

Aquia Church
Stafford Vicinity
Stafford County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-415
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington 25, D. C.

AQUILA CHURCH
Stafford Co., Virginia

Owner: The Episcopal Church

Date: 1751-1753

Builder:

Description: Together with Christ's Church, Lancaster County, Virginia, Aquila Church is one of the best preserved of the early churches of the state. It possesses more original trim than any other except Christ's Church and this the recent restoration has preserved against further decay. In plan the building is cruciform and is built in the shape of a Greek cross. In elevation it is two tiers of windows high the upper opening onto the gallery at its level. All the windows are square headed with nine over nine light sash. All corners of the building are treated with rusticated stone quoins. The doorways are framed with rusticated quoin strips with a keystone in a flat arch over. The roof is hipped and on the front part is built a curious low tower, the front of which is of masonry, and rests on the front wall of the church, but the three rear walls are framed.

The interior retains its box pews but they have been cut down in height. The pulpit has a clerks desk below, and the pulpit is raised on a high pier and is covered by a sounding board. The reredos is unusually fine and has four scriptural panels framed in roll moulding and grouped by Ionic pilasters. The altar table is not old.

Thomas Waterman
June 5, 1941

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Aquia Church

Original Owner: Church of England

Present Owner and Use: Overwharton Parish, Protestant Episcopal Church

Location and Setting: On a commanding eminence just off U. S. Route 1, north of Stafford Court House. Just a few hundred yards removed from the heavy hum of busy traffic, the Church betokens unusual peace and tranquility. Ancient oaks, cedar and hollies shelter and enframe the building and heighten the pastoral quality of the scene. Southward and eastward lies beautiful Aquia graveyard.

Date of Erection: Over the south doorway is the inscription "Built A.D. 1751. Destroyed by fire 1751, and Rebuilt A.D. 1757 by Mourning Richards, Undertaker. Wm. Copein, Mason."

Number of Stories: Two tiers of windows providing for galleries though only one was built, in the west end.

Description: Aquia Church is among the largest and handsomest of Virginia churches. It is built in the form of a Greek cross with hipped roof and has a most interesting unorthodox tower arising from the west end. What is doubly remarkable quite aside from the architectural details is the circumstance of finding bell and clock in this rural area. Hands from the old clock are said to have been in

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existence until comparatively recent times. Few country churches of the eighteenth century boasted bells while most of them were dependent upon sun dials for the time.

Proximity to the local (subsequently famous) quarry doubtless influenced the use of stone in corner quoins, keystones and doorways. Aquia's classic doorways are noteworthy and one must look to Christ Church in Alexandria and nearby Pohick to find their equals (both of these date approximately twenty years afterward). Incidentally the stone mason at Aquia also worked at Pohick. Could Aquia church have set the trend toward double-tiered windows and the increasing use of cut native stone in the Potomac region? This constitutes an interesting question for research.

The interior is of rare excellence, all the more remarkable for its state of preservation and the few changes that have occurred in the past two hundred years. The tall three decker pulpit located at the southeastern angle of the crossing, is one of the few American examples that have come down to us. This is complete with its great sounding board. A handsome altarpiece with pilasters and pediment contain arched panels on which are lettered the Ten Commandments, Apostles Creed and Lord's Prayer. The aisles are paved with flagstones. The old square pews have been retained. Paneling of the gallery memorialize the first minister and vestry as follows: "John Moncure, minister; Peter Hedgeman, John Mercer, John Lee, Mott Doniphan, Henry Tyler, William Mountjoy, Benjamin Strother, Thomas Fitzhugh, Peter Daniel, Travers Cook, Vestrymen.

1757 John Fitzhugh, John Peyton, Church-wardens." The arrangement includes a number of carved and gilded stars as decoration.

History: Overwharton Parish formed in 1680, once covered the greater part of the original Stafford County, cut off from Westmoreland. The Reverend John Moncure, who was minister at the time Aquia Church was built, is burried beneath a stone in the chancel. His inscription reads:

"In memory of the Race of the House of Mancure."

The predecessor of John Moncure was Alexander Scott whose home was "Dipple" on the Potomac. In recent years burials in the family graveyard at "Dipple" have been removed to Aquia Church.

The following of the epitaphs are decipherable:

"Here lyest the body of Revd. Alexander Scott, A.M.C., Presbyter of the Church of England, who lived near twenty-eight years minister of Overwharton Parish and died in the fifty third year of his age, being born the twentieth day of July A.D. 1686, and departed this life the first day of April, 1738."

"Here lies the body of Christina, the wife of John Graham, merchant, and daughter of Doctor Gustavus Brown. She departed this life the 17th of September, 1742 in the 23d year of her age, when she had been married not quite two months. There is no person more universally esteemed nor more sincerely lamented by her acquaintance."

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"In memory of Hawkin Stone, son of Barton and Sarah Stone, who departed this life March the 10th 1810 in the 63d year of his age, leaving a widow and five children to lament the loss of a kind husband and an Indulgent parent and a friend to all mankind."

Reference: Colonial Churches in the Original Colony of Virginia,
by various authors, Richmond, 1908, pp. 254-64.

Stephen P. Dorsey, Early English Churches in America,
1607-1807, New York, 1952, pp. 78-9.

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