

Byrd Presbyterian Church has worshipped for over 140 years at its fourth and present meeting site, situated ½ mile north of Virginia Route 6, on Goochland County Route 614 in Lickinghole District.

The life of Byrd Church began and has remained through its more than 230 years in the rural countryside of Virginia. This continuing congregation has experienced good years of growth and encouragement, and it has faced lean times that would have destroyed organizations of lesser commitment. Years ago a writer said, "It has been enrolled in three Presbyteries: for eighty-one years in Old Hanover; for the following fifty-four in West Hanover; since 1883 in East Hanover." To this account we must add that since 1958 it has been within the bounds of the new Hanover Presbytery.

For one-third of its history Byrd had no installed minister and for practically all of those other pastored years the congregation shared in the Gospel ministry with neighboring churches, notably Providence in Louisa, Genito and Providence in Powhatan, and Hebron in Goochland County. With the passing of generations it has developed qualities of hope and flexibility and endurance, and it has learned to share the fruits of its survival and ministry for Christ.

FROM ORIGIN TO THE 19TH CENTURY

Early in the 18th Century missionary workers from New Castle and other Presbyteries travelled in the central and southern regions of Virginia, preaching and forming communities of Presbyterians who thereafter could worship together. Some of these groups gained enough strength to become centers from which 'meeting houses' developed. Byrd Church has endured as the descendant congregation of the meeting house founded in Goochland County.

On November 1, 1748 the Rev. Samuel Davies, known as "the apostle of Presbyterianism in Virginia", obtained a license under the Act of Toleration, by petition to the General Court in Williamsburg, to add three more meeting houses to the four he had been serving. These new locations were in Caroline, Louisa, and Goochland Counties. His license permitted him to hold services in Goochland on Mr. Tucker-Woodson's land near the Court House. The records of Hanover Presbytery, formed in 1755 and with which the Goochland meeting house was affiliated, show that Woodson was a Presbyterian Elder who attended the very early meetings of this newly organized Presbyterian Church Court. They further indicate that Presbytery met at "Mr. Woodson's at Goochland Court House" in March and August, 1756. Research has suggested that this Woodson property was part of or adjacent to that upon which "Brightly" stands today.

Between 1755 and 1760, while Davies was being assisted by the Rev. John Todd of Brunswick Presbytery, the focus of Presbyterianism in Goochland shifted toward the upper reaches of the county near the Great Byrd Creek and Elk Hill. This change was

reflected in a petition to Hanover Presbytery dated April 27, 1757, from "people about the Byrd", for the services of the Rev. John Martin. Henry Patillo, a Scotsman, succeeded Martin and worked from 1758 until 1762 with the congregations of Buck Island and Willis Creek, as well as with the "people about the Byrd."

Under Patillo's ministry the first parcel of land in Goochland was purchased for Presbyterian use. In a deed of conveyance for one acre of land, more or less, dated January 12, 1759, Michael Smith sold this portion of his property for 22 shillings to John Page, John Lewis, Charles Rice, and Archelus Jarret, Elders of "the Presbyterian congregation on the Byrd." A written tradition of 1883 stated, "When a regular church was organized in Goochland, the place of meeting for worship was moved from Mr. Woodson's farm to a house near the mouth of Byrd Creek, hence its name 'The Byrd Church'. The ruins of this building near Elk Hill depot on the R. & A. Rl. Rd. are still pointed out as the cradle of Presbyterianism in Goochland County."

BYRD CHURCH IN THE 19TH CENTURY

October 12, 1811 marked the beginning of the work of the Rev. J. D. Logan at Byrd: in January of that year the church's membership numbered 66 white and 5 black persons; George Woodson Payne and Josiah Leake were the only Ruling Elders. Byrd and Providence were fielded together, and Byrd's Session supervised the Columbia and Lickinghole places of worship as well as its own. Under Mr. Logan's ministry John Woodson, John Forbes, and Archibald Bryce, Jr. were elected Ruling Elders, the Columbia site was closed as a worship site in 1816, and in 1819 a committee was appointed to provide for repairs to the old Byrd church building.

