

St. Luke's Chapel  
Intersection of Va. Rt. 53 and 732  
Simeon  
Albemarle County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1025

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. LUKE'S CHAPEL

HABS No. VA-1025

Location: Intersection of Va. Rt. 53 and 732, Simeon,  
Albemarle County, Virginia.

Present Owner: Trustees of St. Luke's Chapel.

Present Use: Episcopal Church.

Significance: St. Luke's Chapel was built in 1892 as a mission  
of Christ Episcopal Church in Charlottesville.  
An example of the Carpenter Gothic style of the  
late nineteenth century, the chapel retains many  
distinctive features, including the large pointed  
arch above its entrance and its original interior  
millwork and stained glass windows.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

History of St. Luke's Chapel:

St. Luke's Chapel is one of six missions which were established by Christ Episcopal Church of Charlottesville during the late nineteenth century in Charlottesville and the surrounding rural areas of Albemarle County. The chapel has been known by several names. The building was first called the Colle Mission Chapel, in reference to the large estate named Colle located to the east of the chapel. The first reference to the building as St. Luke's Chapel is found in the Vestry Minutes of Christ Church in 1894, two years following the chapel's construction. These two names appear to have been used interchangeably throughout much of the building's life.

The effort to erect a chapel in the vicinity of Colle began in 1884 when several parishioners of Christ Church donated funds for the purpose. The matter was not brought before the Vestry, however, until July 8, 1890. At that time it was resolved that "the proposition made in reference to erecting a Chapel at Sneed's Store be acceded to by the Vestry; that this missionary Chapel be considered under the care and protection of this Vestry, and that they shall be made Trustees of the same." By 1892, the chapel was under construction, for on April 18, 1892, "an account of the Chapel under erection at Colle, its condition and prospects" was given to the Christ Church Vestry.

Since the new chapel was a mission of Christ Church, it had no full-time clergy and was the responsibility of the rector of Christ Church. The Vestry Records of Christ Church reveal that supplying St. Luke's and the other missions with a minister was a perpetual and often distressing problem for the rector and the Vestry. In 1894 Christ Church appropriated \$300.00 to pay a minister "to do Church missionary work in connection with this parish and Buck Mountain." St. Luke's contributed \$50.00 to this amount as did the church at Buck Mountain and the newly established Edge Hill Chapel. Two ministers, Andrew G. Grinnan and Hugh Martin each served the missions for one year terms under these conditions.

In 1896, however, Christ Church was forced to withdraw its financial support of the missions due to the problems it was encountering in the construction of its new church building. The rector, Dr. Henry Bendinger Lee, served the missions himself until 1898 when the church could again afford to hire a minister for the missions.

In 1912, the Missions Committee of the Christ Church Vestry recommended that funds be raised to build rectories for St. Luke's and Edge Hill Chapel, in order to attract a more permanent minister. In 1913, the Trustees of St. Luke's purchased a 4.6 acre parcel of land adjacent to the church lot on which to construct a rectory. The rectory was never built, however, and in 1953 the Trustees sold the land.

St. Luke's remains today a parochial mission of Christ Church. It is an active Episcopal church in the Diocese of Virginia and holds regular services each Sunday.

#### Bibliography:

#### Written Sources:

"An Historical Sketch of Christ Church," a pamphlet prepared by Christ Church.

Edwards, Wenger, and Yetter. The Secretary's Road in Virginia, Vol. 3. VRT-3 School of Architecture/University of Virginia, 1977.

Vestry Records, Christ Episcopal Church, 1889-1901, 1902-1915. Manuscript Collection, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

#### Interviews:

Mrs. W. S. Bishop, organist and member of St. Luke's.

Mr. Charles Leavell, vicar of St. Luke's Chapel.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### General Statement:

St. Luke's Chapel is an example of the Carpenter Gothic style of the late nineteenth century which was employed for at least four other small churches of the period in and around Charlottesville. The building is rectangular in plan with a steeply pitched gable roof. A square, one-room addition is located on the building's southwest corner.

