

Monday, July 18, 2021

Dear Friends,

We truly have a “Godly heritage” of churches in the Diocese of Southern Virginia, in our history, architecture, art, and worship. It’s worth taking some time to explore that heritage!

Cortes Pauls and I made a fascinating trip to Smithfield this past Friday, July 16, to confirm the directions and specify the driving route for our upcoming church field trip to historic St. Luke’s on Saturday, August 14. We’ll have a complete tour of St. Luke’s, the original structure of which dates to about 1685, on our August trip. More on that later.

This past Friday, however, we made a longer stop along the way at a smaller and very beautiful and historic church in North Prince George County, near Burrowsville, thanks to Bobby Swineford. Bobby arranged for us to tour Brandon Episcopal Church, one of the oldest parishes in Virginia. The history of “Martin’s Brandon” goes all the way back to 1613, when Captain John Martin patented Brandon Plantation, south of the James River. Martin (1562-1632), having previously sailed on voyages with Sir Francis Drake, arrived with the first English colonists at Jamestown in 1607, and was one of the seven men, including Captains John Smith and Christopher Newport, named to the colonial council by the Virginia Company. Martin received a patent for 5,000 acres of land for Brandon Plantation as early as 1613-1616. The Plantation was named for the family of Martin’s wife Mary, daughter of Sir Richard Brandon.

Four churches have been erected at Brandon Plantation since that time. The first (between 1613-1618) and second were wooden structures, the third in 1723 in the colonial brick Georgian style. The present church, along Route 10, was built in the 1850’s of brick covered with stucco, in the Tuscan style, with a gabled entry, an attached bell tower, clasping buttresses, and rounded windows. The master carpenter (what we today would call the general contractor) on that mid-nineteenth century construction project was the great-great-grandfather of Barry Royer, our tour guide this past Friday and an old friend of Bobby’s. Barry is a life-long member of Brandon Episcopal Church.

Barry showed us one of his church’s most cherished possessions, the English-made silver communion service given to the Church by John Winthrop, who left in his 1656 will 1,000 pounds of tobacco to buy the silver chalice and paten (see these in the pictures below of Barry and Cortes). This is believed to be the oldest silver communion service in this country in continuous possession of the original church to which it was given. And this is thanks to the church members who hid the silver at the bottom of a well during the American Revolution and the Civil War!

Brandon also has seven beautiful stained glass windows, including two Tiffany windows, given by members of the church. Another treasure is the pipe organ constructed in 1873 by Henry Erben, a well-known 19th Century New York organ-builder, whose firm built 52 organs for churches in Virginia. Ten of these organs still exist, and five are still in the original buildings for which they were constructed. Three of these are essentially unaltered — at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, in the old Western State Hospital at Staunton, and here at Brandon Episcopal Church. This organ was completely restored in 1980 — Danny, we have a copy of the

remediation program from 1980, featuring Five Bagatelles, Op. 47, by Antonio Dvorak.

Many thanks to Bobby Swineford for arranging our visit, and to Barry Royer and Wanda Temple for the guided tour. This was a fascinating introduction to our “Godly Heritage,” right here in the heart of the Diocese of Southern Virginia. May we preserve our past as we look to our future.

Dick Hickman, Senior Warden



Historic Brandon Episcopal Church (parish established 1613)



4th Church Building at Brandon Plantation (constructed during 1850's)



The Altar



The Communion Service: English Silver Chalice and Plate (circa 1656)



Five of the Seven Windows (Can you find the two Tiffany windows?)



The second window (directly above) is below the organ, which is in the balcony and can be reached only by climbing the circular staircase located inside the bell tower. Access to the bell tower is through an outside door.