

A
History
of the
Aberdour Presbyterian Church
Jarratt, Virginia
and its People
in our
Centennial Year, 1984



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HISTORY
OF THE
ABERDOUR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
JARRATT, VIRGINIA
AND ITS PEOPLE
IN OUR
CENTENNIAL YEAR, 1984

Dedicated
to the
Glory of God
and
In Loving Memory
of
Those Who Have Gone Before
and
To Challenge Those Who
Will Follow

Compiled by
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1984

Very few enduring things or those of any worth just happen. The soils must be cultivated, the seeds planted, a time for growth, and then the harvest. We of the Aberdour Presbyterian Church in this year of 1984 have a rich harvest for which we should be very grateful, due in large part to the sincere trust in our God, and the hard work of the ancestors of many of our present day members.

We are speaking, of course, of the early Scottish settlers who came to this area of Virginia in 1871, and later. First to arrive were Mr. and Mrs. Keith Thomson, Mrs. Thomson being the former Margaret Rae, from Aberdeenshire, Scotland, with their young family. Mr. Thomson had been a member of the Queen's Guard in the Royal Palace in London. Having found military life not to his liking, he and his wife decided to come to America. They first settled on a farm near what is now the Emporia Country Club, later moving to the Thomson farm on Highway 612, a portion of which is still owned by Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Thompson, a grandson of Mr. and Mrs. Keith Thomson.

Back in Scotland, Mr. and Mrs. George Rae, Sr., parents of Mrs. Thomson, suffered a heavy loss when a fire swept through all the outbuildings on their farm, "Windy Heads", near the town of New Aberdour, Aberdeenshire. Because of this loss, and having hear of the opening up of the land to homesteaders in the United States, they decided to come to America. They packed

their personal belongings, and, along with most of their immediate family, took a boat to New York, then on to Norfolk, Virginia, with plans to visit their son-in-law and daughter in Virginia, then continue to the far West to make their home in the new country. This was the year 1873.

They were so well-pleased with Southside Virginia and the cost of the land was so much less than what they had been accustomed to in Scotland that they bought the "Meadowbank Farm" on the old Allen Road, now Route 610, between Emporia and Jarratt, and settled there. The farm is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Fowlie Rae, a grandson of Mr. and Mrs. George Rae, Sr. Mr. and Mrs. Rae have built a handsome home on the original homesite.

Other members of the George Rae, Sr. family soon followed their parents to the new country. Among these were Mr. and Mrs. Alexander (Sandy) Pyper, who brought with them Miss Isabella Cowie who was engaged to and married Alexander Rae in 1877. Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Rae made their home at "Merry Oaks Farm" on the old Allen Road. This farm and home is also still owned and occupied by members of the Rae Family, being owned by Miss Isabella Maitland, a great-granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Rae, Sr.

With Miss Isabella Cowie already over here and married to Mr. Alexander Rae, Sr. it follows that more of the Cowies would come. Mrs. Isabella Cowie Rae's father,

Mr. John Cowie, Sr., whose wife had died in 1873, and was buried in Scotland, along with his sons, James and Thomas, who never married, and his other son, John, Jr., and his family, his wife being the former Margaret Johnson, and their four-year old daughter, Isabella, came over to this country.

The Cowie's had not been able to buy a farm in Scotland, but Mr. Alexander Rae, Sr. had been able to secure the "Brown Farm" for them, with the family arriving in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1881. The sons, James and Thomas, became stone cutters, living in Massachusetts, with the John Cowies, Sr. and Jr., coming to Greenville County and making their home on the farm. This farm remained in the Cowie family until 1956, when Mrs. Frances Goodrich Webb, granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Cowie, Jr. sold the farm to Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Squire. The farm is now owned by Dr. and Mrs. Peter Squire, who have begun restoration of the old house on the farm.