Meeting at the Lickinghole Church in July of 1821, the congregation called the Rev. J. D. Paxton to be their pastor. He was succeeded the Rev. James Wharey, called as minister at a meeting at the old Byrd Church on April 24, 1825. Mr. Wharey was installed when the Presbytery met at Lickinghole Church May 27, 1826, and served until his death in 1842. No record exists to show that the old Byrd site was used after 1825. Changing conditions in the community and church dictated relocation to the Lickinghole Church rather than the congregation's remaining on and restoring their Byrd Creek property. When the old site was abandoned there were 53 white and 4 black members on the roll.

Lickinghole Church, old when Byrd began to meet there, rapidly deteriorated. On May 2, 1837, Samuel Finch and Mary Christian Finch, his wife, conveyed one acre of land to Presbyterian Elders George Woodson Payne, Josiah Leake, and Archibald Bryce "for the express purpose of building thereon a Presbyterian Church." Erecting the new building was a community effort in which residents of the nearby village and area of Belham worked together to make the brick and put up the structure. It was ready for occupancy by the 35 members of the

congregation before 1839. The first Bible used at the new church, a leather-bound volume, was inscribed on its cover with these words: "From J. F. Miller to the Union Church, Goochland, 1838."

Controversy within the Presbyterian denomination throughout the period of Mr. Wharey's ministry took its toll and resulted in local church divisions on issues such as the extent of required strictness on doctrinal interpretation and the institution of slavery. Those members of Byrd who in 1883 compiled their perceptions of the church's history implied that this widespread dispute influenced the naming of the new church building. They said, "The most commonly received opinion on this point, is that the building took the name 'Union' because it was built by those favoring each faction in the controversy of 1837. And as tending to confirm this opinion, may be found, on page 79 of record, resolutions adopted by the Session at its first meeting in the new house, expressing regret for the scism in the church, and urging their members not to discuss the controverted issues between the Old and New School parties....The Presbytery of West Hanover 1839 took exception to the above mentioned resolutions, and this resulted in two of the Elders, Messrs. Payne and Bryce, with certain of the members leaving the church. As Mr. Forbes' name had disappeared prior to this, but one Elder, Mr. Josiah Leake was left; but on April 11, 1841, Mr. Walter D. Leake was elected and ordained to the Office of Ruling Elder."

Mr. Wharey was followed by a succession of seven ministers, whose names and pastoral tenure at Byrd (called at different times "Union" or "Brick Union") are here listed: James M. Allen, 1842-1852; Henry V. D. Nivins, 1853-1854; J. D. Dudley, 1855-1867; L. Taylor Martin, 1868-1870; L. B. Johnston, 1871-1880; Harry H. McLean, 1881-1882; and J. Spencer Smith, 1892-1894.

Ruling Elders elected during these years were Samuel D. Leake, Dr. Thomas Curd, Dr. Francis B. Watkins, Dr. G. W. Harris, A. B. Kean, Dr. Moses E. Treadway, J. W. Pleasants, William Pace, Judge A. R. Leake, D. B. Graves, R. F. Vaughan, and E. H. Argyle. Issac W. Pleasants was the first Deacon of Byrd Church, ordained in 1859, and other men who served as Deacons during this period were Dr. William Morris, J. M. Vaughan, Charles L. Leake, John G. Wilkerson, William Thomas, and Frank Breathed.

BYRD CHURCH IN THIS CENTURY

In 1931, following the pastorates of N. B. Campbell, 1903-1907, and R. V. Lancaster, 1917-1920, a fruitful relationship of 16 years was established with the Rev. W. T. McDonald. The first Sabbath School, which had been founded during McLean's tenure, in 1881, was reorganized under McDonald's ministry, and the congregation increased to 85 members before his retirement in 1948.

The Rev. James A. Marrow, Jr. became Byrd's pastor in 1950 and remained until June, 1954. He was the first minister to

occupy the church's manse, which was completed in the spring of 1950, and during his tenure the only addition to the church building within its history, an educational unit, was dedicated November 9, 1952 in memory of Mr. G. F. Cox. In that year 93 members were reported on Byrd's roll, the largest number of communicants in 200 years of the church's life.