The most striking element of the chapel's exterior is the pointed arch on its east elevation. This arch enframes a round stained glass window, one of eleven in the building. These features as well as the building's interior Gothic millwork and exposed roof trusses add distinction to the structure.

### Exterior Description:

**Overall Dimensions:** The chapel is 45'2" in length and 25'3" in width. The entrance vestibule on the east elevation is 4'6" long and 8'4" wide. The addition on the southwest corner is 10'0" by 10'3". The height of the building from the base of the weatherboarding to the peak of the roof is 28'0". The walls are 11'10" high. The addition is 19'1" in height from the base of the weatherboarding to the peak of its roof.

**Foundations:** The foundations are of random rubble or fieldstone. The height ranges from 8 1/2" under the vestibule and east elevation to 3'2" under the west elevation.

**Wall Construction, finish, color:** The walls are constructed of 4 1/2" beaded weatherboards. There are 4" cornerboards at each corner and a 2" board covers the joint between the chapel and the addition on the west elevation.

The arch on the east elevation which projects 6" from the wall is constructed of 3" unbeaded vertical boards. The inside of the arch is finished

with horizontal boards. An arch of similar construction appears over the door of the addition.

The square bell tower straddling the peak of the roof at the eastern end of the building is constructed of unbeaded weatherboards and has cornerboards.

All the exterior walls are painted white.

**Structural system, framing:** The walls are framed using post and stud construction with studs set at 18" o.c. The floor joists are set at 24" o.c. The studs in the addition are set at 19" o.c. and the joists are also set at 24" o.c.

The chapel's exposed timber roof framing consists of vertical sheathing boards, twelve purlins and a ridge piece which are supported by four scissors trusses spaced at approximately ten foot intervals. These trusses are joined with the ridge piece by iron tie rods which are bolted with a metal plate to the bottom center of each truss. Iron bolts also strengthen each truss at its junction with the wall.

**Porches:** The front entrance to the chapel is located in a rectangular vestibule centered on the building's east elevation. Two cement steps lead into the vestibule.

The entrance to the addition is 4'10" above grade and is reached by an l-shaped wooden stairway with landing which is set upon wooden piers. This porch, of recent construction, is painted gray.

**Chimneys:** Two brick chimneys which have been painted red flank the bell tower, one on either side. These chimneys which project 1'6" from the east wall on the interior serve two stoves.

**Doorways and doors:** The exterior entrance to the chapel in the vestibule is framed by a pointed arch. The double front doors contain two recessed panels made up of vertical boards. Simple beaded moldings enframe the doors.

The exterior door of the addition is rectangular and has five fielded panels.

**Windows:** The chapel's eleven windows are all of stained glass, with curvilinear, geometric or floral patterns. The east elevation contains a round window centered above the vestibule and within the projecting arch, and two narrow rectangular windows on either side of the vestibule. These windows do not open. The north and south elevations each have three pairs of rectangular windows which are pivoted. The north elevation also contains a smaller rectangular window at its western end. The west elevation, the apse end, contains two pointed windows, a large one set at the chair rail level, and a smaller lancet window nearer the peak of the roof. Each of these windows is protected on the exterior by a sheet of plexiglass which is screwed into its frame. Many of the windows, however, are badly warped and have broken or missing pieces. The windows all have simple beaded moldings.

The addition has a fixed rectangular single light window on its east side.

The bell tower has louvered round-arched openings on all four sides.

**Miscellaneous openings:** Ventilation openings are located in the foundations on the north, south and west sides, and in the north and south sides of the vestibule.

The crawl space under the addition is entered through an opening in the foundation on its west side. This opening is covered by a door consisting of a single plywood panel.

**Roof:** The chapel's steeply pitched roof as well as the hipped roof on the bell tower are covered with standing seam metal roofing which has been painted red. The bell tower and the peak of the roof of the addition are topped with white wooden crosses.

The cornice which consists of a cyma recta and a fascia projects 6" from the walls. A 2" quarter round is attached under the soffit at the top of the walls. The cornice returns on both the east and west elevations.

Interior Description:

Floor plans:

Crawl space: The crawl space under the addition is accessible, and has been used as a coal storage area. The crawl space under the chapel is inaccessible.

