Reflections of Social Change: Burial Patterns in Colonial Fairfax County, Virginia

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REFLECTIONS OF SOCIAL CHANGE:
BURIAL PATTERNS IN COLONIAL FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology
The College of William and Mary in Virginia
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Kimberly Wells
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

In this study, burial ground patternings will be examined with respect to Episcopal Churches in colonial Fairfax County, Virginia, between the early seventeenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century. In Fairfax, Episcopal churches built prior to the early nineteenth century had graveyards in the surrounding churchyard. Those later in date generally lack attached burial grounds. This change in Episcopal church and burial association is attributed most frequently to a contemporaneous increased concern with protecting the public health. However, the reasons for innovations in burial ground placement actually seem to be more complex: they reflect important changes in many Fairfax County social institutions. For example, prior to the Revolution, the Church was a pivotal force in civic affairs. However with the rise in dissenting religious sects and the ensuing political turmoil, the Episcopal Church lost its preeminent position and the state took control over many matters once the sole provenance of the Church. The dead, by tradition protected for eternity in the hallowed grounds of the Episcopal churchyard, fell instead under civil jurisdiction. Burial grounds owned and maintained by corporate interests, and disassociated from churches, soon appeared throughout the landscape. Ultimately, the changes in church and graveyard patterns of association in Fairfax County serve to illustrate the remarkable change in world view between the colonial and post-Revolutionary periods in Anglo-America -- from a preoccupation with the ideological and religious to a focus on the secular and urbane.

Field survey was conducted and the relative positions of church and graveyards documented. The presence or absence of burial grounds and date of construction was noted for each Episcopal Church in Fairfax County. Photographs provided documentary evidence. Archival research was conducted and thick description provided of the social, political, economic and religious atmosphere in colonial and post-Revolutionary period Fairfax County. As the legally mandated official religion in Fairfax County, the Episcopal Church was closely bound to temporal affairs and highly integrated into every aspect of the political and economic milieu. Not surprisingly, those events which affected the social structure of the county also were reflected in changes in the Church and its customs.

The results of both field and archival research suggest a positive association between social change and evolving Anglican church burial traditions from the seventeenth through nineteenth century in Fairfax County. Providing silent but clear witness, extant graveyards add their testimony to the story of dramatic culture shift during a period of revolutionary change in America.
REFLECTIONS OF SOCIAL CHANGE
INTRODUCTION

Taken as a whole, the study of American cemeteries and gravemarkers may legitimately lay claim to having a respectable place within the total fabric of American Studies [and their study can serve to illuminate] the discrete cultural values which interfuse these sites and artifacts. (Meyer 1989:2)

Statement of Purpose

This investigation began with a casual observation: most Episcopal churches in Fairfax County lack the quaint grave-filled yards so often associated with historic churches such as Bruton Parish in Williamsburg and Christ Church in Alexandria. Preliminary investigation revealed, in fact, that while colonial period and “country” churches generally have graveyards, modern churches and those in towns do not have attached cemeteries. Instead they are more often surrounded by an asphalt jungle of parking lots. Accordingly, this study began with the simple research question: Why are there burials in the yard of Christ Church (built in 1773), while there are none surrounding, for example, the 1948 Emmanuel Episcopal Church?

In Fairfax County, prohibition of burials within town limits was first legislated in 1809 in Alexandria. A general ban on intramural burials across Virginia was enacted in 1876 which stated, “No land shall be condemned [for burying ground] under the provisions of this act within the corporate limits of any city or town, or within four hundred yards of any residence outside of the corporate limits of any city or town, without the consent of the owner of such residence.” (Acts and Joint Resolutions Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Virginia at the Session of 1875-76:38) Since then, as is true for much of the United States, most of the Fairfax County dead have been buried in large, corporately owned and “perpetually maintained” cemeteries located outside city limits. (Schuyler 1979)
In general, historians have explained the ban of intramural burials solely as an attempt to protect public health. (Kaye 1991:4) Public protection is certainly one reason. However, as will be demonstrated, it is not the only reason behind the disassociation of graveyards and churches. In the case of Fairfax County, Virginia, a complete description of the events which led to the separation of churches and burials must include consideration of important changes in the nature of the relationship between the Episcopal Church and government, other denominations, and the social world during the early history of the county.

In colonial Virginia, the Anglican Church was an integral and important element in many aspects of life. And, by both law and custom, this religious institution determined burial placement through the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. However, the Anglican Church’s control over burial placements ended as its influence waned in other aspects of Fairfax County society and its power in the government brought to conclusion in the late nineteenth century. Variations in graveyard patterning in Fairfax County reflect profound changes in the social and ideological milieus of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Accordingly, the hypothesis for this paper is: The disassociation of the Episcopal Church and burials in nineteenth century Fairfax County happened for reasons beyond a concern for public health; it reflects as well significant social and ideological change which occurred in the county during the transition between the colonial and Republican periods.

Research Setting

For this work, the chronological focus will be from the first settlement of Fairfax County in the seventeenth century until the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The geographic focus will be Fairfax County, Virginia and Alexandria, Virginia. The two are expressed here as paired yet separate to indicate Alexandria’s unusual place within Fairfax County. While Alexandria was part of Fairfax for the greater part of the period under study, it was ceded to the District of Columbia in 1791. Congress formally took possession of the town on February 27, 1801. (Smith and Miller 1989:51) However, Alexandria’s citizenry was permitted to remain under Virginia law, and continued
to play a vital part in the life and economy of Fairfax County. However, after a few decades of District life, the people of Alexandria petitioned to be returned to Virginia. Their request was granted in 1846.

Alexandria was an official part of Fairfax County for the majority of the period under consideration, and continued to play an essential role in the county even when it was not legally bound there. For the purposes of this paper, then, the town will be considered an integral element of the larger Fairfax County community including that period between 1801 and 1810 when it was not by law connected to the county. For, as Netherton et al (1978:58) have pointed out, the history of Fairfax County is for the most part told in the story of Alexandria from its incorporation in 1749.

The Episcopal Church has been chosen as the subject for primary focus. This focus reflects the substantial role the Church played in the early history of the colony of Virginia. In the colonial period it was at the core of nearly every aspect of life -- it was important in government, politics, the economy and in the social life of every citizen. In the beginning, it was the only religion recognized or permitted by law in the colony. As such, extant colonial churches in Fairfax County are of the Episcopal denomination. It is these structures which are associated with graveyards. Accordingly, the Episcopal Church has been chosen as the focus for this research because of the significant role it occupied in Virginia's history and the rich documentary and material data base which have remained concerning the Church.

Various names are used to reference the Episcopal Church throughout available literature. Use depends, in part, upon the author, but also reflects the time frame under discussion. Accordingly, in this thesis, several names will be used to refer to the Episcopal Church of England in Virginia; the different names will reflect the time period under consideration.

In the early colonial period, the formal title for the Church was “The Church of England in the Colony of Virginia”. The Anglican Church was used in the shorthand. (Bruce 1964, Brydon 1957, Slaughter 1907) In this paper, both will be used to refer to the pre-nineteenth century church.
In 1789, following the American Revolution, the Episcopal Church in Virginia separated from the Church of England and became the “Protestant Episcopal Church in the Commonwealth of Virginia.” (Brydon 1947:72) The acceptable shorthand term, which will be used primarily within this text, is simply “the Episcopal Church”. Accordingly, the name Anglican refers to the early colonial church while Episcopal references the post-1789 Church. Some church historians, most notably George Brydon (1957), also refer simply to “the Church”, a general term which will also be used here to refer to the Episcopal Church during any time period.

**Theory and Methodology**

Following Dethlefson and Deetz (1966), described changes in graveyard location patterns will be correlated to periods of evolution in the cultural history of the area. The intent will be to derive an appropriate explanation for changes in nineteenth century graveyard placements. Emerging patterns in the artifact assemblage (here, burial grounds) are assumed to have occurred in response to social change, just as Dethlefson and Deetz (1966) demonstrated that stylistic changes in individual tombstones correspond to social and ideological changes in colonial Massachusetts. Record of such change can be found in documents from the period. When, as Deetz' (1977:25) suggested, such written records are analyzed in conjunction with the material culture remains, each should demonstrate a pattern clearly correlated with the other. Burial customs are one of the most conservative social elements and not easily subject to modification. (Binford 1971) Presumably, then, any changes in burial practices should reflect profound social transformations.

In descriptions of variations in graveyard patterning, terminology will be used that was developed and employed by researchers Henry Glassie and Gregory Jeane to describe the Upland South Folk Cemetery complex. (Jeane 1989) As employed by Jeane, the terms describe both appearance of the cemetery as well as its location. In this research, however, the terminology will be used just to describe location.

Three phases of cemetery evolution have been described: pioneer, transitional, and modern. The term used to describe each stage “...clearly reflects the dynamic aspect of the culture.” (Jeane
The dynamic and fluctuating nature of Fairfax County in the colonial period is an essential point to this thesis, and so use of a terminology reflective of dynamism is appropriate here.

The “pioneer” phase occurred in Fairfax County, as throughout Virginia, from first settlement in the seventeenth century until approximately 1750. Many of the early settlers in Virginia were from England where custom mandated the burial of the dead in consecrated churchyards adjacent to the church enclosed by a fence. (Bruce 1910; Brydon 1947; Pittenger 1957) However, in early Fairfax, churches were few in number, and because most people lived long distances from them, it was not practical to follow convention. Therefore, in the pioneer phase most settlers buried their dead in family plots located on their farms and plantations or along byways as they travelled to new settlement areas.

Use of the family burial ground remained popular and widespread throughout the colonial and into the modern period. However, churchyard burial became more frequent, and was certainly the expressed ideal from 1750 to at least 1810. The Anglican church prospered, more and more churches were built and her ministers and the Bishop’s representative urged citizens to follow tradition and bury in the churchyard. This period will be termed “transition”, for it lasted only a short time and was transitional between two traditions that many researchers have noted to be particularly American customs: family burial grounds and lawn cemeteries. (Farrell 1980; Sloane 1991; Weed 1912)

With bans on town burial beginning in the early nineteenth century, church-annexed burials became less common. This is particularly obvious for Episcopal churches, which, because it was the official church, was often situated in towns and more populous areas. Burials were prohibited in populated areas, and so churches and private enterprise alike began to build lawn cemeteries outside of town limits. Churches again were built without graveyards in this “modern” phase.

Data Sources First, a list of Episcopal churches was acquired from the Alexandria Episcopal Seminary for Fairfax County. Every church location, in the roughly 300 square mile Fairfax County
area was visited, photographed and plotted on a map. Descriptions of each church's surrounding yard were also included in the field notes. Most importantly, the location of Episcopal Churches with attached burial grounds was carefully noted.

The date of each church's construction was the next crucial piece of information gathered. Often this date is recorded on a cornerstone of the church building. Confirmation of this date was made through archival research.

A large part of this work was conducted in various archival and library holdings throughout Fairfax County. Particularly important to the investigation were documents made available through the Virginia Episcopal Theological Seminary in Alexandria, the Virginia Room of the Fairfax County Library Archives, and the Archives of Lloyd House, Alexandria. The history for each individual church was gathered, as well as that for the Episcopal denomination with emphasis on its presence in Virginia.

Important background material was provided through the study of Christian burial practices from sources available in the Virginia Episcopal Theological Seminary Library in Alexandria. The Virginia Room of the Fairfax County Library Archives and the Archives of Lloyd House, Alexandria were invaluable resources for Fairfax County history, and provided information on the state of public health in eighteenth and nineteenth century Virginia. The interlibrary resources of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History provided materials concerning religious and burial practices, plus additional resources regarding public health. Research in the Library of Congress also provided information helpful to this research. In addition, the staff of Alexandria Archeology provided extremely helpful unpublished papers concerning the history of the city of Alexandria.

Literature Review

For the archeologist, burial sites have long provided a wealth of information and research materials with which to study a wide variety of topics in human development -- from human evolution, demography and paleopathology studies to the elucidation of social structures for past
cultures, and the rise of civilizations. Burial excavations have even furnished data for speculation concerning the origins of the religious impulse. For example, the study of Pleistocene period interments has provided a glimpse into what many archeologists believe to be the first evidence of ceremonial burial, and perhaps even proof of ancient belief in a continued existence after death. (Lee 1929:6)

Until the 1960s, archeological investigation of burials and cemeteries primarily focused upon excavated material culture and physical remains of the dead. However, Dethlefsen and Deetz (1966) demonstrated in their study “Some Social Aspects of New England Colonial Mortuary Art” that above-ground mortuary data, in association with the documentation available to the historical archeologist, offer a rich source for the elucidation of past lifeways. Dethlefsen and Deetz chose to study tombstones in order to glean information about religious practices in colonial Massachusetts. They observed that surviving markers bore distinctive surface carved designs, which could be grouped into several distinctive categories. By examining these artifacts in combination with archival research, they were able to demonstrate a clear correlation between patterns of variation in tombstone design to patterns of change in the overall belief system and cultural ideologies in seventeenth and eighteenth century New England. (Dethlefsen and Deetz, 1966)

Dethlefsen and Deetz’ study is important to the development of archeological practice and theory because it demonstrates that examination of surviving above-ground material culture may provide important and viable sources of information for the quest to obtain a clear picture of the past. Deetz’ definition of material culture, “that sector of our physical environment that we modify through culturally determined behavior” (Deetz 1977:24), encouraged a widening of the archeologist’s domain beyond a singular focus on the excavated artifact. Deetz urges examining the entire realm of culturally defined elements including, for example, furniture, houses, spatial arrangement of rooms in houses, arrangement of tableware for dinner, graveyards, and even the proximal distance we maintain between ourselves and others in conversation. All of these things, and more, Deetz believes to be critical to a true understanding of the human past. (Deetz 1977:25)
Deetz argues too that the historical archeologist operates at a decided advantage, over the prehistorian in chronicling and understanding the past. Documents often exist which provide information beyond that supplied by material culture elements alone. (Deetz 1977) His successful analysis of mortuary art in relation to documented ideological change supports this contention. It is the often available combination of written and archeological material which provides the historical archeologist with a wide window on the past. Further, using documents not only enhances the available material evidence, but may also save the investigator from a hidden trap -- reaching wrong conclusions by attempting to understand changes in ideology and social structure with no other source of information save the artifact. (Humphreys and King 1981) Through study of material remains in concert with available documentation, Deetz was able to argue convincingly that innovations in the images and patterns on mortuary stones reflected changes in religion in colonial New England through study of material remains in concert with available documentation. Although patterning was evident in the design elements, the explanation of concurrent changes in systems of belief could only truly be known through documentary sources from that period.

Dethlefson and Deetz' 1966 publication has since inspired other archeologists to look seriously at American graveyards as a promising information source concerning past ideologies, and further as material culture which may reflect broad cultural change. Indeed a journal called Markers was founded specifically to provide a forum for the many articles focusing on graveyard and cemetery investigations. Several texts exist too which focus on such topics. For example, in Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture, Richard Meyer compiled works which demonstrate that graveyard studies can illuminate “...the discrete cultural values which interfuse these sites and artifacts.” (Meyer 1989:2) Ann and Dickran Tashjian’s (1989) contribution to the volume demonstrates that gravestones can be a valuable material source of information concerning colonial period black Americans about whom little information exists. Likewise, few written vital statistics records exist for Pennsylvania settlers. Thomas Hannon (1989), in his study of ethnic origins, examined surnames on tombstones of early cemeteries and ascertained that early Pennsylvanians were primarily of Scottish or Scots-Irish ancestry.
A survey of written studies concerning graveyards reveal, however, a predominant focus on the individual material components of burial yards (especially gravestones). For instance, "A Study of Tombstones", by Virginia historian Christina Dove (1978), falls into this tradition. She has investigated tombstone inscriptions in an attempt to elucidate individual life experiences as well as describe broader regional traditions in religion.

Based upon the available literature, it seems unusual for researchers to treat the entire graveyard or a graveyard complex as a culturally reflective artifact. There are, however, a few who have done so. For example, Gregory Jeane (1989), a cultural geographer, examined the roots of the distinctive Upland South Folk cemetery complex. This distinctive form of folk cemetery is found throughout the rural south -- from Virginia eastward to Florida, as far west as Texas, and spreading northwards through southern Oklahoma. The oldest examples, from the late eighteenth century, are found in Virginia and North Carolina. Early, pioneer forms of these burial grounds are quite distinctive in appearance: "hilltop location, scraped ground, mounded graves, east-west grave orientation, preferred species of vegetation, creative decoration, graveshelters, and evidence or practice of cults of piety." (Jeane 1989:111) After a long transition period, in which, for example, grave mounds become less frequent, shell decorations and cypress and pines are supplanted by flowering bushes plastic flowers, the Upland South rural graveyard type is replaced, beginning in the 1940s, by the perpetual care, modern lawn cemetery. Jeane notes that each of the three phases in the evolution of the Upland South folk cemetery "clearly reflects the dynamic aspect of the culture ... [and] provides a fascinating insight into both the evolution of attitudes toward death and the material expression of those attitudes." (Jeane 1989:108) Accordingly, Jeane’s work is unusual when compared to other cemetery studies, because he has gone beyond a consideration of particular funerary elements within a single graveyard, or the contemplation of individual burial grounds, and instead describes the entire cemetery complex as a material culture element "expressive of the dynamic character of culture." (Jeane 1989:108)

For this thesis too, the intention is to treat entire graveyards as material culture elements. Anglican tradition mandated churchyard burial -- a custom followed whenever possible in seventeenth
and eighteenth century Fairfax County, Virginia. However, by the nineteenth century, graves were by law largely disassociated from the church precinct. Documentary evidence reveals that a period of major social and religious upheaval in religion and society occurred coincidental to church and graveyard disassociation. This separation is generally attributed to a rising concern for public health issues. However, forces beyond such stated concerns are evident in burial pattern changes throughout colonial Fairfax. Burial innovations are better explained as reflections of an important evolution in the overall social structure.