Miss Isabella Cowie, known to many of the present day members of Aberdour as "Bella" or "Miss Bella", was the only child of Mr. and Mrs. John Cowie, Jr., born in Scotland, coming over with her parents in 1881, when she was four years of age. "Miss Bella" remembered well having Mary Massey, a young girl of twelve years of age, who was supposed to look out for her and help Mrs. Cowie on the trip over. "Miss Bella" still managed to get lost on the boat, which "Miss Bella" also remembered well.

Miss Isabella Cowie died on October 23, 1961, the last of the Cowie's born in Scotland who had come to America.

By the way, Mary Massey later married Andrew Howie, who had also come over to America from Scotland.

It is not known just how this large family, strong in the Presbyterian faith, worshipped during the early years. They gathered together for Sunday School as often as possible, and Sunday afternoons were spent teaching the catechism to the youths in the family, with the children memorizing the Westminster Catechism along with all the old and familiar portions of the Bible. Living conditions were so different from what we are accustomed to, and people of different denominations felt they needed each other so much, that often a minister would find himself preaching to Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian, each eager to hear the Word of God by those trained to interpret the Word.

Let us look at the religious structure of the Presbyterian Church in this area at that time. In 1872, the Presbytery of East Hanover had within its bounds thirty-eight of the one hundred counties in Virginia. In sixteen of these thirty-eight counties, there were Presbyterians, leaving twenty-three counties with no Presbyterians. This was a disheartening fact for the Presbytery to accept, but to meet the challenge the Presbytery realized that they must find a minister whose

primary task would be to serve as an evangelist "charged with some missionary responsibilities."

It was not until ten years later, when it was reported that some portions of the field were increasing so rapidly in population that "a new tide of life was surging," and the time to advance had come, that Presbytery found the evangelist, William Addison Campbell, a pastor in South Richmond. The new evangelist was untiring in his labors. In his first report given at the fall meeting of Presbytery in 1882, he stated he had visited eight of the counties in which there was no Presbyterian Church, and had held protracted meetings in six of them; he had preached 83 times and conducted 26 other services. He had taken preliminary steps for the organization of four new churches and had arranged for 10 fields of labor. In his last and final report (1891) he noted that he had added 10 new churches to Presbytery's rolls, and three other congregations had been brought into existence.

