life since that period of warfare has brought many changes, and also its present day growth of population, and widening opportunities of Christian service. Notable among other changes a younger sister congregation has grown up within the town, as Trinity Church, to share with the Mother Church in the life and work of today, as it shares also in all the past history of the parish.

Saint George's Church has been fortunate in securing a trained historical student to search out, assemble and evaluate the facts of its past history: and all who are interested in accuracy of historical statement will be grateful to Dr. Quenzel for the care and devotion he has given to that work.

Richmond, Virginia
February, 1951.

G. MACLAREN BRYDON, *Historiographer*,
Diocese of Virginia