**General Background**

In general, disassociation of graveyards and Episcopal churches in Fairfax County, Virginia happened in the first decade of the nineteenth century, first in Alexandria but spreading throughout the county as the century passed. Historian Ruth Lincoln Kaye writes: “Since burial practice is an essential part of town hygiene, it should be noted that before 1809 most burials were in the churchyards of Christ Church and the Presbyterian meeting House. After 1809 the town had grown, and the dead had to be buried in cemeteries off South Payne...” outside the town. (Kaye 1989:58) This change in burial habits Kaye attributes to concern for public health: “In January of 1809 a municipal restriction was imposed on burials within the town limits [of Alexandria] for health reasons.” (Kaye 1991:1)

Historians seem largely to have assumed that concerns with the adverse effects of burial on public health arose first in England and diffused somewhat later to America. And so, “nineteenth-century...America ran into similar troubles as those experienced in England, and large cemeteries were founded in order to alleviate the problems caused by intramural and churchyard interment.” (Curl 1972:169) As towns and cities grew in population in eighteenth-century England and Europe, “overcrowding in death became even more serious than in life. Burial grounds were used and re-used, burials cutting through others in various states of decomposition. In earlier periods the size of the cemetery was sufficient to allow a pattern of rotation which ensured full decay of at least all but the bones before any subsequent burial. But with the rapidly increased rate of deposition, the
need for overburial came around too quickly for this. Bodies had to be interred over others, and in some graveyards this led to burial ever nearer the surface with consequent health risks...Indeed once the density of bodies within the graveyard reached a certain point, further decomposition was impossible...[and] the graveyard then became ... a foul-smelling, slimy mass of putrefaction.” (Mytum 1989:286)

Customary church-associated graveyards, constrained from expansion beyond boundary walls, became extremely overcrowded, so much so that the normal rate of decomposition slowed and the air became heavy with the vapors of decay. With little understanding of the agents for disease transmittal, doctors and public health officials published articles warning of possible serious health dangers which these “contaminated” air vapors were thought to pose. Church-goers became disturbed over the possibility of contagion from the “noxious fumes” arising from putrefied burials in which several corpses were often piled on top of one another in a single gravesite. Completely disgusted with such conditions, much of the public joined in support of legislation restricting burial to cemeteries outside populous areas in most European cities. In an attempt to protect living humans from the threat such cemetery conditions were perceived to pose, measures were undertaken in France and England for the removal of burial grounds to areas away from churchyards and beyond city and town precincts. In so doing lawmakers thought to protect the public from the harmful vapors emanating from the churchyard. For example, in England, “The appalling condition of the burial grounds of the Metropolis was the subject of a detailed... report by Chadwick on The Practice of Interment in Towns... published in 1843. However, it was not until 1852... that legislation was introduced to effect a remedy.” (Polson, Brittain and Marshall 1953:150) Enacted to protect public health, this law gave officials the authority to close problematic burial grounds and construct replacements outside towns, and created burial boards for the purchase and overseeing of new burial grounds. (Polson, Brittain, and Marshall 1953:151) It was hoped that the removal of these possible agents of contagion would curtail diseases that were rampant and high mortality rates common to that period. (French 1975:74; Curl 1980:49; Mytum 1989:286)

The same explanation is given for the removal of burials from colonial Virginia towns as
demonstrated in Kaye’s writings (1991:1): “...a municipal restriction was imposed on burials within the town limits for health reasons.” The assumption has largely been that burial innovations occurred in England and France first and simply spread from there to all towns in America where the public presumably embraced the new burial customs completely and in their entirety and for the same reasons. (Bowman 1964; Curl 1972; Stannard 1974) It is impossible to deny that in many American regions, public health was a major influence in legislated separation of churches and graveyards. News and gossip from England were eagerly sought by Virginia colonists and, without doubt, Virginians were well aware of the debates over churchyard burial which raged in England throughout the late eighteenth and well into the nineteenth centuries. It would be simplistic to assume that this had no effect upon Alexandria officials’ decision to prohibit interment of the dead within town churchyards.

At the same time, it is equally inaccurate to explain all social development in Virginia as a simple, reflexive response to events in England with little or no relation to an evolving local culture or native environmental factors. Historians Habenstein and Lamers (1981:102) assert that New World society should not and cannot be represented as a simple extension of Old World culture, especially with regard to funeral behavior, despite the seeming similarities. Likewise, historian David Fischer, while noting the heavy influence and “...strong links between the character of the south and west of England and the culture of Virginia...” nevertheless emphasizes the pronounced influence of the frontier environment in the unique development of Virginia. He states, “English folkways were not the only determinant of Virginia’s culture. Another factor was the American environment.” (Fischer 1989:247)

The origin of change in Alexandria and Fairfax County burial practices should not and cannot be explained as a simple grafting of English burial customs onto those in Virginia. Attempts to do so have served largely to obscure important and well-documented underlying shifts in the cultural values which precluded and permitted change in the firmly entrenched custom of churchyard burial in Virginia. Change in burial ground placement was, in fact, a material reflection of demographic, economic, political and ideological transformations which strongly affected Fairfax
County late in the eighteenth century. Such changes occurred along the entire eastern seaboard in post-Revolutionary America, forming a general cultural evolution. So, declares Deetz, “In ways great or small, gravestones, grave pits, houses, refuse, cuts of meat, recipes, ceramics, furniture and cutlery all inform us that a great change was worked between 1760 and 1800 on the world view of most of Anglo-America.” (Deetz 1977:127) Accordingly, it is perhaps in the changes of social attitudes that the study of the disassociation of graveyards and churches in Fairfax County can be most informative. For while “...[p]ublic health was the stated cause of many changes in body disposal over the last two centuries ...[c]hanges in attitudes to death, and to social behavior associated with mortuary practices were largely obscured at the time by the overt concern with public health...” (Mytum 1989:284)

In light of this, the intent of the following chapters will be to examine how social, economic and political pressures characteristic of eighteenth and nineteenth Fairfax County, Virginia, compelled marked modification in Virginia’s Anglican church traditions when compared to its English source. Developing in a changed ecclesiastic system, Virginia’s mortuary customs demonstrate a clear departure from traditional Anglican practices for reasons including but beyond the assumed public health concerns. At the end of the colonial period, Fairfax County was in the midst of a revolution -- not just political, but social and economic as well as philosophical and religious. The segregation of graveyards from churches and towns, while an innovation with little outward relevance beyond the spiritual, was a reflection of profound change affecting every part of Fairfax County social structure. Graveyard patterning changes, between the period of earliest settlement in the seventeenth century to around 1810, provide tangible evidence of clear social transformation in Alexandria and Fairfax County.

The following chapters will outline the relevant highlights of social, economic, political and governmental changes. Coincidental changes in religion and burial habits will also be described. Because the basis for this investigation has been archival research, strong emphasis will be placed on thick description gathered from documentary evidence. According to Schuyler, an historic site must be interpreted in the context of the international, national and local events taking place at the
time the site was occupied. Also, primary documentary sources can provide insight into “the views and beliefs that the subjects hold concerning their own behavior”, which provides information crucial to the interpretation of complex social change in the past. (Schuyler 1978:270) Thick description, then, of contemporaneous events and attitudes gathered from both secondary and primary literature provides the necessary context for site interpretation. Central to this thesis is the idea that cultural materials reflect social changes. Accordingly, because it is crucial to the argument, detailed description of the historical background will be related in the following pages.

In Chapter I the early history of Fairfax County will be examined briefly. These details will serve to illustrate the background in which the Episcopal Church operated in the colonial period. It is also important to understand the early context in which the Church operated in order to understand the impact made by later social change. Accordingly, the focus of Chapter II will be on the Anglican Church in the early colonial period. Special emphasis will be placed upon describing organizational changes which were made in the English Church in order to properly adapt it to the frontier life in Virginia.

In Chapter III, the importance of earth burial in the church precinct in the Christian faith will be presented. The first part of the chapter will serve to elucidate a crucial argument for this paper: that earth burial in the churchyard was considered by Anglicans to be the proper way to dispose of the dead. Long tradition had fixed this strategy as a near immutable custom. Against this backdrop, frontier burials in Virginia are considered as a first step in the changes to be made in Anglican burial customs in the colony. These first alterations in custom, however, were made from necessity rather than choice.

A remarkable evolution marks colonial life in Fairfax County of the eighteenth century. Settlement patterns changed dramatically. People prospered under a growing and changing economy. Government became representative of an increasingly heterogeneous populace. Public health improvements were vast and as a consequence the population increased. This remarkable progress is the subject of Chapter IV, and forms the backdrop for Chapter V. In Chapter V, the impact of these social, political and economic changes will be made apparent. In particular, freedom
from the tyranny of repressive government, hunger, and disease meant that Virginians had the opportunity to work for individual freedoms, including freedom of religion. Under a revolutionary fervor then, the state church was disestablished and the Episcopal Church found itself without support.

In Chapter VI, burial habits in Fairfax County are considered and a list of extant Episcopal churches will be presented to demonstrate discernible patterning. The reasons for prohibition of town burials in nineteenth century Fairfax will be considered with respect to the changing fortunes of the Church.

Finally, in Chapter VII, conclusions will be drawn based upon the presented evidence. Changes in Episcopal church associated burial patterns will be shown to reflect the social, economic and political and religious changes presented in the preceding chapters.
CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD, 17TH - EARLY 18TH CENTURIES

When the English people 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...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... the English genius for adapting old forms of government to new conditions of life. (Slaughter 1907:i)

Fairfax: Early Colonial Period History

There were no towns in early colonial period Northern Virginia. (Brydon 1947:23) Instead, settled lands were divided into discrete political units, or counties, and the Church, legislatively mandated an integral element of the government structure, was organized around a parish system within the county. The parish governing body, or vestry, was organized to serve ecclesiastical concerns, but its members also played an important role in civil affairs. The colonial vestry, in fact, established a vital link in the close association of the secular and religious spheres in colonial Virginia. Many vestrymen held posts in the county government, and all civil officials were required to take an oath in which they promised to “be conformable to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England as by law established.” (Netherton et al. 1978:65) Thus, from the beginning, county and parish worked hand in hand and their several civil and religious functions were treated as complementary components.

The parish system operated to build and maintain churches, provide ministers, meet the needs of church administration, provide for the orphaned and destitute, and present offenders against moral standards to the courts. (Andrews 1937:342) County responsibilities centered
around maintenance of civil order, through the offices of sheriff and the county courts, and tax collection. Upon formation, counties and parishes were generally quite sizeable in geographic extent. These were subdivided into smaller units as populations grew sufficient in size and density to provide an adequate tax base for civil and religious institution support. The lands now encompassed by Fairfax County were initially included in the enormous Northumberland County created in 1648. (Burke 1952:3) Subdivided in 1653 to develop Westmoreland, this area in turn was divided in 1664 to form Stafford County. In 1730 Hamilton Parish and then Prince William County were created out of Stafford. (Slaughter 1907:2)

Early standard procedure established the county, after which the county court determined the parish boundaries. In 1730, however, this practice was reversed and the parish boundaries were allocated prior to county creation, an arrangement which served to underscore the importance of the Church in the community.

Truro Parish was first established in 1732 from Hamilton Parish with parameters extending “By the river Ockoquan, and the Bull Run, [a branch thereof,] and a course from thence to the Indian Thoroughfare of the Blue Ridge Mountains.” (Slaughter 1907:2) In May of 1742, Fairfax County was defined with very nearly the same boundaries as Truro Parish. Initially, Fairfax was one of Virginia’s frontier counties and of enormous extent; it enveloped the same area as modern Arlington, Loudon and Fairfax Counties plus the cities of Alexandria and Falls Church. (Netherton et al. 1978:4)

Distinctive Regional Settlement Patterns

Northern Virginia land grants in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century were enormous as a rule, largely because the local economy was based on tobacco production -- a crop voracious in its land consumption. Additionally, early land sales were often made to speculators who hoped to clear a profit on later resale of smaller parcels of land. Populations were typically sparse and widely distributed with most initial settlement occurring on large tobacco-producing plantations. (Netherton et al. 1978:12)
Northern Virginia’s geography exerted a strong influence on Fairfax County settlement patterns as well. Characterized by two broad rivers -- the Potomac and Rappahannock -- it was along their banks that colonists generally chose to settle. The rivers were valued for their importance as transportation routes, a significant consideration in a land densely forested, with rough terrain and no roads. (Fischer 1989:32)

Large plantations were usually situated along river banks. Boats journeyed down the rivers collecting crops from plantation wharves. Virginia’s produce was then taken to the Chesapeake Bay for shipment to England. Also, plantations were self-sufficient, and with a river bank location it was simple to acquire necessary supplies by requesting delivery to individual plantation wharves. A riverside residence was important to individual transportation too since it was easier to go to court and church by water than through the heavy forests. Court and church days provided the primary point of social contact for early Fairfax County settlers. River access was, therefore, crucial. (Netherton et al. 1978:42) Accordingly, rivers, in their function as primary transportation routes, were important to the economic, social and political life of the colony. It was along their banks that early Northern Virginians generally settled.

Parish and county boundaries were also determined by river courses. Sufficient population was needed to provide financial support for government and church functions. As Brydon (1947:366) remarks, “The sparseness of population must be noted because of its influence upon the development of the Virginia way of life, both in church and in civil affairs.” Eventually the lengthy river estates were divided into smaller plots as speculators sold off their lands or land lost its viability for tobacco production. Additional settlers moved into Northern Virginia to claim these newly created farms, and the resulting increase in population made it possible to divide parish and county into smaller units.

Colonial Public Health

The wretched state of public health early in the colonial period contributed to the sparse populations characteristic of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century in Virginia. Overall,
early colonial medicine was quite primitive and the public health was generally very poor. Prior to 1700 more than 100,000 people had immigrated into Virginia, but, despite a tremendous birthrate, the population stood at only 75,000 in 1700. Settlers blamed this high death rate on poor food, lack of living quarters, slimy waters and “vaporous” air and soil around the colony, and poor drinking water. (Blanton, 1930:19)

Although physicians were present in Virginia beginning with earliest settlement, the colony suffered from a serious shortage of trained doctors well into the eighteenth century. Of necessity, the clergy filled much of early colonial community medical needs. Consequently medical knowledge and practice was crude. Few innovative measures were taken, and bloodletting and purging were standard treatments, despite more effective medical advances being made throughout England and Europe. (Dunglison 1972:54)

Judging from colonist’s descriptions, it appears that summer fevers, such as malaria, were the most destructive illnesses. While the curative powers of quinine had been discovered in mid-seventeenth century by the English doctor Sydenham, the remedy was not in widespread use until the last quarter of the century. (Blanton 1930) Quinine was not used in Virginia until the 1670s. However, once its curative abilities were proven it was widely employed in the treatment of fever, followed soon thereafter by a significant reduction in Virginia’s mortality rate. (Blanton 1930:89; Mettler 1947:142)

In addition to malaria, there were a host of illnesses which plagued colonial Virginia, including yellow fever, typhoid, smallpox, cholera, scurvy, measles and dysentery. (Blanton 1931:50) The common cold and influenza on occasion also posed a threat to the lives of colonists, although much more so in the seventeenth than in the eighteenth century. (Mettler 1947:149) In Fairfax County, dysentery and typhoid seemed to be a leading cause of illness and death, especially among children. The high rate of these diseases was tied to an unsanitary water supply. There was no public water system; each home had an attached water well and privy. These facilities were often in close proximity and ground water allowed seepage to travel from one to the other. Typhoid or dysentery
was frequently transmitted from the privy to the well, thereby infecting the household with illness through the water supply. (Kaye 1989:45)

The threat of yellow fever, smallpox and cholera increased as the number of foreign trade ships in contact with the area increased beginning in the late seventeenth century. In particular, vessels travelling from England posed an exceptional danger since the disease was frequently epidemic in that country. (Blanton 1933:102) This disease and many others presented a constant threat to the public health in early colonial Virginia. In the beginning, the colony was a remarkably unhealthful place.

**Demographic Profile**

Many early settlers were poor people who were attracted to Virginia by the promise of a new life in an area rich with fertile lands for farming. However, an early colonial period governor, Berkeley, schemed to attract a “Royalist elite” population to the colony in the early seventeenth century. With his eventual success, Berkeley shaped Virginia’s economy, society and all lifeways. And, because it was such an integral part of many social institutions, the Anglican church was greatly affected by the success of Berkeley’s scheme.

