

Lower Church Time Line

1609 – Land grants by King James forms Virginia. Located there-in is Lancaster which extends across the Rappahannock River and includes Middlesex

1650 – Worship begins on site of the lower chapel of ease.

1657 – Lancaster divided into two parishes. The upper being Lancaster and the lower being Peankatanck

1666 – Lancaster and Peankatanck Parishes unite as one and called Christ Church Parish. It is also noted that the lower chapel in Middlesex was in need of repair

1669 – Middlesex separates from Lancaster County but still under the Christ Church Parish

1714 - Decision to build brick church on north side of existing Lower Chapel

1717 – On October 25th, first worship held in new Lower Church

1733 – Ordered a 4½ foot high brick wall to be built around church yard. (Part of this wall un-earthed in 1964/65)

1750 – Gallery added to west side of church interior

1772 – Mr. Key, owner of the property on which the Lower Church stands sells same to Mr. Issac Jones

1776 – Revolutionary War – Churches abandoned as priests and some parishioners flee fearing for their lives

1795 – October 30th, Mr. Issac Jones sells afore mentioned property to Mr. Philip Ludwell Grymes

1795 – December 24th - Mr. Philip L. Grymes and wife, Judith deed approximately 4 acres and church to the Protestant Episcopal Church

1812 – War of 1812 – Due to the general decline of religion throughout the state, churches remained abandoned after the wars and being bereft of minsters, congregations, and financial support fell into disrepair or were vandalized.

1844 – The Methodist Episcopal Church South was formed due to a split over slavery. It seems that the Baptists and Methodists were using Lower Church well before 1844. This may have been possible as Robert Healy, a member of Christ Church and a trustee for Lower Church possessed the key for same. The Baptists left but the Methodists stayed.

1857 – October 3rd - Court Case. The Protestant Episcopal Church begins suit for ownership of Lower Church as Mr. Healy refuses to hand over the Lower Church key

1860 - March 28th, Court case settled in favor of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. Thus begins our Methodist history at Lower.

1879 – Mr. Robert Healy purchases his family burial plot (60 ft. by 60 ft.) from the Methodist Episcopal Church South. His descendants own it to this day.

1912 - Large east window removed and replaced with “Gothic” arch and the pulpit area was extended.

1944 – May 25th - Discussion began for an annex to be added to provide Sunday School classrooms and a social hall

1946 – Ground broken for the new annex. Brick laid in English Bond pattern to match 1717 church

1955 – Methodist Church divided the charge and Lower became part of the newly formed Piankatank Parish

1956 – New parsonage built on land at Lower Church

1964 – Second annex added more classrooms, restrooms, kitchen and new social hall. Once again great care taken to enhance the 1717 sanctuary. Again bricks matched and laid in the English Bond pattern

1970 – (about) Joined with the Brethren to form the United Methodist Church

1972 – October – Lower Church, having undergone extensive renovation and restoration was listed on the *Virginia Historic Landmarks Register*, including annex and grounds

1973 – April - Lower church complex and approximately 10 acres listed on the *National Register of Historic Places*.

2002 – Broke ground for third annex. This added more classrooms, restrooms, commercial kitchen, and larger fellowship hall with stage. Sound system, screen and other

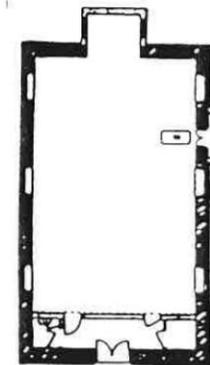
Drawing by Dell Upton depicting changes and final design to the Lower Chapel



71a

71b

71c



71d

71d (also denotes today's layout)

Lower Chapel, Christ Church Parish, Middlesex County.
Reconstructed plan:

(a) first design

(b) second design

(c) final design

(d) today and the grave slab of Mary Beverly (d – 1678)

In the final scheme (Fig.71c) the chancel and communion rail at the lower church were reduced to their original dimensions, but two further, more important changes were made. The South door was moved west and opened into the body of the church rather than the chancel. The pulpit was pushed back out of the aisle against the north wall, but remained east of center, opposite the new location of the south door, not close to the center of the building as in most seventeenth-century Virginia churches.