The Rev. Douglas Paulson succeeded Mr. Marrow in 1954, remaining for less than a year and being followed by the Rev. Donald H. Goshorn, who served Byrd from 1956 to 1959. After a period during which students and supply ministers filled the pulpit and the duo-church field relationship between Byrd and Hebron was discontinued, the Rev. John T. Finney was installed for a tenure from 1963 into 1964 which was cut short due to his ill health. From 1967 to 1969 the Rev. W. Paul White was the installed pastor. He was followed in the summer of 1972 by the Rev. Forrest D. Sheets, who from that time to the present has served as the 'tentmaker' minister of Byrd while working as an adjunct staff person with Hanover Presbytery in the area of town and country church ministries.

Ministry by the laity has always been significant in the Byrd Congregation. The Women's organization of Byrd was revitalized in 1947. This organization continued to be an active and productive group of the church with monthly meetings and helpful projects. Lifetime Memberships have been awarded to Mrs. Nellie Morton, Mrs. Annie Ragland, and Mrs. Stella Ware. The first of many women of Byrd to become Church Officers were Mrs. Erminie L. (S. S.) Haden and Mrs. Evelyn M. Royster (M. L.), who were ordained as Deacons in 1966, and Mrs. Haden became a Ruling Elder in 1969. Names of these women will be found listed elsewhere in this sketch with other Officers of Byrd.

Improvements in the church plant have been made with members and friends of Byrd participating in the work in active ways. A new furnace was installed during the early 1950's, and in 1956 new flooring was put in and the sanctuary was replastered. A new organ was obtained in February, 1959, and in 1963 the pews were completely refinished by one of the best friends Byrd Church, Mr. S. S. Haden.

"The Byrd Cemetery Company", incorporated in 1884, in more recent years has operated with a Board of Trustees which holds and administers the affairs of the Company. In 1971 Mrs. Sallie Eades donated a parcel of land as a road to the back section of the Cemetery, and not long thereafter discussion began with regard to the erection of a barrier which would prevent unwanted traffic through the burial areas. A picturesque brick barrier was completed in September, 1980, by Mr. S. S. Haden who was engaged by the Board of Trustees. While the Company is not affiliated with the church organization, the finished work has measurably enhanced the beauty of this venerable site of Presbyterian worship.

In addition to Hunter S. Bowles, Sr., the first Ruling Elder Emeritus of Byrd Presbyterian Church, mention is here made of known Officers of this congregation whose names have not appeared elsewhere in this historical sketch as Church Officers:

Roger Alvis
 C. C. Brooking
 Edward M. Brooking
 John H. Brown
 Ben Carter
 Eugene B. Dameron
 James B. Dunn
 Gilbert J. Eades
 James B. Ferguson
 Edward F. Fulwider
 Ramona Fulwider
 Carroll A. Gathright, Jr.
 Lewis K. Gathright
 Thornton E. Gathright
 William A. Gathright
 Erminie L. Haden
 Thelma M. Hatcher
 Julian Kean
 Dewey S. Kirstein
 D. Knapperberger
 A. K. Leake
 Oliver C. Lippy
 William Miller

Frank C. Moultrup
 D. Lewis Nichols
 Parrott R. Nixon
 Russell H. Pace
 Willie J. Pace
 Dabney W. Phillips
 Helena M. Phillips
 Peter Phillips
 C. H. C. Preston
 Albert L. Pyle
 Neva T. Pyle
 Myrtle T. Ragland
 E. Hugh Rhodes
 Evelyn M. Royster
 Joseph H. Scales
 Roselle F. Scales
 Thomas C. Taylor
 Peter Tredway
 Frank Ullmer
 Robert F. Vaughan
 A. B. Ware
 Harold G. Ware
 John T. Wilkinson



This brochure is presented as a popular historical sketch of Byrd Presbyterian Church. Resources used in its preparation may be found in the Record Room at Goochland Court House, Union Theological Seminary Library and the Virginia State Library in Richmond, the Historical Foundation at Montreat, N.C., and in the formal Minutes of Byrd's Session from 1893. In some instances this writing offers variations in content from sketches produced in former years.

Forrest D. Sheets
 Goochland, Virginia.
 October, 1980

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BYRD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH GOOCHLAND, VIRGINIA 1748