Initially, much of Northern Virginia was purchased by Englishmen who acted purely as speculators and investors. They were required to “settle” their investments and so sent indentured servants to live in Virginia. Other elite land investors (often the younger sons of landed Englishmen who would not acquire property through inheritance), journeyed to Virginia in order to take advantage of the economic opportunities promised there. These were Berkeley’s “Cavaliers” - the Royalist elite. These Cavaliers shared Berkeley’s “Royalist politics, his Anglican faith, and his vision for the future of the colony.” (Fischer 1989:212)

By and large, Cavaliers were the sons of wealthy landholders from the south and west of England -- areas characterized by large manors and dominated by a small landholding class. Fortunes had been made there through the production and sale of agricultural products. Politically the region was very conservative and its inhabitants were known throughout centuries as staunch.
monarchy supporters. In religion, they were equally conservative and tended towards the orthodox Anglican spectrum. It was this way of life which the Royalist elite settlers and Governor Berkeley strove to replicate in Virginia. Their eventual success formed the basis for colonial Virginia’s hierarchical social structure. (Fischer 1989:213)

Berkeley held Virginia’s governorship from 1642-1676. As the King’s agent, he controlled land grants and made political appointments. When his elite settlers arrived, “he promoted them to high office, granted them large estates and created the ruling oligarchy that ran the colony for many generations.” (Fischer 1989:212) By 1665 both the county courts and parish vestries were dominated and controlled by what had become closed oligarchies of the local elite. As members of the political system controlling property patents, these landlords were able to influence further distribution of land and did so in favor of their friends and family. Accordingly, the Cavaliers came to control settlement patterns in Virginia. Since men were ranked socially and economically by the acreage of land in their possession, the Cavaliers’ social dominance in the colony was further strengthened with their control over most of the arable lands. (Netherton et al. 1978:178)

The unequal division of land persisted throughout the colonial period. Very large fertile plantations belonged to a few, while the majority of settlers inhabited smaller farms or worked for the upper classes. Ten percent of free adult males owned 50 to 75 percent of all productive assets in Northern Virginia. These plantation owners controlled the majority of the productive land, had many servants, and owned most of the slaves. Twenty to thirty percent of the population owned small farms, tilling the land themselves or with the help of one or two servants. Sixty to seventy percent of the male population was without land; they were predominantly tenant farmers, poor laborers and servants. Last came the slaves and paupers. The destitute were supported through vestry public funds. (Fischer 1989:374-377).

According to Fischer (1989:390), “By the mid-seventeenth century, a distinct system of settlement had developed in Virginia - small market villages straggling along major streams, large plantations and little farms.” The political and economic climate was conservative. Wealth, and synonymously land, were unequal in their division. Power was vested in the hands of a very few,
and the society hierarchical in its structure. This last point had significant cultural importance for the development of Virginia throughout the colonial period for, as Fischer (1989:224) points out, "The more hierarchical a society becomes, the stronger is the domination of its elite."
The Established Church of England was important in both political and social arenas throughout Virginia’s history as a royal colony. Churchmen were involved in formulating and reinforcing civil law, and enacted laws served to legitimize and strengthen the Church’s position of power within the community. In fact, civil ordinance made regular attendance and financial support of the Anglican Church compulsory for all colonists throughout the colonial period. (Spence 1957:73) In return, priests and other church officials swore allegiance to the highest government officials and the king upon ordination. Thus, from the beginning of the colonial period “cooperation between church and state [was] so intimate that the state itself [was] a sort of church” (Miller 1949:29). The Anglican church reigned as an essential and fixed element within the colonial political scheme.

Anglican Church History

The Anglican Church was a political organ from its inception in sixteenth-century England during the general push for reformation of the Catholic Church. Reorganization in this, England’s state religion, was primarily a political move, unlike the reformation inspired under Luther, for example. When King Henry VIII broke with the Catholic Church, religious reorganization proceeded along constitutional lines, with the result that the Anglican Church maintained a closer resemblance to the Catholic Church in ceremony and beliefs than other Protestant churches.
Tradition maintains that King Henry’s desire to divorce his wife and take another drove the monarchy to break with the Roman Church in 1534. This may have been the final catalyst, but in more general terms the reformation in England was grounded in the overwhelming movement towards nationalism which struck a keen desire for self-determination among the citizenry and politicians. (Addison 1951:212) Thus the English Reformation began as a primarily political and liturgical movement as opposed to the European reform of Luther and Calvin, which was popular and theological in its impulse. The doctrinal and ethical problems with which Luther and Calvin wrestled were only of secondary consideration in the establishment of England’s Anglican Church: “A recasting of Catholic doctrine was certainly not intended by Henry VIII, nor did he reject any part of Roman teaching, except Papal claim to universal jurisdiction.” (Olmstead 1961:13) The Anglican Church became the state church in England under King Henry and was called the “Established Church of England” (Olmstead 1961:14).

In sixteenth-century England, church and civic leaders held to the necessity of an official state religion to which all were compelled to adhere. They insisted that “by exercising pastoral care, preaching moral conduct, denouncing immorality and, more positively leading in charitable and educational work, the clergy would tame human wickedness sufficiently to maintain public order...” (McManners 1990:277) Religion was seen as an important instrument for preserving civil law and order.

**The Established Church in Virginia**

Virginia’s early settlers were English people and as such they were to enjoy “all the liberties and privileges of Englishmen in the homeland.” (Addison 1951:28) This included institution of the Anglican Church as the official religion. In the colonial period, Virginia was the center of Anglican strength in America. Church historian George Brydon points out that early English Virginia settlers were not fleeing from unjust laws or persecution. It was their intent to institute the same way of life they had enjoyed in England, including its religion, and “never from the beginning was there any idea that their forms of worship should be any other than those of the Church of England,
their own Mother Church.” Too, nostalgia probably induced this immigrant population to cling the more tenaciously to English custom in order to maintain a sense of shared community and affinity with their faraway country. (Brydon 1947:3) Keeping alive the Anglican Church in America and placing it in a position of eminence within the community undoubtedly served to strengthen the illusion of continued connection with a distant homeland. (Brydon 1947:3)

However, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the “Mother Church” in England was at the center of constant conflict. As a result, Anglicans in Virginia received only the barest support despite the colony’s sustained loyalty. Consequently, Virginia’s Church was never able to replicate exactly the Anglican Church in England; in both form and function there were marked differences.

**Wealth, Social Class and the Colonial Church**

In Virginia the “publicly supported Anglican Church fell very much under the secular influence of its wealthier members. Northern visitors were sometimes shocked to see clergymen dancing and gaming with their parishioners.” (Morgan 1952:72) And, in fact, the Established Church acted to reinforce, both literally and symbolically, the very hierarchical nature of Virginia’s society. For example, church vestry positions conferred a certain level of status, but entrance standards into this elite group prohibited the majority of Virginians from winning these positions. Successful nominees had to be both landowners and literate, and few other than Cavaliers met such criteria. The requirements for literacy were so strict that in 1744 an entire Truro Parish vestry was dismissed as a result of the charge that at least one of their number could not read. (Slaughter 1907:102)

Churchgoing itself expressed the dominance of the local gentry, and the social hierarchy was reinforced through church practice and physical arrangement. (Isaac 1982:89) The Truro vestry minutes reveal this to be true. For example, at the August 13, 1737 meeting, the Churchwarden was ordered to “[p]lace the people that are not already placed, in Pohick and the new Churches, in pews, according to their several ranks and degrees.” (Slaughter 1907:14) Church pews were sold to parishioners who held them for life, and often willed them to their heirs. It was
primarily socially prominent, well-to-do members who could afford to purchase seats in the church. Further, pews were sold to the highest bidder and those centrally placed, across from the Communion table and pulpit, were the most highly prized and sold to the wealthiest parishioners. There the wealthy remained in full view and at the head of the rest of the less prominent congregation. By such means, the gentry were placed in the center and front of the church, symbolizing and reinforcing the position they occupied in the social hierarchy. (Isaac 1982:90)

The architectural plan of the Greek cross, by tradition employed in Colonial Anglican church construction, also served to maximize the visibility of the gentry. With this plan the large elite-owned oak pews were clearly the focal point, while the remaining parishioners were given less advantageous positions at the back and in the second floor gallery. Accordingly, the “forms of action at church clearly asserted the hierarchical nature of things, confirming definitions of authority within the rural community itself.” (Isaac 1982:64) Recorded during the November 20, 1772 Truro vestry meeting was the information that the central pews in the just completed Pohick church were sold to prominent, wealthy men of Fairfax County. In their numbers were included the names of several who are remembered even today as important men, for example, George Mason, George Washington and George W. Fairfax, Esq. (Slaughter 1907:238)

**Early Colonial Church Conformity**

Plagued by constant political and religious turmoil and confounded by its great distance from Virginia, the English government could provide only limited religious support to its colony. Despite this, the Anglican Church maintained a strong presence and tremendous influence in Virginia, both at the level of the individual and in the development of the state’s tradition. Conformity to the church was maintained and demanded of the colonial citizenry, and “[f]or more than a century, the religious life of Virginia developed along these lines. It was ceremonial, liturgical, hierarchical, ritualist...” (Fischer 1989:233)

Religious belief was remarkably uniform and the “people in general professed to be of the Church of England.” (Campbell 1847:354) To maintain and ensure continued uniform preference
the General Assembly and other civil bodies enacted strict ordinances throughout the colonial period. In 1619 when the first Assembly convened in Virginia, initial legislation included measures “designed to advance the religious and moral welfare of the people...” (Bruce 1910:13). Among them was an act which required all to attend church on Sunday. Failure to do so meant a substantial monetary fine. Penniless slaves were whipped for failure to attend. (Minutes of the Assembly, Colonial Record of Virginia 1619:28)

On the 24th of February, 1631, the importance of the English Church in the community was further emphasized and increased by an act which called for “a uniformitie throughout this colony both in substance and circumstance to the cannons and constitution of the church of England as neere as may bee and that every person yeald readie obedience unto them uppon penaltie of paynes and forfeitures...” (Hening 1823:i.155) And in subsection II of the same legislation, the 1619 ordinance for church attendance was reinforced: “That the statutes for comminge to church every Sonday and Holydays bee duly executed...as they will answere before God for such evills and plagues wherewith Almighty God may justlie punish his people for neglectinge this good and wholesome lawe.” Statutes continued in this vein throughout the early colonial period into the mid-eighteenth century. The interrelatedness of church and state is underscored as well by further legislation which mandated all civil officials to vow, as part of their oath of office, to “be conformable to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England as by law established.” (Netherton et al. 1978:65)

Documents and surviving material culture from the early colonial period manifest as well the importance of the Church in Virginian’s social and daily life. According to historian Philip Bruce (1968:218), writings from the colonial period document the importance of Sunday church service, which was one of the most significant social occasions in colonial Virginia, on par with county court day, horse races and the funeral. (Bruce 1907:218) Religion was a fixture ever present in the lives of colonists, permeating the smallest detail of their daily lives and thoughts. Children were taught to read from the Bible, and grace was said before and after every meal. (Isaac 1982:182)
Bruce (1968:21) points out too that "[t]he few letters belonging to private correspondence which have descended to us from the Seventeenth century breathe a spirit as full of reverence for religion as the spirit observable in such a large proportion of the wills recorded during the same period." And the importance of religion to colonial life was particularly obvious in last testaments, of which Bruce (1968:18) says: "Perhaps, under no circumstances did the religious spirit of the Virginians in the Seventeenth century find more remarkable expression than when they came to write their last wills." He goes on to quote many, all of which show a deep respect for religion and hope for an everlasting life.

Wills also demonstrate the high value placed on religious books, which were often left by specific title to children and close friends. Probate inventories show that even the most modest home in the seventeenth century had at least one copy of the Bible. There were other religious titles, especially The Whole Duty of Man, which were also frequently listed among personal estates. (Bruce 1968:25)

The substantial financial support given the Church in colonial Virginia may also be taken as evidence of its significance in the community. In fact, throughout the colonial period, a remarkably larger amount was paid for each tithable in the support of the Anglican parish church than for county maintenance. For every one pound of tobacco paid to the county, three pounds were paid to the Established Church. (Netherton et al. 1978:112) Every citizen had to subsidize the clergy, including members of the Governor’s council who as a rule were exempted from public taxation. (Bruce 1910:112) And, great pains were taken to ensure that ministerial salaries were paid in full as soon as possible. In fact, a seventeenth century act was passed which levied a heavy fine on any planter who disposed of his tobacco before delivery of the clergy’s share. This law was maintained and enforced until the late nineteenth century. (Hening 1823:i.124)

In such a climate of exacting conformity to the Established Episcopal Church it is hardly surprising to note pronounced intolerance of dissenters. Religious groups other than Anglican did not flourish in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. So determined was Virginia to maintain
the eminent position of the Church in the colony that the General Assembly enacted strict laws against Puritans at the outset of the English Civil War in 1642. (Olmstead 1961:171)

Despite the evident dangers of such a course, colonial leadership even continued its strongly Anglican and Royalist disposition during the eleven-year Protectorate under Cromwell -- a period when Anglican worship was outlawed by Parliament in both England and its colonies. (Addison 1951:62) So determined was the General Assembly to preserve the Anglican Church that, upon learning of Parliament’s act abolishing the Church of England, it enacted a law in 1647 which required the use of the Anglican Prayer Book in every church each Sunday. In addition, parishioners were absolved from paying the salary of any minister who defied this measure. (Brydon 1957:189) Because of this staunch church support, English Anglican clergy came to seek refuge in Virginia as a safe haven from Cromwell’s persecution. (Addison 1951:64)

Throughout the colonial period, every parish minister was required to vow to faithfully adhere to the Anglican Church, thus ensuring conformity among clergy and guarding against the possible influence of dissenting ministers. (Bruce 1910:162) At the March 1642-3 session of the General Assembly an act was passed which read:

For the preservation of the puritie of doctrine & vnitie of the church, It is enacted that all ministers whatsoever which shall reside in the collony are to be comfoimable to the orders and constitutions of the church of England, and the laws therein established, and not otherwise to be admitted to teach or preach publickly or privately. And that the Gov. and Counsel do take care that all nonconformists vpon notice of them shall be compelled to depart the collony with all conveniencie. (Hening 1823:i.277)

Surviving records from 1645 show there to be fewer than 200 nonconformists living in Virginia among a total population of approximately 15,000 people. (Olmstead 1961:182) By law citizens were prohibited from voting or holding office unless a member of the Established Church. (Addison 1951:92) This strict enforcement of Anglican Church conformity and intolerance of dissent was followed until 1699 when the General Assembly adopted the Toleration Act enacted under William and Mary. However, toleration was extended only to several Protestant sects,
while existing restrictions against Catholics and Quakers were maintained. (Campbell 1847; Olmstead 1961; Isaac 1982)

**Church Adaptations to Colonial Conditions**

In the early seventeenth century, the British King’s commandment to Governor Berkeley “to see that the church was firmly maintained and no innovations permitted” (Addison 1951:29), exemplifies the efforts made to mandate strict conformity to the Anglican Church in Virginia. Despite such attempts, change in form and practice in Virginia’s Episcopal Church was inevitable both as a consequence of the minimal support received from England, and as the unavoidable conclusion of the realities of the ‘frontier’ life experience. As Hudson (1981:12) notes, “While the English inheritance was the most important single influence determining the form and substance of religious life ... both necessities and the opportunities of life in the New World introduced changes of emphasis and modifications in practice.” Virginians themselves recognized that their church departed in many practices from its English parent, an understanding in evidence, for example, in the wording of a 1623/24 law [emphasis added]: “That there be uniformity in our church as neere as may be to the canons of England: both in substance and circumstance, and that all persons yield readie obedience unto them under paine of censure.” (Hening 1823:i.123)

**Virginia Church Form and Organizational Adaptations**

The Virginia parish and vestry systems were quite different from their English counterparts. For example, while parish boundaries were fixed by tradition in England, they were determined by statute in Virginia, indicating the closer control the state exercised over church concerns in the colony. Likewise, the English vestry was simply an annual meeting of taxpayers to discuss church affairs and choose Churchwardens. (Slaughter 1907:iii) In Virginia it became a close corporation of twelve of the most influential and wealthy local planters in the parish, as is evident from the vestry membership roster for the two parishes in Fairfax County (Truro and later Fairfax) which read like a “Who’s Who” list of prominent Virginians. (Bruce 1910:76; Slaughter 1907:ii) Church
historian Edwin Goodwin examined 1732-1785 vestry records for Truro Parish, Fairfax County and concluded:

“No Parish in the Colony had a Vestry more distinguished in its personnel... than the Parish of Truro... 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, George Mason, was one of the first among the founders of the State and one of the great political thinkers of his time. Still another was declared to be the ‘Greatest man of any age,’ the imperial George Washington.” (Slaughter 1907:ii)

The vestry, therefore, was composed of the ruling elite and the interests of church and state became firmly intertwined through their several offices. Accordingly, Virginia vestries took on important civil duties, such as caring for the poor, orphans and aged as well as maintaining spiritual affairs such as presenting moral offenders to the courts for punishment. (Andrews 1937:82)

Royal support of the English Church in Virginia was unevenly applied, and the King’s message self-contradictory with respect to concern for colonial support of Anglicanism. On the one hand, the crown had iterated the importance of the Church to the colony and urged compliance with it. On the other hand, because each successive King was so completely engaged with the turmoil over religion in his own immediate dominion, few arrangements were made for ensuring compliance through effective institution of the Established Episcopal Church in the Virginia colony. An enormous problem from the beginning, and one that grew in significance throughout the colonial period, was the lack of an American bishop. For 177 years there was no American bishop, a condition which posed a substantial dilemma for an Episcopal (i.e., “pertaining to bishops”) church. The bishop alone has the authority to ordain clergy and confirm new members and so this office is essential in church maintenance and progression. (Spence 1957:202) And since “bishops and apostolic succession were the distinguishing and legitimating features of the Church of England in relation to other British Protestant groups”, the lack of a Virginia bishop was both an embarrassment and a problem. (Isaac 1982:187) Many government and church officials believed that filling the Virginia bishopric was the remaining element key in the formulation of a complete government for
the colony. Given the closely interwoven nature of English church and state, some argued that the lack of strong church governance would weaken the civil governmental structure. Each could be strong only through powerful church and civil administrations working in unison. (Isaac 1982:188)

Without a bishop in America, Virginia fell under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London. Consequently, those who wanted to join the Anglican priesthood were forced to journey to England for ordination, a practice which resulted in a shortage of ministers throughout the colonial period. (Spence 1957:205) Only a smattering of Virginians were able to afford the voyage or were willing to risk the dangers of the passage to and from England. And, few English priests were willing to undertake the rigors of frontier life.