For reasons not revealed the vestrymen of Christ Church Parish had experimented with two new plans for their lower church, abandoning the old seventeenth-century arrangement in favor of a form that characterized all subsequent Virginia rectangular churches. The chancel was no longer a rigidly defined part of the building. Although the lower church still had a screen, it is the last to appear in Virginia church records. Henceforth the “Chancel” was reduced to the “communion place”, the small railed-in enclosure around the table.

As with any building project there are always delays. It is noted in the vestry book that on August 5, 1717 the builders were “putting up pews inconveniently” and were ordered to install them as specified, showing the Chapel to be practically complete at that date.

The first worship service in the new Lower Church was held on October 25th, 1717, and conducted by the Reverend Bartholomew Yates.

electronics were added as we prepared for the future. Once again great care was taken to ensure the enhancement of the Colonial-era church and remain true to the requirements of the historical registers.

2011 – The Rappahannock River District was dissolved and Lower Church was joined with the York River District

2014 – A ground penetrating radar study performed by Mr. Bevin of Geosight revealed the locations of possible Colonial-era graves and other anomalies around the 1717 sanctuary

2016 – September – Roof on sanctuary suffered severe wind damage and had to be replace. When roof was removed some of the original hand-cut cypress shingles and wrought iron nails were discovered.

2016 – November – Archaeologist from the Fairfield Foundation began a probe study of areas of interest indicated in the 2014 Geosight study.

2017 – Study by Fairfield Foundation reveal a few 18th Century artifacts.

Expansion of Lower Church Grounds

The following information was gleaned from the Middlesex County Court House Deed Room records. Some of the earliest items were illegible.

- According to Deed Book 7A, Pg. 532, dated (?), Mr. William Armistead purchased 1,100 acres. No mention of a “church quarter”. He died in December 1712 and 354 acres was sold by Act of Assembly – Deed Book 9, Pg. 226 & 227
- Mr. John Keys of Gloucester. No date or amount given but the first time there was a mention of the “church quarter”. Mr. Keys then sold the same property recorded in the same Deed Book 9, Pg. 226 & 227.
- Issac Jones on July 17, 1773 for 240 pounds and 15 shillings purchased 354 acres lying and being in the said county of Middlesex and being part of the Tract commonly the Church Quarter. Mr Jones then sold the 4 acres more or less, and church to
- Philip Ludwell Grymes for 30 pounds recorded Deed Book 11, pg. 250
- Mr. Grymes and wife, Judith, then conveyed the same acreage and church for the sum of 15 shillings, to the Protestant Episcopal Church on December 24th, 1795
- The Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 caused the abandonment of the English Churches. The Protestant

As the area grew it was proposed to build three new churches in the Christ Church Parish, Middlesex; a middle, an upper and a lower. The lower church was to be built on the north side of the existing Lower Chapel. The cost of this new church was set at 90,000 pounds of sweet-scented tobacco. Captain Henry Armistead and Major Edmond Berkeley were ordered to build the new church. It was to be completed by January 3, 1716/17. The plan for the lower church was to be the same as the middle church.

As in any building project changes occur as noted in the following found in Mr. Mason’s book:

When it came time to begin work on the lower church, the same plan was proposed although the dimensions were changed (Fig. 71a), The fenestration and door openings followed the example of the middle church, and the chancel, communion table, pews and pulpit were treated identically with the 1712 design. When the dimensions were enlarged from fifty by twenty-five feet to fifty-two by thirty feet, the chancel depth was increased to sixteen feet by ten feet (Fig. 71b), with pews inside the chancel enclosure. The pulpit was moved east and placed in the middle of the “alley” or aisle. This was an arrangement used often in early eighteenth-century English churches and less frequently in American ones, but nowhere else in Virginia.