First floor: The chapel is entered through double doors in the small rectangular vestibule on its east end. An arched doorway leads from the vestibule into the body of the chapel. The sanctuary is rectangular in plan and most of it is devoted to seating, with pews arranged on either side of a central aisle. Two steps lead up to the raised platform at the western end of the sanctuary which extends across the entire width of the chapel and forms the chancel area. The entrance to the one-room addition which is used as a storage room is located in the southwest corner of the chancel.

Flooring: The chapel has 5" to 6" hardwood flooring. The chancel and steps leading up to it have been covered with wall-to-wall carpeting. The vestibule is covered with linoleum tiles. The addition has 3" to 4" hardwood flooring.

Wall and ceiling finish: The chapel's walls are painted plaster to the level of the chair rail, below which is dado paneling. The vestibule's walls and ceiling are of vertical beaded boards. The addition's walls are finished with painted beaded vertical boards. The ceiling of the addition is finished with acoustical tiles.

Doorways and doors: The doorway from the vestibule into the chapel is in the form of a pointed arch. Marks of hinges on the sides of the doorway show that the opening once had double doors.

The door into the addition is a two panel rectangular door the upper panel of which is glass and has been covered with contact paper.

**Trim:** The chapel has dado paneling consisting of vertical beaded boards which have been stained dark brown. The window and door moldings are beaded and are stained a similar color.

**Hardware:** Much of the building's brass hardware appears to be original notably the lock plate on the front door and the mechanisms on the pivoted stained glass windows on the north and south sides.

**Lighting:** The chapel is lit by three brass chandeliers, each with three lamps, which are suspended from the roof trusses. These have been converted from kerosene to electricity, and are probably original to the building. Uncovered single electric bulbs have also been attached to the western side of each roof truss just above the joint with the wall. The addition has a single electric bulb suspended from the ceiling. A modern light fixture has been installed above the exterior door of the vestibule.

**Heating:** The chapel is heated by two modern oil-burning stoves which are attached to the chimneys which project from the east wall. The oil storage tank is located at the southeastern corner of the building. Previously, the building was heated with coal-burning stoves.

**Furniture and fixtures:** The chancel of the chapel is delineated with a tripartite wooden screen and altar rail. The two outer sections are 4'9" wide and are attached to the north and south walls 1" from the edge of the chancel platform. They are topped with rounded arches and contain quatrefoil, trefoil and other scroll sawn Gothic ornamentation. Two arches of the same design extend back from the inside edge of these arches and are attached to the west wall. An altar rail extends around the central altar area. All of these fixtures are of varnished wood and are original.

The chapel contains eighteen wooden pews. They are not permanently fixed to the floor and are randomly spaced throughout the body of the chapel.

The chapel's small pedal organ is quite old. The altar, lectern, and episcopal chairs located within the altar area, as well as the baptismal font located to the right of the main entrance are in the Gothic style and are of a later date.

### Site and surroundings:

General setting and orientation: The chapel is located on the western side of state route 53 just south of the point where it intersects with state route 732 and bears south at the crossroads known as Simeon. Route 53 forms the northern and eastern boundary of the property. A line of trees and dense undergrowth parallel the road on the northern edge. Directly across the road to the east is Bishop's Store, a gas station/store with an overhanging porch typical of Virginia rural stores. A barbed wire fence marks the western and southern boundaries of the property. The land south of the property is wooded while to the west lie cultivated fields.

Like many Episcopal churches, St. Luke's is oriented east to west; its altar, however, is at the west end rather than the east end of the building. The chapel's site slopes downward toward the west. A gravel parking area was added on the southern side of the building in 1978, and a cement walk leads from the road to the front entrance of the chapel. The chapel's cemetery is located approximately 100 feet west of the building. It contains stones dating from 1896-1979, but has not been well maintained and is overgrown.

### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of a project undertaken by the School of Architecture of the University of Virginia under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Professor of Architecture. The records were prepared during the Spring Semester, 1981 by Sallie Smith. The documentation was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. It was not produced under HABS supervision, nor edited by members of the HABS staff.