The scarcity of ministers was clearly evidenced by legislative measures passed in 1656 which offered a reward of 20 pounds sterling to anyone who would transport a willing minister into the colony. (Gaustad 1982:7) And, in “Virginia’s Cure” clergyman Roger Greene discusses the pressing problem of a shortage of ministers, noting: “Many Parishes as yet want both Churches and Gleabes, and I think not above a fifth part of them are supplyed with Ministers...” (Greene 1661:4) In 1697, Commissary Blair, the first representative of the bishop of London in Virginia, reported a mere 22 ministers for 50 parishes. (Perry 1969:11) The ministerial shortage resulted in adoption of new custom where lay readers and deacons were appointed to administer Sunday services in the absence of an ordained priest. (Hening 1823:ii.47) In this manner, church attendance was maintained by a measure unique to the colony.

As the ministerial shortage worsened, particularly in the seventeenth century, desperate vestries took on priests of dubious qualifications to fill parish needs. The poor quality of the Episcopal priesthood seems to have been a particular concern in the 1600s and early 1700s and precipitated another departure from Anglican custom. (Campbell 1847) Initially the colonial vestries followed the English established tradition which granted a lifelong tenureship to the parish minister, who, following induction, could not be forced out “except after an ecclesiastical trial by the bishop or his commissary”. (Brydon 1957:16) Likewise, early Virginia law mandated presentation of each priest by the vestry to the governor after one year for permanent induction into the parish.
Following induction, tenured clergy could be removed only by an act of the General Assembly. (Hening 1823:i.242) However, as the shortage of ministers became acute, Virginian vestries feared they would be forced to retain inadequate ministers under such rules, and began to refuse to bring priests to the governor for induction early in the eighteenth century. Instead vestries adopted the practice of granting limited successive one-year term appointments. (Bruce 1929:101) In this way, the elite lay vestry in Virginia became the true seat of power and they, rather than the priesthood, controlled the parish. With little reason to relinquish their control and no one of sufficient power to challenge the practice, Virginia’s lay vestry continued to enjoy far greater control over ecclesiastical matters than their English counterpart which remained under clerical domination with little laity participation allowed in church governance. The practice of single-year, vestry-controlled appointments continued in Truro Parish, Fairfax County, until 1748 when a law passed which mandated the appointment of a tenured incumbent within twelve months after a vacancy occurred. If the vestry were unable to fill the position, or refused to appoint a permanent clergyman, the Governor was empowered to himself appoint any available clergyman. (Slaughter 1907:32)

Without the office of a bishop, too, the profane and secular were not clearly separated in colonial Virginia. Since bishops alone were empowered to confirm church members and consecrate church buildings, new parishioners remained unconfirmed in their faith and church buildings were left unconsecrated. (Brydon 1957:62) Both rites were extremely important in their symbolic value. Confirmation established a rite of passage which separated the church member from the non-believer. Through this office the person became an avowed member of the church body. Likewise, church consecration set the building apart from the secular, identifying it as a special, sacred space. But without a bishop, these important Church traditions were, by necessity, dropped from practice throughout colonial Virginia.

Lacking a bishop and with a weak priesthood in Virginia, the House of Burgesses determined to take over those duties and roles usually occupied by the ecclesiastical courts in England. (Campbell 1847:206) General courts took on an ecclesiastical role as they brought to trial and punished those guilty of defying the rules of worship authorized by the Anglican canon and codified into
colonial law by the General Assembly. (Bruce 1910:111) In consequence, the church became more allied with the secular realm, and the secular crept into religion’s sphere. Accordingly, the vestry investigated charges of immorality and religious nonconformity among the parishioners. The churchwarden, who was a vestryman of special appointment, then presented each offender to the civil county courts, since there was no ecclesiastical equivalent in Virginia. (Bruce 1910:113) Secular officials acted to fill gaps left in the bishopless Episcopal church. Virginia’s governors were empowered to distribute marriage licenses, probate wills and induct ministers, duties which, in England, fell exclusively under a bishop’s authority. (Brydon 1957:71)

**The Anglican Church: Adaptations to a Colonial Landscape**

The Church had no power of self-motion. She was tied to the state, and the state carried the church along with it. The method of progress was this: the state offered bounties to pioneers to penetrate the wilderness, and settle new plantations; and, when the settlers were too far from court-houses and churches to attend them, the state threw the net over them in the form of new parishes and new counties. (Randolph 1885:30)

Virginia’s settlement patterns of widely spaced plantations meant that an important anchor in conformity - church attendance - was often hindered or even prohibited by distance. This problem was addressed by Roger Greene in “Virginia’s Cure” [emphasis added]:

...Virginia which hath at present craved your Lordships Assistance to preserve the Christian Religion...is bounded on the North by the great River Potomek... and contains above half as much Land as England; it is divided into several Counties, and those Counties contain in all about Fifty Parishes, the Families whereof are dispersedly and scatteringly seated upon the sides of Rivers...Every such Parish is extended many Miles in length upon the Rivers sides. The Families of such Parishes being seated after this manner, at such distances from each other, many of them are very remote from the House of God, though placed in the middest of them.

...By which brief Description of their manner of seating themselves in that Wildernesse, Your Lordship may easily apprehend that their very manner of Planting themselves, hath caused them hitherto to rob God in a great measure of that publick Worship and Service, which as a Homage due to his great name, he requires to be constantly paid to him, at the times appointed for it, in the publick Congregations in his House of Prayer. (Greene 1661:3-4)
The “cure” described notes “the only way of a remedy for Virginia’s disease (without which all other help will only palliate not cure) must be by procuring Towns to be built, and inhabited in their several Counties.” (Greene 1661:8) Despite Greene’s plea, towns were not often built in Virginia until the eighteenth century and then for reasons other than religion.

However, in the colonial period, legislation was repeatedly enacted which addressed the adverse effect sparse and sporadic settlement patterns had on church attendance. For example, the 1642-3 General Assembly noted: “religious worship and service of Almighty God ... is often neglected and slackened by the inconvenience and remote vastness of parishes...” and continued with the provision: “It is therefore enacted and confirmed by the authority of the present Grand Assembly, that the county of Vpper Norff: shall be divided into three distinct parishes...” (Hening 1823:i.251) To encourage increased church building, large parishes were subdivided into smaller units, which necessitated church construction in the newly formed parish. With an increase in church numbers in the same relative area, parishioners were in fair proximity of at least one church which they could visit on a regular basis. Conformity to the Established Church, which included regular church attendance, was taken seriously by the political milieu during the colonial period. Every effort was made to see that compliance was carried uniformly throughout -- even to the extent of restructuring existing boundaries.

Despite concerted effort to limit parish size the continued importance of tobacco meant large plantations remained the rule in settlement with the result that “a single parish could be from thirty to one hundred miles in length,” (Hudson 1981:15). Towns were non-existent until the eighteenth century when Alexandria was incorporated. Other “towns” - for example Fairfax, Falls Church and Colchester - were the tiniest of villages until the nineteenth century. The “genius of Virginia life opposed the development of towns of greater population than was required for a shipping point and a warehouse, for the storing and grading of tobacco, and for a few agents...” (Brydon 1957:21) The number of tithables needed to construct and support a parish church was significant, and the lack of concentrated population areas meant parishes continued to be quite
Virginia Parishes and dates of origin. (Cocke 1967)
large, well into the eighteenth century, in order to ensure sufficient tithables for adequate church financing.

Church shortages were often relieved by construction of chapels-of-ease in the far reaches of parishes where there were too few settlers to finance a proper church. Lay ministers were appointed to hold services in these small buildings, thus providing a way for those on distant farmlands to attend Sunday worship in accordance with the law: "In such places where the extent of the cure of any minster is so large that he cannot be present himselfe on the Saboth dayes and other holydays, It is thought fitt, That they appoynt and allow mayntenance for deacons...for the readinge [of] common prayer in their absence." (Hening 1823 v.1:208) The laymen were only permitted to read the morning and evening prayer plus a printed sermon, or "homily", and were prohibited from celebrating the most important event in the Episcopal church -- the sacrament of Holy Communion. (Brydon 1957:15)

In accordance with English tradition, early colonial Virginia laws mandated church attendance several times during the week and "attendance on morning and evening prayer was required on week days as well as Sundays..." (Stannard 1977:327) However, the great distances between parishioners and the parish church, or even chapels-of-ease, required further departure from Anglican custom, and amendment to civil law once again reflected this change. It was impractical to expect busy farmers to travel many miles to attend religious service more than once a week; accordingly church attendance laws in colonial Virginia were modified to require Sunday worship only. (Brydon 1957:182)

In Virginia, dispersed settlement and the constant demands of an agrarian life proved an impediment to casual visiting between neighbors. Thus, participation in Sunday service provided an important social occasion for isolated plantation families. Church provided the primary forum for forming and maintaining friendships and alliances and in keeping abreast of current events and politics. (Bruce 1968:102) As Brydon (1957:24) notes, "The churchyard on Sunday morning was then a meeting place of the whole community, and the only place where all could meet on the same level." Because church services were the only occasions during which the majority of the
citizenry gathered together, civil officials took advantage of the opportunity to transmit information by asking ministers to make official announcements and read new laws. The minister was generally one of the few literate members of the community, and so it was all the more appropriate that he should be chosen to announce important events. (Brydon 1957:26) The importance of religion in both social and political spheres of Virginia communities was thereby further strengthened.

**Early Colonial Northern Virginia Churches**

Prior to the establishment of Fairfax County in 1742, the area above the Occoquan River fell under the jurisdiction of Stafford County, from 1660, and then Prince William from 1731. The parish system included first Overwharton in 1664, then Hamilton in 1731 and finally Truro (fig. 1), which was established in 1732. (Moxham 1974:1) When Fairfax County was established, its boundaries coincided with Truro Parish. There are no surviving records for Overwharton or Hamilton, but detailed vestry records survive for Truro, which provide documentary evidence for early houses of Episcopal worship in early colonial period Northern Virginia. Truro then was of huge extent (it has since been subdivided into four parishes) running “along the Potomac from the mouth of the Occoquan to the Blue Ridge...” (Slaughter 1907:3)

As noted previously, mission churches (often called chapels-of-ease or upper churches), were set up in sparsely settled areas, where services were generally led by lay readers. The earliest place of worship in Fairfax County was probably such a chapel. It was likely located on Woodlawn Plantation: land owned by George Mason II. Evidence for this chapel’s existence comes from Mason’s 1714 correspondence in which he refers to his Chapel Land. A survey map from the same year also depicts a chapel on Mason’s holdings. A mid-eighteenth century survey map by George Washington again shows a chapel located on the same Woodlawn Plantation land. (Moxham 1974:3) The chapel was ideally located because it was accessible to many of the region’s early settlers; it could be reached “by water, being near the head of the navigation of Dogue Creek...[and] ...close to the Potomac Path...which, as it does today, provided the northeast-southwest approaches to that area by land.” (Moxham 1974:3)
After 1700, prosperous and influential families like the Masons began to settle above the Occoquan. To attend to their spiritual needs a chapel was built by the Overwharton Parish. (Harrison 1964:285) A plat has since been placed on the location where this first Episcopal chapel of that area stood in 1715.

Frontier chapels-of-ease were often designated as the parish church when the population became dense enough to support a parish and minister. In this manner, the Overwharton chapel-of-ease above the Occoquan eventually became a parish church when Overwharton and Hamilton Parish were divided to create Truro in 1732. (Netherton and Netherton 1968:2) The church was called Occoquan for its location above the ferry over the Occoquan river. The markers have since disappeared, but writings from George Mason IV indicate that there was a graveyard surrounding the church building. (Moxham 1974) These early Occoquan parishioners, it seems, followed established Anglican tradition and buried their dead in the churchyard.

The new Truro vestry met for the first time in November of 1732 and again in March 1733 when they engaged Reverend Lawrence deButts on a temporary basis to preach three times a month at Occoquan and once a month at one of the chapels-of-ease in the region. (Slaughter 1907:6) In that same year the vestry decided to move the church from Occoquan to a location near Pohick run, "a location more convenient to the family seats then beginning to extend up river from the mouth of Potomac." (Netherton and Netherton 1968:2) The name was consequently changed to Pohick church (Slaughter 1907:7), a name the parish church of Truro has retained to this day. The Pohick church was constructed around 1734 and Charles Green was engaged as the first regularly appointed rector of the parish in 1736. (Slaughter 1907:9) Several markers, dating from the early years of the eighteenth century, remain standing in the graveyard which still surrounds the church.

Harrison (1964:286) reports: "Meanwhile as the population of Truro spread north up Four Mile Run and along the Potomac and more slowly west towards Bull Run, Truro undertook to keep pace by providing everybody with a convenient chapel of ease." A 1745 map shows there to be two such chapels in existence at that time: Falls Church and Goose Creek. A third
chapel is often wrongly ascribed to Truro Parish, however, it was actually the first church to be built within Cameron Parish — a parish created in 1749 by subdividing Truro. Truro vestry records indicate plans to build a chapel-of-ease at an accessible spot “between Salisbury plain, Little river and Potomac river...”, but this never occurred. Instead, the Cameron vestry laid the levy and built the church in 1749 within the Cameron Parish boundaries. (Slaughter 1907:22)

Those who found it too difficult to travel the great distance to Pohick to worship gathered instead at Gunnell’s farmhouse near Four Mile Run. (Moxham 1974:15) Accordingly the vestry engaged Rev. Lawrence DeButts to preach there on a monthly basis at Gunnell’s, an arrangement which lasted from 1733 until the summer of 1734 when a new upper church was completed. This chapel-of-ease, called Falls Church, was constructed “at the Cross Roads near Michael Reagan’s...” (Slaughter 1907:6), that is, “whereon the road to Little Falls crossed the Alexandria-Keys Gap road (now Leesburg Pike).” (Moxham 1974:17) Falls Church still stands and the surrounding yard, following tradition, is filled with burials dating from the eighteenth century.

A June 1733 entry in the Truro vestry says that Joseph Johnson was named “‘Reader at the new Church and the Chappell above Goose Creek’...”, and in August 1737 Reverend Mr. Charles Green was directed to “‘preach four times in a year only, at the Chappell above Goose Creek.’” (Slaughter 1907:14) Goose Creek chapel was constructed by vestryman Francis Awbrey beginning in 1733 and completed in 1736. (Slaughter 1907:5) It stood at the head of Cool Spring Run, located beside what is today the main road between Point of Rocks and Leesburg. (Harrison 1964:286) Tradition maintains that once a graveyard surrounded the chapel, but no archeological investigations have been attempted to establish its location. The Ball family now owns the site where Goose Creek Chapel is thought to have been located. They relate that upon the death of Colonel Burges Ball of the Continental Army servants were ordered to dig a grave for him in the family burying ground. However, they missed their mark and instead “dug it about 150 yards lower down in the midst of a neglected burying ground of the old colonial times, surrounding the famous Big Spring'” (Hopkins 1988:17) which is believed to have been the cemetery surrounding Goose Creek Chapel. And Mary McDowell, sexton of Goose Creek Chapel declared in her will
her desire to be buried "at the Chaple..." leaving no doubt that a burial yard was indeed located in close proximity to this Anglican chapel-of-ease. (Hopkins 1988:18)

In 1742, Fairfax County was established with boundaries co-extensive with Truro Parish. More and more settlers arrived in the area, demanding ever more church facilities. All of these small wooden churches and chapels, therefore, have been replaced over the years with other more substantial and larger brick buildings. But the first chapels are marked in memory and word as important edifices in the history of the county. Many of the old chapel-associated burial grounds too still exist as concrete testimonial to the colonial settlers who lived and worshipped in the land that became Fairfax County. These grounds also bear testimony to colonial struggles to maintain the Anglican ecclesiastical tradition in their new land far from the Mother Church.