The History of Lower Church

Middlesex County

The history of worship on this site dates to 1650. The Parish of the Peankatank was formed about 1657. Originally Middlesex was part of Lancaster but was set up as a separate unite somewhere between 1665 and 1673. About 1657, what is now the County of Middlesex was composed of two Parishes, Lancaster and Peankatank, the upper known as Lancaster Parrish and lower known as Peankatank. Incidentally, there are thirteen different spellings for Piankatank.

In his book *The Colonial Churches of Tidewater Virginia*, Mr. George Carrington Mason gives the following account:

The first building mentioned was apparently the existing church of Peankatanck. This ancient Peanckatanck Parish church appears to have been the earliest church building in the combined parish of Christ Church, Middlesex and being located in the lower part of the parish, it naturally became the chapel of ease for the lower precincts of the new parish. The first mention of the church as the Lower Chapel seems to have been in a vestry ordered of 30th January, 1666/7 when a lay reader was appointed for it, under that title, and during the next quarter century of the vestry record, the names "Lower Chapel" and "Peanacktanck" were used interchangeably in referring to the old building.

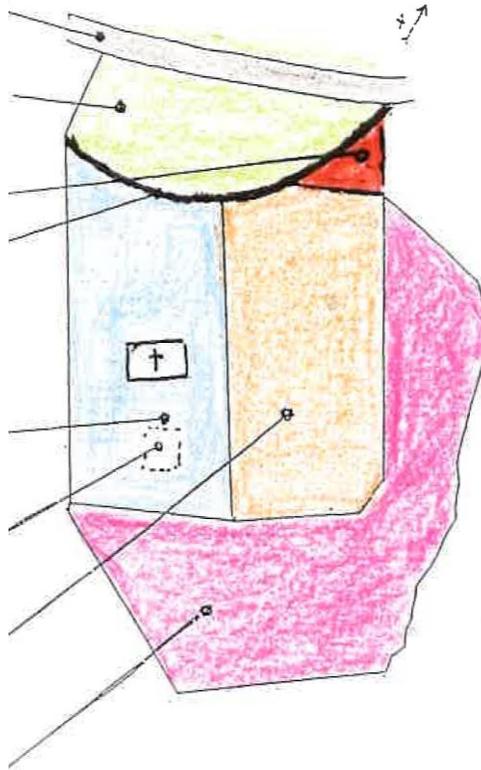
Episcopal Church had not set up an exclusive claim to Lower Church. The Baptists and Methodists used the church..

- October 3, 1857, the vestrymen of the Protestant Episcopal Church by motion in the Circuit Court of Middlesex had appointed their trustees to take possession of the land and church. Robert Healy , on behalf of the Methodists refused to turn over the church key. His fellow trustees began a suit against Healy and the Methodists.
- March 28, 1860 – The suit against Mr. Healy and the Methodist Episcopal Church South was settled in favor of Healy and the Methodists. Deed Book 22, Pgs. 210-211

Through the years the church property has expanded to over 18 acres. See sketch on the next page.

Property Growth of Lower United Methodist Church

- Route 33
- 3.43 acres
- From Dutton 1950's
- .323 acres 1998
- Gift from Wright
- Old Route 33
- Original
- "Church Quarter"
- Deeded by
- Grymes 1795
- Healy Plot
- Deeded to Healy
- 1879
- 4 acres
- From B. Wood
- 1959
- 6.854 acres
- From Gordon
- 2001



The History Committee of Lower United Methodist Church has compiled this booklet as an update to the book, *The History of Lower Church* by H. W. French. We referenced the vestry book of Christ Church, *The Colonial Churches of Tidewater Virginia* by George Carrington Mason, the Middlesex County Court House records and old Lower Church meeting minutes.

Many new things have happened since Mr. French compiled his book in 1947/48.

Lower United Methodist Church is unique. It has been witness to the growth of our country and its people. It is just as vibrant and vital today as it was three hundred years ago.

With God's blessing may it continue to be a beacon of hope and inspiration for future generations.

Lower United Methodist Church
Middlesex County, Virginia



1717 – 2017

*A brief history compiled by the History Committee of
Lower United Methodist Church*