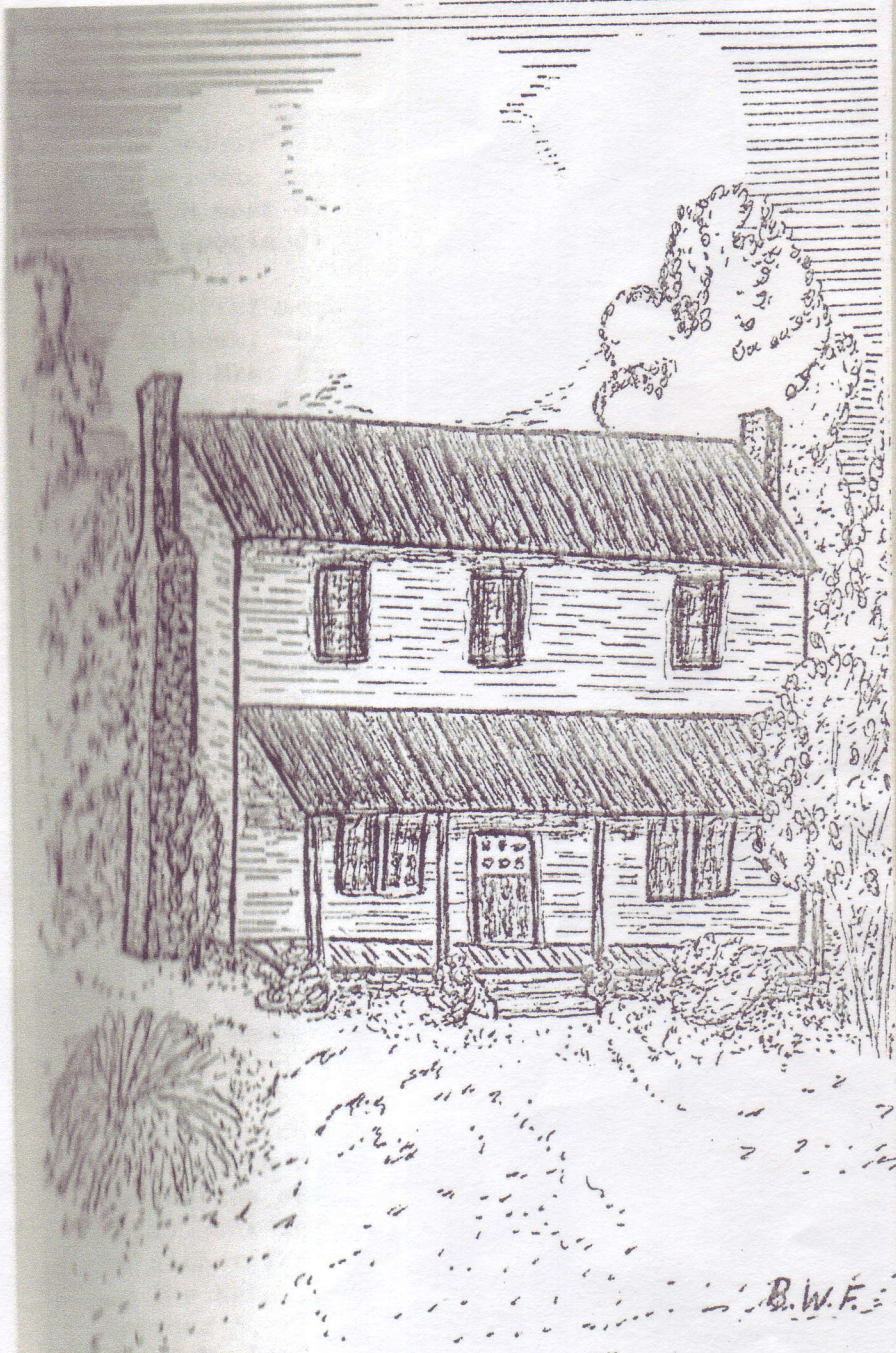
Aberdour was certainly on the list of churches, being organized in the year 1884. Virginia Presbyterians in American Life, a history of Hanover Presbytery from 1755 to 1980, reads:

"Evangelist W. A. Campbell preached a week in Jarratt and Merry Oaks. People responded and a church was formed, most of whose charter members were received by certificate from the Church of Scotland. The name,

"Aberdour", taken as the church's name, was the name of the parish to which most of them had belonged." (in Scotland) This was the year 1884.

Charter members of the church were as follows: Mr. and Mrs. George Rae, Sr., Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Rae, Sr., Mr. and Mrs. John Cowie, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Keith Thomson, Sr., Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Pyper, Mr. John Cowie, Sr., Mr. and Mrs. William Sangster, and Dr. George Feild. The first elders were Mr. George Rae, Sr. and Dr. George Feild. The first deacons were Mr. Keith Thomson, Sr., Mr. John Cowie Sr., Mr. Alexander "Sandy" Pyper, and Mr. Alexander Rae, Sr. The people worshipped and held their meetings in the parlor of the home of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Rae, Sr., "Merry Oaks", but felt the need for their own place of worship.

The year 1888 was an important one in the life of the young congregation, for it was in that year that they decided to build a church. It is understood that all the lumber needed for the building was cut from lands owned by the members, and sawed at a sawmill also owned by one of the church members. The building was finished in the summer of 1888, and a dedication service was held during the fall. The dedication sermon was given by either The Reverend William A. Campbell or The Reverend Rosenborough. It was on October 5, 1888, that a donation was sent to Mr. John Cowie, Sr., from family and friends back in Scotland, to help defray the cost of the building.



"MERRY OAKS"

where worship services were held until
the church was built