However, as English settlers successfully maintained their church as the Established Church in Virginia, frontier life demanded many changes in its traditions. As the centuries passed, new Church customs developed. And the Anglican Church eventually evolved into an organization distinct in many important ways from its English origins in the Established Church of England. In particular, burial customs show marked changes from those established by the Anglican Church in England.
Chapter III

EARLY COLONIAL BURIAL CUSTOMS

The sacred and enduring bonds of relationship connect us with churchyards. Our very flesh and blood are mingling with their dust. (Kelke 1851:7)

Historical Context

Stannard, following Malinowski, has argued that the source of religious impulse may be discovered in a universal search for an understanding of death. (Stannard 1977:3) The manner in which societies choose to dispose of a lifeless body reveals cultural assumptions about the meaning of death and the state of being following death. Both Egyptians and Mycenaen Greeks provided food and drink for the dead’s sustenance in the after-life. (Quasten 1941:17) The Homeric Greek concept of the soul developed from this idea of a continued life. (Stannard 1977:17) Later Romans believed in burial as a means of reuniting the person with “mother” earth where the dead enjoyed a continued “life” under the earth. (Stannard 1977:19)

Early Christians buried their dead in imitation of Christ’s burial. Scripture reveals its even earlier importance: for example, in the old testament, Abraham asks the Canaanites to give him “a possession of a burying place ... that I may bury my dead out of my sight” when Sarah dies during their travels. (Genesis 23.4) Interment became so solidly the custom that St. Anthony was moved to decry those who did not bury their dead underground as transgressors of the law and Christian practice. (Quasten 1941:244)

Quasten (1941:245) declares: “To Christians, only the body remained in the grave; the soul went to heaven.” However, most early Christians also believed in eventual material resurrection, a belief reflected in the writings of Bishop Hobart, who said on “the resurrection of the last day ... their bodies being united to their souls, they are advanced to complete felicity or woe in Heaven or
Hell.” (Hobart 846:28) In the book of Saint John it is noted that “the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” (John 5.28-29) Likewise Saint Paul wrote concerning the resurrection of the dead, saying that the body is “sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption ... It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” (I Corinthians 15.42-44) Thus, initially the “main reason for burying the dead in the earth was respect for the body that was one day to rise in glory from the tomb.” (Quasten 1941:248) Further, burial is considered important as a mark of respect and veneration for God whose workmanship is evident in the human form and in whose image people were created: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him...” (Genesis 2.26-27) In Christianity, earth burial has long been a tradition, and is a practice which evolved from many of that religion's most basic tenets.

The Churchyard Burial Tradition

Churchyard burial became particularly important in the Christian tradition after the consecration of graveyards became customary in the ninth century A.D, and in “the fourteenth century ... churchyards were recognized as parochial cemeteries by law...” (Kelke 1851:6) In 1348 Bishop Edyndon wrote that in accord with Christian belief in the resurrection, the dead should be buried only in places which had been made sacred through consecration and “where with due reverence they are kept like the relics of the Saints till the day of resurrection.” (Puckle 1926:141-2) In general, the churchyard was walled to clearly separate the sacred precinct of the dead from the profane. (McCollister 1983:83)

Churchyard interment also became important as a way of keeping the dead within the community. In medieval Europe the church was most often in the middle of a small village surrounded by outlying farmland. In these rural areas, community members were in frequent contact with one another. Accordingly, a death was a loss keenly felt by all. Death was a public affair rather than the more often private concern it has become in the twentieth century. (Aries 1975) Burial within
the community churchyard kept the dead close to the living; there, everyone could participate in
the mourning and remembrance of one who had been an integral part of the community.

Throughout Christian history, churchyard graves often played a role in the worship of, and
served to inspire prayer in, the congregation. For example, in the Middle Ages it was fashionable
for tombstone artisans to depict the more grisly aspects of death on the marker. Viewers were
thus reminded of the frailty and brevity of earthly existence and of the importance of a devout life
and the expeditious atonement of sin. (Stannard 1977:246)

Prior to the Protestant Reformation, family members for the deceased hoped a churchyard
tombstone would serve to prompt and supplicate prayers from the passer-by, thus shortening the
length of time the dead spent in purgatory. The ground on either side of the pathway to the church
door, in fact, became the most avidly sought burial spot, since it was there that the greatest number
of churchgoers would see the grave and be prompted to remember the deceased in their prayers.
(McManners 1981:192)

Churchman William Jay offers an intriguing discussion of the spiritual lessons churchyard
tombstones provide. He argues, for example, that graves around churches serve to constantly
remind the churchgoer of guilt by original sin. Jay calls churchyard stones “monument[s] of human
guilt.” (Jay 1826:323) In Christian theology, death entered the world through “original sin”, and all
people must suffer because of it: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death
by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned...” (Epistle to the Romans 5.12)

According to Jay (1982:324), burials in the churchyard function also as a reminder of the
“state of extreme degradation” which all must endure. Whatever riches or material benefits exist
here on earth for us, they must necessarily be left behind. The grave is the great equalizer and
awaits all citizens; rich and poor alike: “Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves bags
which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither
moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (St. Luke 12:33-34)

And pride of physical appearance is shown a vain thing, since the “body itself, that fine piece of
divine workmanship, so fearfully and wonderfully made, is here broken and thrown by as a vessel
wherein is no pleasure.” (Jay 1826:325) An epithet written on an eighteenth-century stone from Alexandria’s Christ Church graveyard echoes Jay’s admonishments:

And you, my friends, look down
and view the hollow gaping tomb:
This gloomy prison waits for you
Whene’er the summons come.

To the faithful Christian, however, tombstones have also provided happier contemplation. So writes Jay: “When you think of the grave, remember that Jesus himself has been there.” (Jay 1826: 331) And too the grave can be seen as a place of rest. There will be repose “from the snares and vexations of the world; from the reproaches and persecutions of the ungodly; from the perfidy and weakness of friends; from the temptations of the Devil; from the conflicts of flesh and spirit: there all will be peace.” (Jay 1826:333) And finally, graveyards should offer comfort with the assurance that death has only a partial empire and “only receives what is corporeal and mortal... And when the powers of the body are suspended in sleep...” that most essential human element - the spirit - continues on. (Jay 1826:333) In this, Jay echoes scripture: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” (Ecclesiastes 12.7)

Anglican Church Burial Traditions

Burial in the sacred precinct of the churchyard was considered to be of paramount importance to early Anglicans because there alone the body was ensured protection until resurrection. Until the twentieth century the Anglican Church held to the belief in material resurrection of the dead, as noted in the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” (Book of Common Prayer 1976:53-54) The 1549 “Articles of Religion” maintain that all faithful Anglicans will enjoy the same reward as did Christ who did “truly rise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man’s nature; where with he ascended into Heaven.” (Book of Common Prayer 1976:53) The need therefore of burial in sacred and protected grounds is evident; it assures careful guardianship of the body
until resurrection and places it in a spot certain to be set aside and safeguarded from pollution by
the profane. (Curl 1980:29) Burial in consecrated churchyards increased the likelihood that the
dead would be treated with reverence until resurrection. Church of England churches and
churchyards were consecrated; they were not officially recognized by the Church until this rite was
performed. (Kelke 1851:14) Once consecrated, the churchyard has been separated from the
secular world and reserved specifically for the service of God. As such it can never be used for
any other purpose and so may offer an uninterrupted haven for the dead awaiting resurrection.
(McCollister 1983:169) Most churchyards were also walled and protected by churchwardens
which further ensured the undefiled continuance of church precinct burials. (McCollister 1983:170)
Following long tradition then, Church of England members expressed marked preference for
churchyard burial.

During the Middle Ages, churchyard burial in England was for a limited period of time
only. The Church followed the widely practiced European custom of digging up bones after the
flesh had decayed and storing them in mass charnel houses. Graves were then re-used. However,
in the Renaissance the individual was increasingly emphasized and during the Reformation importance
was placed on each person’s salvation. The necessity for permanent and individual burial plots
was stressed, particularly in the strongly Protestant England. (Aries 1981:202) Proper identification
and safe-keeping of individual gravesites were thought critical because of the belief in corporeal
resurrection. (Aries 1981:204)

Even after the concept of purgatory was expunged from Episcopal Church doctrine, markers
for the dead continued to provide “morality lessons” for the congregation. For example, ministers
often used the obvious churchyard evidence of the “wages of sin” in their sermons, reminding
worshippers to be ever watchful of their spiritual affairs since death is an unpredictable and inevitable
event. Also, quotes from scripture were often put on tombstones and so enhanced the spiritual
quality of the church precinct. So notes the historian Dove (1978:13): “The stones provided a
lasting memorial for both the living and the dead; they affirmed the goodness of the deceased,
offered hope for the future of the soul, and inspired the visitor on to better things.”
And, although the colonial Church of England did not espouse the Roman Catholic belief in purgatory, the belief in future probation after death had enjoyed a significant following in the church since early in the eighteenth century. (Hudson 1981:72) Bishop Hobart voiced this conviction when he noted that following death the soul does not go directly to heaven or hell, but rather “remains in a state of enjoyment or misery in the place of the departed, until the resurrection at the last day...” when their bodies will be united to their souls and only then are they “advanced to complete felicity or woe in Heaven or Hell.” (Hobart 1846:28) In 1660, the Bishop of Durham, John Cosin, encouraged remembrance of the dead in prayers in which thanks was given “for them that are departed out of this life ... and in praying to God, that they may have a joyful resurrection, and a perfect consummation of bliss, both in their bodies and souls, in His eternal kingdom of glory.” (Bettenson 1947:198) The dead are included in prayer throughout Episcopalian worship; for example, in the “Prayer for the Church Militant” the dead are remembered by: “We bless Thy holy name for all Thy servants departed this life in Thy faith and fear, beseeching Thee to give us grace so to follow their good example that with them we may be partakers of Thy heavenly kingdom.” (The Book of Common Prayer 1976:57) Tombstones also served as visible reminders to the churchgoer to pray for the deceased community member.

In addition to their power to provide spiritual inspiration, in the past, Anglican churchyard burials also played an important role of a more secular nature. As graveyards became more frequently associated with churches, they came finally under their control -- including monetary control. The clergy were “largely dependent upon the fees charged for interment, in return for which they ... took the responsibility of seeing that burials were conducted with reverence and decency, and that the bodies left in their charge remained inviolate.” (Curl 1980:139) Colonial Anglican ministers especially depended on burial fees as an important part of their livelihood.

**Burial Customs: Adaptations in Colonial Virginia**

In 1631, King Charles ordered that there be “uniformitie throughout this colony both in substance and circumstance to ... the church of England”. (Hening 1823:155) By law and necessity
Virginia's churchmen sought to exercise the same control over burial as did the Church in England. For example, in 1631 the House of Burgesses ordered that all ministers should maintain a burial register (Hening 1823:158), thus mandating the importance of church involvement in the disposal of the dead. And, because clergyman’s wages were often meager (as a result of the continually fluctuating value of tobacco), burial fees assumed importance as a supplement to an often inadequate income. According to Brydon (1947:91), “Fees for the official acts of the minister and an essential part of his annual remuneration, were set at two shillings for performing a marriage, 1 shilling for churching of women after childbirth, and one shilling for a funeral.” A House of Burgesses law in 1631 ordered 10 pounds of tobacco to be paid a minister for each burial in addition to his regular salary. (Hening 1823:162)

Given the emphasis placed on churchyard burial in the Anglican tradition, and its economic importance to the clergy, it would seem likely that Virginia’s Church would have fought to ensure churchyard burial within each parish. However, surviving material culture remains and documentary evidence reveal this was not the case. Local procedures often exhibited significant departure from the ideal. From the beginning, burial practice in early colonial Virginia was in marked contrast to that in England.

Traveller and Reverend Hugh Jones wrote “The Parishes being of great Extent...many dead Corpses cannot be conveyed to the Church to be buried; so that it is customary to bury in Gardens or Orchards, where whole Families lye interred together...” (Jones 1724:96-97) Family burying grounds located on plantations seem particularly to have been the practice early in Virginia’s history, and posed a concern to the ecclesiastical establishment in England. On July 17, 1677, the Bishop of London, Henry Compton, presented a report “Of Abuses Which Are Krept Into The Churches Of The Plantations...To The Committee for Foreign Plantations.” In it he notes the “want of public places in Virginia to bury the dead, ‘insomuch that profane custom of burying in their gardens, orchards and other places still continues...’” And in answer the committee recommended “that Church yards be allotted and bounded in...” (Virginia Historical Society 1917:147), so ensuring conformity to the custom of churchyard burial. A 1631 act suggests a
preference for churchyard burial: “It is ordeyned and enacted that in all such places where any churches are wantinge...the inhabitants shall be tyed to contribute towards the buildinge of a church...And it is ordered in like manner, That there be a certayn portion of ground appoynted out, and impaled or fenced in (uppon the penalty of twenty Marques) to be for the buriall of the dead. (Hening 1823:160-161) While the wording of the law is vague, the dictum for burial places following directly after the order for church construction seems to assume burial in proximity of the church. Legislation in 1661-2 mandated “that there be in every parish three or fower or more places appoynted...to be sett apart and fenced in, for places of publique burial...” (Hening 1823:53) Burial places are clearly legislated early in the colonial period and a preference for churchyard burial implied.

Historian Rhys Isaac (1982) has argued that regular use of places other than the churchyard for burial was simply a natural evolution towards a distinct local culture in early colonial America. Early preference for interment in family plots on farms and on plantations may be attributed to widely dispersed populations and the often long distances between habitations and churches. And while, Isaac notes, necessity may have provided the initial incentive, by the mid-eighteenth century it had become the custom rather than the exception, witnessed by Bishop Compton’s complaint: “that that profane custom of burying in their gardens, orchards and other places still continues...” (Emphasis added. Isaac 1982:62) And so, while “churchyards existed in many of the small communities, distances and hardships reinforced the isolation in life and death on the frontier.” (Sloane 1991:17)

Want of a bishop may also have been another reason Virginians did not initially adhere to the Anglican custom of churchyard burial. Without a bishop the definition of sacred space had become confused. (Isaac 1982:67) Churchyards could only be consecrated by a bishop and without an American bishop this rite could not be accomplished. Consequently, it was impossible for settlers to follow the Anglican directive that burial should occur in hallowed, consecrated church ground. Without consecration, the churchyard was little more sacred than the burial plot on the family plantation. There was little incentive, therefore, for Virginia colonists to go to a great
deal of trouble and travel long distances to bury in the churchyard. Perhaps many Virginians came
to agree with the Reverend Devereux Jarratt’s who argued, in the eighteenth century, “‘all places
alike were sacred, when any clergyman was called upon for such a [funeral] service.’” (Chorley
1946:9)

The Reverend Hugh Jones blamed the unconsecrated state of many churches for the
undignified behavior of many of Virginia’s congregations. The behavior of Virginia colonists at
church on Sundays was sharply in contrast to solemn English behavior, and many travellers to
Virginia were moved to comment upon it. For example, John Davis noted: “A Virginia churchyard
on Sunday resembles rather a race-ground than a sepulchral-ground”. The fact that churchyards
were exposed to such agitation may have also served to discourage churchyard burial. Jones
suggested some method be used to solemnize the church precinct, saying “Though the Churches
be not consecrated by Bishops, yet might there be some solemn Dedication prescribed for setting
them apart for sacred Uses: which would make People behave themselves with greater Reverence
than they usually do, and have a greater Value for the House of God and holy Things.” (Brydon
1947:398)

Philip Bruce notes as well that although “A plat for burial was laid off in the immediate
vicinity of every parish church...it was not used to the extent long customary in England.” (Bruce
1929:247) Early in the colonial period, churches were made of wood and this “more or less flimsy
construction of the average buildings for religious purposes...naturally created an impression of
impermanency. The people in the mass, therefore, preferred to reserve a burial ground, in the
neighborhood of each home, for the deceased member of the family as offering more assurance for
the proper preservation of so sacred a spot.” (Bruce 1929:248) It was not until the eighteenth
century, when towns and villages formed, that Anglican churches came to be built of brick and
accordingly viewed as a more permanent place suitable for burial. (Bruce 1929:251)

In England, churchyard burial was coveted as a mark of prestige by the rich and important;
however, wealthy colonists do not seem to have considered it a privilege. In fact, prior to the mid­
eighteenth century, “[a]ll classes of people were either interred in private lots, outlying farms, or in
their own backyards…” (Miller 1992:373) This practice continued late into the colonial period, evidenced by the 1799 burial of George Washington on his Mount Vernon plantation.

