

THE HISTORY OF TRURO PARISH IN VIRGINIA

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The history of Truro Parish in Virginia by Philip Slaughter & Edward L. Goodwin

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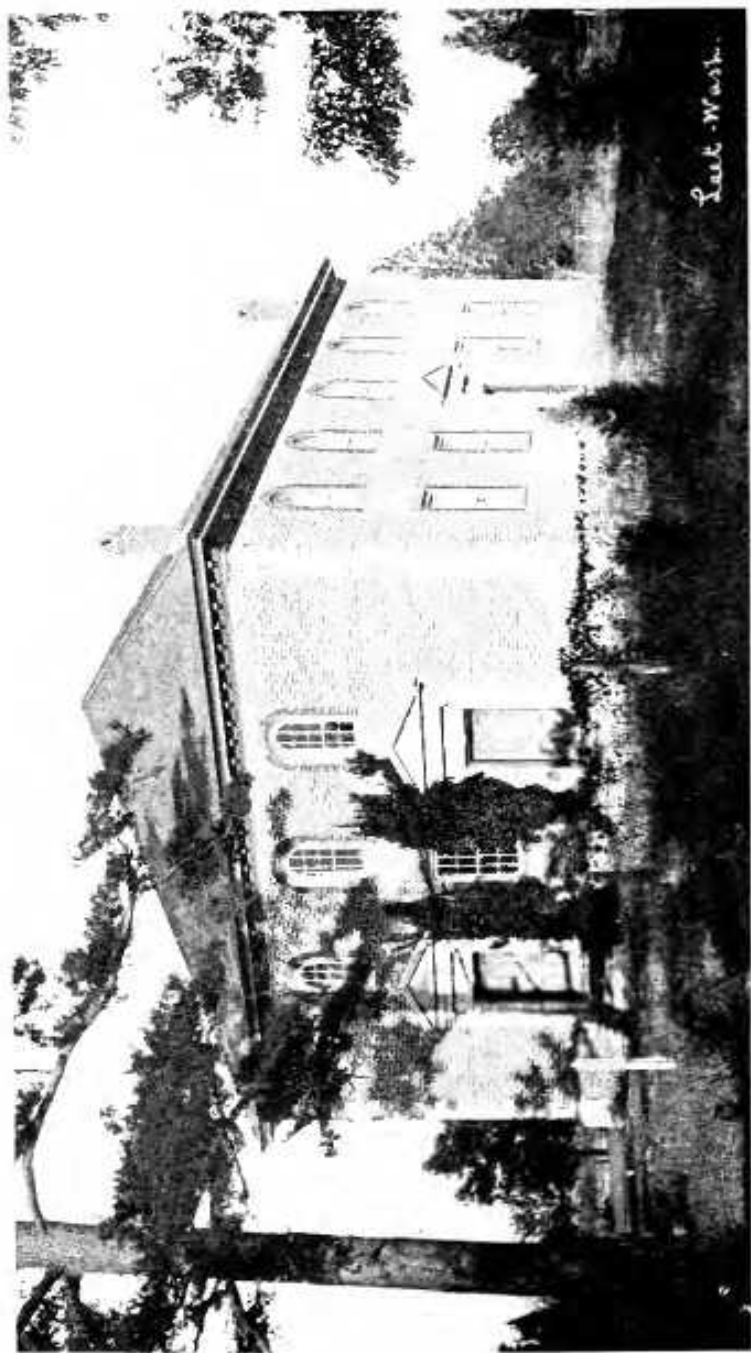
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PHILIP SLAUGHTER & EDWARD L. GOODWIN

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IN VIRGINIA**



Parish Church

THE HISTORY
OF
TRURO PARISH
IN VIRGINIA

BY

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Edited

With Notes and Addenda

By REV. EDWARD L. GOODWIN

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INTRODUCTION

When the English colonists made their first permanent settlement on the shores of Virginia they came to establish themselves as an English people in America. They did not emigrate for purposes of robbery, nor yet to escape conditions which were not to their liking at home, but they brought with them all they could of the old England, including, as a matter of course, the English Church and English law, ecclesiastical and civil. They brought, too, as the event was to prove, the English genius for adapting old forms of government to new conditions of life. Thus in process of time the Parish and the Vestry in Virginia became quite different from the same institutions in the old country, though still based upon the broad sanctions of the ecclesiastical law of England. The Parish was established and its bounds were fixed not by tradition, but by statute, and the Vestry, from an annual meeting of all the ratepayers to choose Churchwardens and discuss parochial affairs, became practically a close corporation of twelve of "The most able and discreet persons" in the Parish. These divided with the County Court the responsibility of local government, having as

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their especial charge the maintenance of religion and the oversight of all things pertaining thereto in the domain of charity and morals. These Vestrymen were described by Jefferson as being "Usually the most discreet farmers, so distributed through their Parish that every part of it may be under the eye of some one of them. They are well acquainted with the details and economy of private life, and they find sufficient inducements to execute their charge well in their philanthropy, in the approbation of their neighbors, and the distinction which that gives them."

No Parish in the Colony had a Vestry more distinguished in its personnel, or more fully qualified for their positions, than the Parish of Truro. Of its earlier members indeed little has come down to us but their names inscribed on almost every page of the scant records remaining to tell of the settlement of these upper reaches of the "Northern Neck," and the establishment of religion and civilization in what was then but a wilderness. But later her Vestrymen are found ranking among the first gentlemen of Virginia in position and influence. Eleven of them sat at various times in the House of Burgesses. Two of them, the Fairfaxes, were members of "His Majesty's Council for Virginia." Another of her Vestrymen was George Mason, one of the first among the founders of the State and the great political thinkers of his age; while still another was declared to be the