

I - WORSHIP IN THE WILDERNESS

Just thirty years after its first publication, The Book of Common Prayer was used in the wilds of North America (1579). At the end of the 16th century, two of Queen Elizabeth's great captains, Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh were responsible for the first English services in the "new World," but neither established enduring colonies. Elizabeth's successor, James the First, chartered the Virginia Company which led to the establishment of Jamestown in which "the service of God" was to be used "according to the rites and doctrines of the Church of England." This beginning would lead to the establishment of Anglicanism in the southern colonies. In 1608 John Smith mapped all the Chesapeake Bay including "Little Choptank" on its Eastern Shore where Old Trinity Church was later built.



In the first year of his reign James the First also took two other actions which were to shape the course of religion in America. At Hampton Court he rejected most of the pleas of the Puritans for further reformation of the Church of England, leading indirectly to the decision of the "Pilgrims" to leave England in 1620 and form a holy commonwealth. This resulted in a very different religious establishment in "New England." However, James' one concession to the Puritans was to authorize a new translation of the Bible which in time would shape the religious heritage of almost all Americans. The "King James Version" was published in 1611 and nearly four centuries later is still prized by some steadfast Anglicans as "the original Word of God." A large leather-bound copy graces the reading desk at Old Trinity.



Unresolved issues between Puritans and other churchmen, as well as issues between Parliament and King plunged England into Civil War between 1640 and 1660. Radical religious reformers and "Levelers," who sought to abolish all class

distinctions added to the mix, until after twenty years of chaos, England was ready for stability and distrusted all “enthusiasm” in religion. The monarchy was restored in the person of Charles II, and a new Prayer Book issued in 1662. Many people who had become “persona non grata” or who had lost everything in the civil strife chose to immigrate to America. The churchmen among them brought with them the King James Bible, the 1662 Prayer Book, and the new “auditory” style of church architecture. This style, of which Old Trinity is a classic example, emphasized the hearing of the Word. The proportions support good acoustics, enclosed pews are provided for people to sit warmly, and the raised pulpit is surmounted with a sounding board. In keeping with Puritan sensibilities which won despite their political loss, the interior is plain except for

The 1 Creed and Lord’s Prayer at Old Trinity written texts; the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, the essentials of the faith the Prayer Book said all Christians should learn “for their soul’s health.”

Henry Aldridge was an American success story. In 1659 he sold himself into seven years of slavery for his passage to Maryland. After his servitude he received 50 acres of land on the Little Choptank. His wife transported herself in 1662 and also had right to 50 acres. In time he amassed seven more parcels of the same size, to each of which he gave the name of an English parish. He patented “Elsing” in 1671 and built a house. At some point a church was built on a little portion of the farm across from the house. Not having children of his own, he left the farm to Mary Stone, a servant’s daughter, after his wife’s death. It passed in time to her half-brother James Busick, who in 1749 asserted that two acres of the farm should belong to the church only “so long as a church was maintained and no longer.”



The early 18th century Chapel of Ease on Taylors Island retains the sense of worship in the wilderness. 2