In colonial Virginia, then, prior to the mid-eighteenth century, burial seems to have been commonly conducted in unconsecrated grounds -- generally near the family dwelling. These early “pioneer” burials were a significant departure from tradition as dictated by the mother church in England, and it is likely that “[t]his American experience with a domestic, nonsectarian burial place was a foundation for the secularization of the burial process.” (Sloane 1991:17) However, as the century progressed and the land increasingly settled, burial patterns once again shifted and, in the “transition” period beginning in the eighteenth century, came to reflect the more traditional church-associated Anglican practice. To comprehend the reasons for this transformation, it is necessary to understand the sweeping governmental, political and economic changes which occurred in the eighteenth century in Virginia, and had a significant impact on the role of the Anglican Church within Fairfax County.
CHAPTER IV

DEVELOPMENT: LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FAIRFAX COUNTY

Water and trees, trees and water—the physical terrain occupied by Virginians... continued in 1790 to be dominated by rivers and forests. A much higher proportion of the 750,000 inhabitants now lived beyond the Tidewater... Land usage, however, had scarcely changed; villages and towns, though larger and more numerous, contained only a tiny percentage of the total population at the end of the eighteenth century. Yet changed outlooks entailed changed worlds—changed landscapes as experienced in life. New landmarks appeared; old landmarks and familiar patterns assumed new meanings. (Isaac 1982:299)

In the seventeenth century the area eventually established as Fairfax County was characterized by scant population, dispersed settlements, transportation routes along waterways, and an economy based upon the growth and cultivation of tobacco. Governing bodies were comprised primarily of well-to-do planters, and the established religion, Anglicanism, was tied closely to the secular government. In 1742, Fairfax County was formed with boundaries coterminous to those of Truro Parish. (Netherton et al. 1978:172) The creation of this county coincided with a period of significant economic and social change, most notably the establishment of the first towns for the region.

Since the early seventeenth century, tobacco production and trade had been the economic mainstay for Fairfax County. However, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, tobacco production waned. Tobacco crops quickly stripped soil of its nutrients, leaving the large Chesapeake plantation lands exhausted, and so quantity and quality of tobacco crops diminished. Because most plantations shipped produce from their own wharves, quality control was not strict and inferior leaf was often shipped to England. In addition, the colonial government feared that many planters were not
paying sufficient taxes on their crops. In an effort to remedy these problems, Governor Gooch passed the Tobacco Act in 1730 which provided for the establishment of specific sites along primary transportation waterways where public warehouses were set up as inspection and storage sites. Men who were appointed by authority of the crown inspected and evaluated tobacco prior to its export to Britain. (Sprouse 1975:45) Certificates measuring the quality and value of tobacco were given to growers, which they then used instead of actual tobacco as payment for goods. Through these central locations, England was ensured adequate duty collection as well as a shipment of high quality tobacco. In accordance with the law, plantation owners were forced to abandon the practice of shipping from individual wharves and instead brought their goods to common shipping docks.

These warehouses became magnets for various vendors and merchants. They found ready customers among the planters who brought their tobacco to be inspected. Over time, small settlements grew up around warehouses and eventually several were decreed towns by the General Assembly. Alexandria was formed in such manner when, in accordance with the Tobacco Act, warehouses and an inspection point were established at Great Hunting Creek. A group of enterprising merchants were first attracted to the area. The settlement they formed grew and in 1748 the House of Burgesses received a petition from “Inhabitants of Fairfax County...praying that a town be established at Hunting Creek Warehouse, on Patowmack River...” In 1749 the House of Burgesses granted the petition, noting “[t]hat a Town at Hunting Creek Warehouse on Potomack River would be Commodious for Trade and Navigation...[and] That the said Town shall be called by the Name of Alexandria.” (Hambleton and LANDINGHAM 1975:8)

Two other inspection stations were established in Fairfax County. The first, in 1762 was situated beside the Occoquan River, on the site which became the town of Colchester in 1754. (Sprouse 1975:52). The second was built on the upper Potomac in 1772 at Matildaville, which was later incorporated as the town of Great Falls. (Netherton et al. 1978:182) Neither Colchester nor Matildaville ever attained the importance of Alexandria in Fairfax County.
Colchester fell victim to changed primary transportation routes. In 1807 the Colchester ferry was supplanted by Ellicot’s bridge farther upriver. Since the river crossing was tied to a major trade route, a significant reason for the existence of the town ceased with the loss of the ferry. In 1835, Colchester had diminished so far as to be omitted entirely from a list of Virginia towns. (Sprouse 1975:52)

In their turn, inhabitants of Great Falls no doubt dreamed that the village would one day become a significant port with development of the Potowmack Canal Company’s plans for a series of shipping canals. However, the company became bogged down in financial problems and its plans were made obsolete by growing railway systems. Great Falls missed becoming an important port town and instead remained a small village until well into the twentieth century. (Netherton et al. 1978:188)

Alexandria, however, following its incorporation in 1749, quickly grew to be the pivotal point in Fairfax County. Its dominance in the county was confirmed when the Fairfax County Court was moved there in 1752. (Hambleton and Van Landingham 1975:12) The following discussion then will necessarily rest upon this town for, as historians have noted, the history of Fairfax County after mid-eighteenth century is primarily that of the town of Alexandria. (Netherton et al. 1978) For “within fifteen years of its founding Alexandria was the dominant town in the Potomac river basin...a position it would retain until its eclipse in the nineteenth century by Washington, D.C.” (Preisser 1977:9)

Concurrent with Alexandria’s creation, important changes may be noted in the economic and social fabric of the county, changes in which the town played a leading role. As Alexandria developed, the exclusively plantation-centered, agrarian way of life in Fairfax County was supplemented by an urban focus dominated by mercantile and industrial interests and merchant classes. This transition was rooted in the demise of tobacco as the primary economic base.

By mid-eighteenth century the decaying tobacco plantations were by and large subdivided into smaller farms, particularly in the western part of Fairfax County, and wheat and other agricultural products had begun to replace tobacco as Fairfax’s predominant export. (Netherton et al. 1978:192)
Farmers moved to the interior toward the furthest reaches of the county in the Shenandoah Valley and away from the natural transportation system the Potomac River provided to port towns. Alexandria’s importance as a central shipping point was recognized by these new farmers and they utilized the port for crop exportation. Small farmers, especially those in the western part of the county, turned from tobacco production and instead grew wheat and other grains; by 1775 these crops had replaced tobacco as Alexandria’s leading export item. The reasons behind this change were multiple: tobacco crop production was low, quality was on the wane, and wheat was easier to transport and could be shipped worldwide since it fell outside the British Navigation Act. Larger markets, and so greater profits, could be realized through wheat export. (Smith and Miller 1989)

New methods for farming were made available through publications devoted to the subject. Over time, improved forms of land-use and farm machinery permitted crop diversity and a higher yield. (Gutheim 1973:107) The grain trade became so large in Alexandria that in 1768 the tobacco warehouses on West’s Point were rented out for wheat and flour and still another had to built before there was sufficient available storage. (Preisser 1977:19)

Wheat provided three significant exports: grain, flour and bread. Flour was a particularly important export for Alexandria between 1760 and 1830. The major market for Alexandrian flour was the West Indies. Many colonial east coast shipping towns exported large amounts of flour during the latter part of the eighteenth century and early part of the nineteenth. The four largest shippers, ranked according to shipment volume, included New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Alexandria. (Shephard 1988:8)

By 1800, the importance of grain as a trade commodity was eclipsed by the demand for flour. In part, this was due to England’s war with France. When Napoleon tried to starve the British into submission, England relied heavily on American wheat, much of it from Alexandria. Alexandria exported 94,954 bushels of wheat to England in 1803. In 1857, Alexandria reached the peak of its wheat exports when it shipped 231,572 bushels. (Macoll 1977:28) Alexandria may have owed its existence to tobacco but it was wheat that allowed it to flourish.
A New Mercantile Center

The tobacco trade continued fitfully, the wheat trade boomed, and an increasing number of merchants found Alexandria a profitable location. “In 1775, there were twenty-one factors and merchants doing business in the town, most of them dealing in wheat…” (Hambleton and Van LANDINGHAM 1975: 43) Their numbers included purchasers of wheat, such as Hooe and Harrison; importers of colony goods and buyers of wheat and tobacco, for example Brown and Finley, and importers of European goods and tobacco buyers, like John Muir. (Hambleton and Van LANDINGHAM 1975: 45)

As might be anticipated in a prominent port town, shipbuilding was a thriving industry in Alexandria. The first ocean-going vessel was launched from the town in 1752, and there are construction records from between 1752 and 1772 for at least seventeen other ships. (Shephard 1988: 6) An additional eight were built and launched from Alexandria’s docks between the Revolution and 1800, including schooners such as the 95 ton Harriott, built in 1791, to the 246 ton ship, William and John, of 1799. (Hambleton and Van LANDINGHAM 1975: 52)

Early town industries developed with production of ship-related goods in response to needs of the shipping trade. Since bread was a primary staple for ocean-going vessels, bakeries were some of the earliest businesses in the town. Additionally, rope walks provided lines, coopers built barrels for on-board storage, distillers and brewers provided rum and wine for the long voyages, printers provided ship manifests to owners, sail lofts grew up which provided sails and sail cloth. Ordinaries, boarding houses and inns provided lodging and entertainment for sailors and merchants, warehouses were built, and shipyards and wharves sprang up. (Braden 1984; Hambleton and Van LANDINGHAM 1975; Shephard 1988) Additionally, the Potomac had a reputation for excellent fisheries, and quantities of Potomac fishes -- particularly herring and shad -- were salted down and barrelled at Alexandria’s “Fish Wharf”. Some were used for rations on board, and the rest exported for sale in distant lands. (Macoll 1977: 89)

By the 1790s, Alexandria was a thriving port town with decidedly mercantile interests. Nearly 1,000 ships anchored there annually. In 1786, a Virginia statute restricted foreign vessels
to only a few ports of entry, one of which was Alexandria. A growing trade was thus concentrated on the town, including strong international commerce with a number of countries, in particular, Canada, Sweden, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Holland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the West Indies and hosted ships from at least twenty-five American ports. (Shephard 1988:8)

**Population Growth**

Prior to 1774, most population estimates in Virginia were made by the British Board of Trade. Then in the Continental Period, 1774-1789, a few states, Virginia among them, took population counts based on a census of polls and taxable property. Travellers to the area also provided accounts which provided evidence used to estimate population prior to 1790. In 1790 the first federal population census was conducted. (Parker 1909:17)

In 1610, Virginia’s population was estimated as 210. In 1750, just two years after the founding of Alexandria, there were around 275,000 inhabitants in the colony. The first federal census shows 691,737 people living in Virginia making it then the largest state. (Serow 1978:32) Of this number, 12,320 lived in Fairfax County, with 2,748 of those in Alexandria. (Androit 1983:21) In 1790, 1.8 percent of Virginia’s total population lived in what could be termed an urban area (either Alexandria, Norfolk, Petersburg or Richmond), with the remaining 98.2 percent in rural environments. (Serow 1978:34)

By 1800, Alexandria’s population had grown to 4,971. And, in 1810, nearly double that number (7,227) resided in the town. (Hurst 1991:72) The total population for the remainder of Fairfax County had increased little during the same time frame -- with 13,111 in 1810 there were just under 1,000 more inhabitants in the county than had been recorded in 1790. The town of Alexandria itself had gained significantly more people than the rest of the county in the same period. (Androit 1983:24)

**Public Health Improves with Town Development**

The prevention of epidemic disease was a deep concern everywhere in eighteenth century
colonial Virginia. In particular, as towns increased in number and size more people came with increasing frequency into contact with potential disease carriers. It was, therefore, in towns that colonial government and the medical community focused their preventative efforts. Throughout the eighteenth century, there were considerable medical advancements which served greatly to improve public health in Alexandria and Fairfax County. Also, town officials sought to safeguard public health through appointment of administrators who enacted legislation designed to protect against the spread of disease.

In the shipping port of Alexandria, smallpox and yellow fever were particular problems. However, cholera, typhoid and dysentery continued to be problematic there as they were throughout the rest of Fairfax County. (Kaye 1975:7)

Smallpox was commonly reported in Fairfax County and posed a continual threat until the turn of the nineteenth century. Smallpox was also introduced primarily through shipping; in particular, ships from England posed a threat since smallpox was frequently epidemic in that country. (Kaye 1975:35)

Early medical practitioners understood smallpox to be particularly contagious. However, throughout the eighteenth century it was also known that the victim “...became resistant against future attacks of the same disease.” (Mettler 1947:419) It was the knowledge of this characteristic of the disease that enabled the Englishman Edward Jenner to develop a vaccine for smallpox in 1798. His vaccine all but halted the deadly ravages of the disease in England. (Mettler 1947:425) Virginians were slow to accept the vaccine, but with the powerful support of Thomas Jefferson, the vaccine was rapidly implemented throughout the state. Accordingly, the mortal threat of smallpox was greatly diminished in the early years of the nineteenth century in Virginia. (Blanton 1933:92)

In Alexandria, the positive effects of the vaccine were widely evident. After its introduction, smallpox was controlled to the point that “The natural small pox usually carries off 8 in every 100 attacked by it; but of 800 inoculated, no more than one dies.” (Alexandria Daily Gazette: June 19, 1806). In fact, by the nineteenth century the threat of the disease was so completely controlled that an Alexandrian was moved to write: “We cannot repress our astonishment and horror, that in
a country where the blessings of vaccination are so well known, ...human victims should be ... sacrificed to the small-pox. We consider it a species of murder...” (Alexandria Daily Gazette, Dec. 16, 1808) And physicians of Alexandria noted: “The total absence of the Small Pox for some time past, seems to impose upon the Physicians of Alexandria the duty of making known to its inhabitants that a natural case of that disease now exists in a small tenement in the neighborhood of Ezra Kenzie’s tanyard...[We] have taken measures to procure from adjacent towns an immediate supply of Vaccine Infection, which they hope will arrive in two or three days at furthers. -- In the meantime the authority of the Police will be applied to prevent the subject now laboring under Small Pox, from wandering from his place of residence. Little or no danger is therefore to be apprehended during the short interval which will elapse before vaccination can be resorted to.” (Alexandria Daily Gazette, Dec. 15, 1808) From such articles it is apparent that smallpox was largely contained and controlled by vaccine and quarantine by the beginning of the nineteenth century. From that time forward, it ceased to pose a mortal threat to the public health in Fairfax County.

Of diseases in Fairfax County, only yellow fever ever reached true epidemic proportions - - episodes confined to the town of Alexandria. The fever was the scourge of many port towns and appeared frequently in epidemic form. High mortality rates characterized these epidemics, thus, yellow fever was the focus of much colonial medical investigation. Because the disease was primarily associated with seaport towns, many physicians and laymen determined that a town’s proximity to water was a certain indication that its inhabitants would be victim to the ravages of the particularly deadly disease. Water, it was believed, somehow acted as an agent of disease transmittal and objects of concern were privies, marshes, street run-off, and drainage ditches. Seagoing vessels from foreign ports were also seen as posing a particular threat, especially those from the West Indies. (Blanton 1931:295)

In fact, yellow fever was brought to Alexandria through trade with the West Indies and South America where the disease flourished. Although, it was believed that infected sailors introduced the disease into the town while their vessels lay at dock along the town’s wharves, the
real disease carriers, however, were mosquitoes. These insects were unknowingly transported in ship water barrels from the Indies to the colonies. The link with mosquitoes was not understood until many years after the disease was described, but doctors early noted a connection between port towns, trade and increased incidence of yellow fever in the eighteenth century and took appropriate measures to quell the outbreaks. (Blanton 1931:297) Many doctors also believed that the disease could be transmitted by one human being to another, and that “the contagion was [also] spread by fomites -- furniture, clothing, bedding.” (Blanton 1933:327) Others maintained that the disease was not contagious, but was instead distributed through air particles, particularly marsh miasmas. (Kaye 1975:38)

In 1797-8 the first yellow fever outbreak was recorded in Alexandria. The cause was attributed to the filthy condition of lower Prince Street, remedied by draining standing water and the strict censure and control of “nuisances”, such as throwing garbage into the streets. (Powell 1949:58)

The yellow fever epidemic of 1803 was the worst outbreak in Alexandria’s history. “Of the six thousand inhabitants of Alexandria, more than three thousand left the city...” (Kaye, 1989:14) Two hundred of those who remained in the town died. For the most part the wealthy and middle class members of the community escaped, while those who succumbed to the disease were primarily the poor and indigent. (Powell, 1949:60) Well documented through publication of Dr. Hall’s correspondence to a colleague, The epidemic, its causes, and course of action pursued to cure the disease and halt its progress were described. He faulted neglect of streets and standing water as culprits in the origins of the epidemic along with the lack of rain and intense heat. (Hall 1803:18) But chief among all other causes he believed was “a kiln burnt in a central part of the city, on which was thrown a pile of oyster-shells; containing, as was said, some putrid fish. For some days the exhalations arising from it proved offensive to the neighborhood, some individuals of which sickened and died.” (Hall 1803:19)

To control yellow fever, quarantine of infected ships and individuals seemed most effective and, accordingly, strict quarantine laws were applied by Alexandria’s board of health, particularly
for all incoming ships and travellers. For example, the City Council records from 1794 note “there is good reason to believe that a contagious fever rages in Baltimore, and to prevent the introduction of it into this Town Resolved that the health Officer be requested to take the necessary precautions to prevent the landing of any persons or goods coming by water from Baltimore to this Town, without a previous examination by him and that he attend the Stages as they arrive from the Northward and if he has reason to suspect any passenger to be infected with said disorder; that he cause such person to be immediately removed out of the Town...” (Alexandria City Council 1800:118) And September 14, 1798 minutes note “The Council having rec’d Information from the Health Officer of this Town, that there exists [fever] in several Ports and places, which has communication by Water with this port, It is ordered that the Health Officer of the town, to enforce the Laws concerning quarantine without further delay towards all Vessels and persons coming from such infected places...” (Alexandria City Council 1800:285-6) In addition, during the 1803 epidemic, stores and shops were closed to limit contact between the citizenry and many townspeople simply left the city to avoid possible contagion. (Powell 1949:62)

Throughout Fairfax County, dysentery and typhoid also caused the death of many people. In particular, large numbers of children were lost to these diseases during the summer months. (Kaye 1975:22) Dysentery and typhoid primarily afflicted those in the outer reaches of the county; town dwellers in Alexandria suffered far less especially after 1800 when successful preventative measures were enacted in the town.

Typhoid and dysentery were largely spread as ground water flowed between privies and wells which were often located in close proximity to one another. In the first few years of the 1800s the board of health in the city of Alexandria ordered the digging of deep wells throughout the town specifically to provide all inhabitants with clean drinking water and end the threat of the summertime diseases. Thereafter the childhood mortality rate for Alexandria was significantly lower than that noted in county inhabitants. (Kaye 1975:24)
Alexandria’s Board of Health

Measures carried out by Alexandria’s board of health were largely responsible for the successful control of disease in the town by the turn of the nineteenth century. Largely through its efforts, Alexandria’s citizenry came to enjoy remarkably good at about the same time as church and graveyards were disassociated.

The first board of health in Alexandria, composed of eight members guided by a physician health officer, was established shortly after Alexandria’s founding. In 1779 public health laws were codified, focusing primarily on the threat posed by seagoing vessels. (Alexandria City Council 1780) Quarantine was prescribed as the most effective safeguard against possible ship-borne disease as illustrated in the 1779 enactment which mandated: “Whenever it shall appear to the satisfaction of the mayor, that a malignant or contagious epidemic disease prevails in any...foreign port or place...all vessels coming from, or touching at, such places, to be examined; and if it appear that the said vessel or vessels...be in such a state as...may be dangerous to the health of the inhabitants, he shall order and direct that such vessel or vessels proceed forthwith to the quarantine ground...” And “Any of the crew of any vessel or steamboat, or any passengers in any vessel or steamboat coming from any place infected with...pestilential disease, who shall come into or within the limits of the corporation in violation of the orders of the health officer before the expiration of the time, which shall have been limited by him for their exclusion of the city...shall for each violation of this provision, forfeit and pay the sum of fifty dollars...” (Alexandria City Council 1800:99) These laws were enforced repeatedly to safeguard the citizenry. For example, on August 29th, 1795, the health officer reported that “a Malignant Disorder at this time prevails at Norfolk and other ports upon the Continent & in several of the West India Islands and...he be requested to employ a Boat to bring too all Vessells coming from Norfolk, New York and such places as he may receive Information are certainly infected with malignant Complaints and not suffer them to come higher up than the Bluff untill such Vessell be properly examined by the said officer...” (Alexandria City Council 1780:139)
Efforts to protect the public health also focused on street maintenance. They were considered potential health hazards because of the stagnant waters which often collected in sunken areas of irregularly attended roads. Notably, in fact, following the 1803 yellow fever epidemic in Alexandria, Dr. Hall blamed neglect of streets as the cause, noting in correspondence with a colleague: “From motives truly laudable, inasmuch as the beauty of this place was considered, our attention was too much given to paving new streets, whilst those already paved were neglected.” (Hall, 1803:17) Accordingly, it was enacted in 1779 that “It shall be the duty of the superintendent of police to have the streets, lanes and alleys of the city cleaned and purified in such manner and at such times as the board of health may direct.” (Alexandria City Council 1821:99)

Overall, citizens in Fairfax County and Alexandria enjoyed remarkably good health at the turn of the nineteenth century. The low population characteristic of Fairfax County in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century helped to limit the spread of illness. There was little of the crowding and filth noted in other towns and comparatively few people lived in the desperate poverty described for large eighteenth and nineteenth century American and English cities.

The concern for public health led to the establishment of governmental bodies designed to protect the public welfare. For example, Alexandria’s board of health campaign to improve hygiene and make available clean drinking water kept the incidence of disease low in that town. The board of health’s vigilance there and enforcement of strong quarantine laws also helped to contain illness before it spread beyond control. The town of Alexandria was also fortunate to have a large number of trained doctors practicing in town. Thirty-one doctors attended to a relatively small population of 5,000 people in 1799. (Kaye 1975:22) And, effective medical cures and better understanding of preventative measures for the most deadly diseases threatening Fairfax County - smallpox, malaria and yellow fever - existed and were used by the beginning of the nineteenth century when legislation prohibiting intramural burials was initiated.

**Commerce and Manufacture: Economic Change**

Shipping continued to be important to Fairfax County’s economy until well into the 1700s.
Alexandria remained at the focal point of such enterprise. By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, the town’s economic interests began to expand beyond its earlier mercantile focus, diversifying to include commercial and small-scale manufacturing interests. (Shephard 1988:15)

Accordingly, merchants ran retail establishments for sale of imported wares on Prince, King, Fairfax, Lee and Union Streets. By 1800 there were at least 15 retail stores in Alexandria. (Hambleton and Van Ladingham 1975:54)

In addition, milling operations increased throughout Fairfax County where the rolling river channels of outlying county lands were ideally suited to the power needs of grist mills. Several mills began operation in Alexandria itself so that in 1810 there were three milling establishments on record within the town’s 1.2 square mile boundaries. (Macoll 1977:17) Many town merchants set up partnerships with county millers -- alliances solidified through passage of an 1775 act requiring inspection of flour. Merchants, on site in Alexandria, were often able to facilitate inspection for distant county millers. By the end of the eighteenth century Alexandria’s prominence in Fairfax County was ensured by the lead role it took in the important flour trade, and as “a result of law and convenience, country mills and the villages they created became economic satellites orbiting Alexandria’s export flour trade.” (Macoll 1977:19)

Sugar refining provided one of the most valuable manufacturing enterprises for Alexandria early in the nineteenth century. Two refineries were located in the town, one at the intersection of Washington and Queen Streets, and the other on Alfred Street. Together they accumulated $144,000 in sales annually. (Macoll 1977:24) In 1810, Alexandria ranked third in the nation for sugar production. (Shephard 1988:11)

As population and the number of villages increased throughout Fairfax County, local craftsman and small manufacturing companies sprang up in response to this ready and growing market for material goods. For example, in Alexandria of 1800, one could purchase storage jars from a local crockery manufacturer, tinned boxes from a metal shop, saddles and bridles from a local manufacturer, shoes from the town’s cobbler, jewelry and other luxury items from the silversmith, nautical instruments and a host of other goods which had previously been available to the
townspeople solely through importation. (Macoll 1977:30) Local manufacturing and retail prospered in turn of the century Alexandria. Largely due to the town’s success, Fairfax county was a nationally recognized economic force by the late eighteenth century. (Netherton et al. 1978:182)

**Transportation Improvements**

Transportation routes became increasingly essential as local trade and manufacturing enterprises grew, and as ever more people settled on small family farms and rural villages in the western reaches of the county away from the primary waterways which had provided ready transit avenues for early settlers. For the earlier tobacco plantation dwellers, rough tracks had been sufficient for product transportation since the sturdy hogsheads were easily rolled down to the shoreline along even the most rutted surfaces. (Hambleton and Van Landingham 1975:187) However, the shift in Northern Virginia from tobacco to diversified agricultural products made wagon transport mandatory. Thus, high grade, smooth surfaced roads were required. Additionally, with the growth and increasing importance of milling, large quantities of flour needed to be moved efficiently from outlying county areas to the export center of Alexandria. Consequently road construction accelerated in the late eighteenth century with Alexandria as the focal point.

Two key roads carried much of Alexandria’s business between it and the Shenandoah Valley. These early roads were built and maintained by the county court system, with local levies providing the financial support. Roads were expensive to maintain and so were infrequently repaired. Thus, they were difficult for wagons to traverse. (Netherton et al. 1978:189) Merchants petitioned the House of Burgesses for a solution to their transportation problems, and in answer, the first toll road was established between Alexandria and Snicker’s Gap in Loudoun County in 1785. Others were constructed soon thereafter. (Netherton et al. 1978:190) This improvement of Northern Virginia’s road system “firmly established Alexandria’s position as a viable seaport and gave its merchants a virtual monopoly over the area’s trade.” (Macoll 1977:51)

Canals were another important element in the transportation system which influenced the development of Fairfax County. For example, in 1802, the Patowmack Canal Company completed
and opened a series of locks and canals around Great Falls. Through this innovation distant western farms could easily access the town and its produce-processing facilities. The quantity of agricultural products sent from Great Falls to Alexandria for overseas shipment expanded; for example, between 1801 and 1802 shipments of wheat and flour doubled from the town to Alexandria. Great Falls grew in size in accord with its increased importance to exportation. (Netherton et al. 1978:192)

Importantly, bridge construction began late in the eighteenth century, allowing span of the Potomac river and increased ease of transportation. In 1797 the first bridge was built at Little Falls at the site of the present day Chain Bridge. (Netherton et al. 1978:193) Utilizing this facility, still additional villages were able to send their produce and manufactured goods to Alexandria’s market.

The development of a network of transportation routes stimulated production and trade in eighteenth and nineteenth century Fairfax County. With increased opportunities in business, agriculture and manufacturing, greater numbers of people were attracted to Fairfax, prompting a commensurate growth in the number and size of towns. Regional settlement patterns changed dramatically between the seventeenth and late eighteenth century.

**Changing Settlement Patterns**

The tobacco planters of Fairfax County’s early plantations had arranged themselves primarily along the banks of major rivers and lesser water routes. When forced to find additional lands they tended to move northward, sticking close to the primary river banks and feeder streams. During the eighteenth century several important changes influenced where people settled. First, produce emphasis changed from tobacco to grains and their products. Second, plantation soils became relatively unproductive due to successive tobacco plantings which left them depleted of essential growth nutrients. Third, farms became smaller as a result of repeated divisions of lands as they were passed down through succeeding generations. With viability and productivity of eastern and northern Virginia lands thus limited, many farmers chose to move on to the largely unsettled and
rich lands of the Shenandoah to the interior and west in Fairfax county. However, those lands were distant from the primary rivers which earlier plantation dwellers had exploited as convenient transportation routes. New settlement patterns developed in western Fairfax County to accommodate the transportation and market needs of these distant farms. (Netherton et al. 1978:197)

By the end of the eighteenth century, small villages developed in response to the material and market needs of the newly established western county agriculturalists. These settlements provided local markets and county fairs where perishable goods were readily sold, as well as a source of necessary material goods for the farming family (goods which in the east were imported directly to plantation wharves via river routes). Several still extant Northern Virginia towns began in this fashion; for example, Vienna was first established as a tiny farming village called Ayr Hill in the late seventeen hundreds. (Geddes 1967:22) By beginning of the nineteenth century, the highly dispersed settlement patterns characteristic of seventeenth and early eighteenth century Fairfax had become more centrally focused and organized around farming villages and trade towns. (Isaac 1982:207)

The necessary development of roads for transportation routes also influenced the development of county settlement patterns. Taverns, ordinaries, hotels and restaurants sprang up along roadways and intersections. Tradespeople and their families were naturally attracted to these areas by the constant flow of potential customers. With their influx, small villages and eventually towns grew up along roadsides. For example, the Earp family opened an ordinary at the crossroads of two early roads -- present day Little River Turnpike and Ox Road. Over time, other tradesmen established themselves at this intersection as well, and records indicate that there existed a tiny settlement in 1800. (Rust 1960:62) When the county courthouse was moved from Alexandria to this small town, it became the center of much county activity with a commensurate increase in population. It was finally incorporated in 1805 as the town of Providence. (Netherton et al. 1978:197)
Alexandria: Town Expansion

As mentioned previously, the town of Alexandria experienced significant population growth in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The rapid expansion began, at first, in response to the town’s early success as a seaport, and increased as its economic base diversified to include mercantile and industrial pursuits. Merchants, businessman, artisans and craftsmen flocked to Alexandria to take advantage of the opportunities her growing prosperity afforded. Additionally the town’s importance in county government attracted others, especially between 1752 and 1800 when the Fairfax County Court was located there. Real estate within the town limits became increasingly valuable as demand for living space and commercial properties grew.

In the beginning, the area covered by Alexandria was quite tiny; upon its founding in 1749 it was a mere sixty acres in size. The town was “rectangular one-half acre lots with streets running north-south and east-west” (Shephard 1988:3). To the west, Alexandria was bounded by Royal Street, to the south by Duke, and by Cameron Street to the north. (Smith and Miller 1989:82) However, as the population grew, and the desire for land within the town of Alexandria increased, city officials found it necessary to significantly widen the town’s boundaries on several occasions. (fig. 2)

In 1762, the first act allowing for the enlargement of Alexandria was passed, creating Pitt Street to the west and Wolfe to the south. (Hambleton and Van Landingham 1975:202) In 1785, the General Assembly enabled further extension of the town limits with “Franklin on the south, Oronoco on the north, and Washington on the west.” (Hambleton and Landingham, 1975:31) Finally, in 1796 Alexandria’s boundaries were extended to a size not to be exceeded until the twentieth century, and its perimeters became Great Hunting Creek to the south, West Street on the western side and Montgomery Street to the north, with the east boundary comprised of the Potomac River. (Shephard 1988:15)

According to a study conducted by archeologists with Alexandria Archeology, eighteenth and early nineteenth century population distribution was based upon two factors: social standing and location of the urban core. Three distinctive socioeconomic groups were described in this
Figure 2

Alexandria’s boundaries between 1749 and 1796. (From the Office of the County Manager 1980)
First, the upper class was composed primarily of wealthy land holders, merchants and their families. Second, the middle class included professionals, "such as ministers, lawyers, teachers, and doctors..." plus skilled craftsmen. (Shephard 1988:7) Third, "Unskilled laborers and servants made up the lower end of the socioeconomic hierarchy, with slaves being at the very bottom." (Shephard 1988:7) Prior to 1810 there is little evidence of distinct lower-class neighborhoods, since most servants and slaves lived in white households before then. (Cressey et al. 1984) The upper classes held public office and generally controlled the town government. The interval between 1750 and 1790 was termed the Mercantile period, which was characterized by "little residential segregation of different socioeconomic groups. The middle and lower classes were located in the central part of the settlement, upper class residences were scattered along the river bluff." (Shephard 1988:7)

During the Indigenous Commercial Period (1790-1850), distinct separation of social classes according to neighborhood became evident. (fig. 3) By 1810 the elite and upper middle classes were clustered around the major streets of Washington and King. "No Upper Middle Class street-face is more than two blocks away from King or Washington Street." (Cressey et al. 1984:15) Also situated in this area were the largest number of churches, private schools, libraries and government centers. Neighborhoods of middle and lower classes were then distributed according to status around the elite areas in ever outlying portions of the periphery. (Cressey et al. 1984:17)

Alexandria Archeologists analyzed land-use patterns using a "core-periphery model" and discovered definite patterns which, when viewed over time, have been hypothesized to be reflective of changes in the town's social and economic structure. The "core" for this model is defined as the politico-economic center and functioned as the commercial and government center. It was there the upper and middle classes chose to reside. (Shephard 1988:9) The lower classes lived in areas peripheral to the core amid places of manufacture.

A map for 1750 locates the core along the waterfront and along King Street ending at Royal. This area corresponded to the location chosen by upper classes for their residences. An 1810 map shows a change -- the residences of the poor had replaced the elite along the waterfront,
Figure 3

Core and periphery delineations for Alexandria: 1750 and 1810. (Adapted from Shephard 1988)
and a much expanded core area was oriented east-west away from the Potomac. (Cressey et al. 1984:19) “This geographical shift of the urban core, to the west and away from the waterfront parallels and is related to the economic shift Alexandria experienced in the first half of the nineteenth century. The town’s beginnings as a mercantile port gave way to the development of Alexandria into a commercial and small-scale manufacturing center.” (Shephard 1988:11)

Additionally, the population was increasingly heterogenous in the early nineteenth century. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Alexandria was peopled primarily by British Anglican plantation owners and merchants, with a few Scottish traders among them. By the beginning of the nineteenth century settlers to Alexandria were increasingly diverse in terms of their professions, economic standing, and ethnic and religious backgrounds. As Alexandria became increasingly heterogeneous in population, people arrayed themselves with others more like themselves and in a manner clearly reflective of social standing. Property became most valuable in the core area where the wealthy lived and primary professional and political offices were located.

**Alexandria: The Evolution of Town Government**

Changes in Alexandria’s economic base and population dispersal were accompanied by transformations of town government as well. Importantly, as government officials were replaced in this Revolutionary period, a body of ordinances and laws were enacted which reflected the values of this new leadership.

Alexandria was originally founded primarily in answer to the urging of a few large landholders and wealthy merchants who needed a market town on the Potomac suited to their import and export needs. (Braden 1983) Representatives of these elite men were appointed trustees and it was they who governed the town and determined the laws under which it operated. The first eleven trustees were appointed in 1749. All were members of the squirarchy, and included such notables as the Right Honorable Lord Fairfax, Northern Neck proprietor and sixth Baron of Cameron; the Honorable William Fairfax, land agent for his cousin, Lord Fairfax, and a large landowner in his own right plus vestryman to the Established Church; Lawrence Washington, plantation
owner and Truro Parish vestryman; and John Carlyle, wealthy Scottish merchant and land-owner. (Hambleton and Landingham 1975:11) Because most trustees lived on plantations at a distance from Alexandria they met infrequently and were slow to respond to the needs of townspeople. City government, therefore, was loosely structured and its interests subordinated to the needs of the wealthy. In addition, most of the town’s leaders were also members of the Episcopal Church vestry. With early Virginia law mandating close ties between civil and church concerns, and with city officials involved with both, town and church were closely bound in Alexandria of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. (Hambleton and Landingham 1975)

In 1779 the town was incorporated and its government restructured so that “the town’s oligarchical trusteeship was replaced with a mayor-council system.” (Smith and Miller 1989:16) The new officials were elected by town citizenry -- a response to the move toward popular representation which had swept the country. Alexandria’s citizenry likewise moved to have their interests and needs clearly reflected in the town government. Few of Alexandria’s inhabitants in the Revolutionary period were large plantation owners or wealthy merchants simply looking for a shipping port; rather they spanned the gamut of occupations and interests, and included craftsmen, professionals, businessmen, merchants and so on. Following the Revolution, popular elections were the vehicle whereby the earlier elite-dominated government was replaced with an administration more reflective of the townspeople’s varied needs and interests. (Isaac 1982)

Importantly, with the demise of British rule, the Episcopal church was looked upon with suspicion. Gone were the laws which decreed that all must be members of the Established Church and those which prohibited non-members from holding civil office. (Netherton et al. 1978) After 1799, then, Alexandria’s town government reflected the diverse occupations, ethnic and religious backgrounds of its citizenry.

In February, 1780, Alexandrians elected the first twelve town officials (including mayor, recorder, aldermen, and members of the Common Council), for the newly incorporated town. In most aspects they differ from their trustee predecessors, and reflect the professional and religious heterogeneity of Revolutionary and Republic period Alexandria. They were:
Robert Townsend Hooe, elected mayor: native Virginian, flour merchant, large land-owner and a member of the Anglican Church.

David Arell, elected recorder: originally from Pennsylvania, a lawyer and Presbyterian by faith.

James Hendricks, elected alderman: wheat merchant and Presbyterian.

John Fitzgerald, chosen alderman: Irish wheat merchant and a Roman Catholic.

William Rushby, chosen alderman: house painter and glazier.

Robert MacCrae, chosen alderman: Scottish merchant and a Presbyterian.

Elected common councilman included Presbyterian Scottish merchant, William Hunter, Jr., English merchant, Josiah Watson, tanner, Peter Wise, baker and flour inspector, Adam Lynn, and Quaker merchants, John Harper and William Hartshorne. (Braden, 1983:19)

By 1800, Fairfax County was dominated by Alexandria. The town had grown from a cluster of inspection and storage warehouses to an international port town of nearly 5,000 citizens of varying occupations and religious beliefs. (Shephard 1988:15) All major county roads led to Alexandria. Residents of both county and town enjoyed far better health than had their predecessors. Diversification of the county’s economic interests led to an increase in population - especially for Alexandria. The town also grew in political importance and major innovations were made in the town’s governance. And, because the Anglican Church was so closely tied to civic affairs in Fairfax County, it too was strongly affected by the changes evident there.
CHAPTER V

THE CHURCH: REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

...in North America, inspirations always implicit in Christianity had free play, creating something new, an idiosyncratic mutation - a Christianity diverse, fissiparous, and inventive not held in check by the state or beholden to it, not taking orders from Rome or supervised from Europe, enjoying freedom and extending freedom to others, thriving on democratic systems of church government, the voluntary principle, and lay leadership. (McManners 1990:337)

Growth and Prosperity

By the mid-eighteenth century the Anglican Church was strong in Fairfax County. As county population grew, the demand for church facilities and the ability to pay for them increased. The Church prospered and Anglican church construction escalated. Additional parishes were formed to accommodate this growth. In 1748, Cameron Parish was formed from Truro and in 1757 Loudoun County was formed with boundaries coterminous with those for the new parish. Cameron Parish was, therefore, removed from Fairfax County. (Netherton et al 1978:32)

A few years after the formation of Cameron, the Fairfax County citizenry petitioned the county court, requesting a further division of Truro Parish and additional churches to accommodate religious needs. After debate, the petition was granted on February 1, 1765, and Fairfax Parish was formed from Truro. However, this initial division was decried as monetarily unfair by the residents of Truro because Washington’s wealthy estate was located in Fairfax Parish which put “…nearly double the number of tithables in the new parish of Fairfax than there [were] in Truro.” (Netherton et al. 1978:40) A new division, approved on May 14, 1765 left George Washington’s mansion house in Truro with most of the associated farmland in Fairfax -- 1013 tithables for
Fairfax and 962 to Truro. (Slaughter 1907:42) This unequal division meant that larger tax revenues were available to the Fairfax County Parish than were to Truro.

When Fairfax Parish was formed there were several Anglican chapels and churches in existence in Truro. They are known through the surviving parish vestry book of records. In it are entries which provide evidence for the early religious structures of Upper Church, Overwharton Parish, and Goose Creek Chapel. Suggestive passages in the vestry meeting minutes seem to indicate that a chapel may well have existed in early eighteenth century Alexandria.

There are no physical remains which might provide details about these churches. Little is known beyond the scant information found in vestry records. For example, vestry minutes show that Goose Creek Chapel was part of Truro until 1749 when it was included in Cameron Parish. It later became the first church in Loudoun County upon its separation from Fairfax in 1757. (Harrison 1964:78) Scholars speculate that both Upper Church and Alexandria’s house of worship were probably chapels-of-ease and therefore small, wooden structures built to allow for services led by either lay readers or ministers traveling periodically to the frontier. (Harrison, 1964:80) Overwharton was the only true Parish Church with a minister in regular attendance, but posed a long journey for settlers in the northern reaches of Fairfax who wanted to attend its services. These early churches were all small structures made of wood.

By the mid-eighteenth century, sparsely populated Fairfax County had grown sufficiently in numbers and wealth to support additional parishes. Both Truro and Fairfax vestries authorized and gathered funds for the building of permanent parish churches. The three brick churches built in this period of Anglican prosperity -- Pohick in Truro, and Falls Church and Christ Church in Fairfax Parish -- have remained standing to the present time. Two additional Anglican churches were built as well -- the Colchester church and the other called “Payne’s” -- however, the church buildings did not survive and only remnants of the graveyards which once surrounded them remain as material testimony to their existence.

In 1732, Overwharton chapel was designated the parish church for the newly created Truro, with a concurrent name change to Occoquan for its location above the Occoquan ferry
(Netherton and Netherton 1968:7). In 1733, Truro vestry records indicate another name change, calling the church Pohick, for the location on Pohick Run where the church had been relocated. This location was chosen because it was more convenient to important family plantations, such as those of Washington and Mason. (Rawlings 1963; Netherton and Netherton 1968:9)

In 1767 the vestry “laid a levy” for the building of a new church “at or as near the Cross Road leading from Hoolis’s to Pohic Warehouse as water can be had...” replacing “The Old Pohick Church [which] was a frame building, and occupied a site on the south side of Pohick run, and about two miles from the present site which is on the north side of the run.” (Slaughter 1907:63) Apparently this Church relocation was a source of conflict between George Washington and George Mason. Mason insisted the new church should be built on the old site, arguing that it was the location where their ancestors had worshipped and many of them were buried. Washington advocated the proposed site for Pohick, citing its more central and convenient location. (Slaughter 1907:65) The majority favored Washington and a builder was commissioned to construct a parish church for Truro at Pohick Run. Midway through construction, builder Daniel French died and, ironically, the church was then completed by George Mason in 1774. (Slaughter 1907:65) A graveyard surrounds the church and contains many markers from the late eighteenth century. It is currently in use but lies well outside town and is distant from any habitations.

Anglicans met and worshipped at the home of “William Gunnell on the upper waters of Four Mile Run” prior to the Truro’s founding in 1732. (Harrison 1964:287) When the new vestry determined to build an Upper, or “frontier”, church they chose a advantageous location at the crossroads of two major trade routes where “the road to the Little Falls of the Potomac was intersected by the road from Alexandria to Leesburg...” (Alves and Spelman 1969:1) Accordingly the vestry announced, “that the Churchwardens give publick notice to workmen to appear at the next Vestry to be held for this parish to agree for the building of a Church at the cross roads near Michael Regans in this parish...” (Slaughter 1907:5). Soon thereafter, in 1733, a small wooden structure was built to function as the Upper (frontier) church for Truro in Fairfax County. Upon Fairfax Parish’s creation in 1765, Upper Church became the parish church. This wooden 1733
structure was replaced by a brick structure between 1767 and 1769 following plans outlined by James Wren. (Rawlings 1963:66) Falls Church, as it came to be called, stands today with “its yard, containing magnificent old trees and ancient graves, consecrated by burial rites and tears and the tread of worshipping feet...” (Fairfax County Board of Supervisors 1907:82)

Although no physical proof remains, suggestive vestry record entries have led historians to believe that a chapel-of-ease was built in Alexandria following its creation in 1749. For example, the 1751 vestry minutes indicate that a lottery was held to raise funds for church construction. (Harrison 1964:291) Likewise, in 1753 Truro’s vestry “ordered that the Rev. Mr. Charles Green do preach every third Sunday at the Town of Alexandria.” (Slaughter 1907:30) Legend places a chapel-of-ease at one of two places, either on the present site of Christ Church or at the intersection of Pitt and Princess streets, but regardless, “Reason bulwarks the existence of some place of worship, for the English settlers were accustomed to the offices of the Anglican Church...” (Voges 1975:152)

By the time Fairfax Parish was created, Alexandria had become a thriving seaport with a substantial population. As the center of local government and commerce for Fairfax County it seemed, no doubt, the logical site for a religious center as well. Accordingly a parish church was constructed there between 1767 and 1773. Like Falls Church it was designed and initiated by James Wren, but was completed by John Carlyle. (Meade 1857) Although the church stands today nearly at the center of Alexandria’s busy business district, it was initially at some distance from the built-up section of the town. Set among trees on a hill two blocks from the town’s limits, it was referred to as the “Church in the woods”. (Smith and Miller 1989:22) Upon its consecration in 1814, it was formally named Christ Church. (Meade 1857)

Christ Church is very similar to Pohick and Falls Church in appearance: red brick laid in a manner called Flemish bond, door on the south side, rectangular in shape and simply adorned with areas of brick glazing to emphasize the patterning or rubbed brick or sandstone applied to off-set doorways and windows. (Brock 1930:65) The steeple on Christ Church is an 1818 addition with modifications made in the 1840s. (Rawlings 1963:92) Like Pohick and Falls Church, a graveyard
surrounds Christ Church too. This church in Alexandria was “not only the official burying ground for the Protestant Episcopal Church, but it also functioned as a public cemetery for local indigent.” (Miller 1992:376) According to vestry records, the earliest burial dates from 1766 before church construction was even completed; however, the oldest extant tombstone dates from 1771. Eighty-six gravestones have survived the intervening centuries to the present, but archeological investigation produced evidence for many more burials than there are current markers. Vestry records indicate there are over 400 burials in the Christ Church yard. (McCord 1985:67) Few tombstones were used in the colonial period, and scholars theorize that they may have been a mark of wealth prior to the nineteenth century. (Dove 1978:112). Although the graveyard “was spacious and by no means filled with graves...” (Clark 1907:42) legislation prohibiting burials within the city corporate limits was enacted in 1809.

In February of 1766 the Truro Vestry met to discuss the building of yet another Episcopal church. Vestrymen decided in favor of a construction site “on the middle Ridge near the Ox road, the ground to be laid off by Mr. Edward Payne, Mr. William Gardner, Mr. Thos. Withers Coffer and Mr. Thos. Ford, or any three of them, on the land supposed to be belonging to Mr. Thomazen Ellzey, who being present consents to the same.” (Slaughter 1907:50) Accordingly, a brick Anglican church was built for Truro beginning in 1766. The name “Payne’s” is believed to be a relic from the period just prior to construction of the brick church when religious services were held in a tobacco barn at or near Payne’s plantation. (Harrison 1964:292) Abandoned by its Anglican congregation following the Revolutionary War, Payne’s was used by Baptists until its destruction in the Civil War. A white frame building has since been constructed on the site by the Jerusalem Baptist congregation. All that remains of the 1760s Payne’s church are unmarked graves which are sparsely interspersed among later headstones erected by Baptist groups. (Conley 1994:22)

There is also evidence that an Anglican church, with a surrounding graveyard, existed as well in the once bustling town of Colchester. For example, an early report from 1938 notes the existence of a single tombstone from 1766 which was discovered near the church foundations. Currently the site is overgrown, but depressions in the vicinity of the church suggest the gravesites
which once occupied the churchyard. (Conley 1994:72) Further evidence may be revealed upon the completion of planned archeological investigation.

**The Rise of Dissent**

Well into the eighteenth century, Virginia’s Episcopal Church enjoyed a position of unchallenged dominion guarded by the state. By 1776 the chronic shortage of ministers which had plagued the Church had subsided and the 105 clergy provided resident ministers to all but five of 95 parishes in Virginia. (Biydon 1947:198) However, “it was all too apparent that the well-spring of religious fervor in America was drying up. Where once there was ardent devotion to things of the spirit now there was self-satisfaction and lethargic indifference. The churches, once the supreme arbiters of community faith and practice, were losing their hold on the people.” (Olmstead 1961:155) This religious malaise afflicted early eighteenth century Virginia as well. Spiritual lethargy was one source of the difficulties in acquiring a sufficient number of capable ministers or an adequate number of churches to cover the needs of the typically large parishes. And, as discussed previously, without an American bishop to consecrate and set apart the religious from the profane, there arose a careless attitude toward the artifacts and symbols of religion which fed the increasingly indifferent attitude toward religion itself.

Small enclaves of missionary preachers, however, stirred religious sensibilities and began making converts early in the eighteenth century. So began the “Great Awakening”, that “great tide of evangelical religion which swept through the English-speaking world...” (Hudson 1981:59) In America the first stirring of this religious revival began with Theodore J. Frelinghuysen’s work in the Dutch Church in the early years of the 1700s. Noting the religious lethargy of the congregations under his care, Frelinghuysen began a campaign for incisive reform fueled by his fervent evangelical preaching style and frequent visits to church members in remote parts of his circuit. (Stannard 1977:189) While some Anglican ministers took part, for example Virginia’s Devereux Jarrat and George Whitefield, it was largely a movement comprised of nonconforming Protestant churches - - Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist. Beginning in 1750 with the impact of the Awakening, the
dominant position held by the Anglican Church in Virginia was eventually overwhelmed. (Gaustad 1962)

At first, dissenting church missionaries were particularly successful in the frontier and county areas, where their message and preaching style seemed especially to appeal to the poor and uneducated. Baptist preachers, who journeyed far and wide through the countryside beginning in the 1750s, used a “simplified Gospel easily understood which, when preached with persuasive zeal, could strike deep into the hearts of the hearers...” (Olmstead 1961:173) Unlike Anglican ministers, Baptist preachers were generally uneducated and from the less privileged classes and so appealed more to frontier settlers who were often of a similar background. “In their [Baptist] eyes an educated clergy was for the most part an unconverted clergy...[and] never would these men who felt the call of God to preach allow their message to be ‘corrupted’ by theological education.” For them the move to preach had to come from faith and the heart, directed by the Holy Spirit. (Olmstead 1961:174) Baptist ministers, like most of those who fueled the Awakening, understood that to accomplish religious conversion, “emotion was a more effective weapon than reason.” (Olmstead 1961:173)

Some Anglican ministers too joined in and added an effective presence to the general revival. For instance, during the 1740s through the 1760s George Whitefield of Virginia was reknowned for and made many converts with his emotional, tear-inducing style of preaching. (Stannard 1977:182) And, despite the scorn of his fellow Anglican ministers, Devereux Jarratt strongly advocated the evangelical manner of preaching used by the Baptists over the more austere mode taught by the Established Church. He wrote in defense of his own style: “Instead of moral harangues, and advising my hearers in a cool, dispassionate manner, to walk in the primrose paths of a decided, sublime and elevated virtue, and not to tread in the foul tracts of the disgraceful vice, I endeavored to expose, in the most alarming colors, the guilt of sin, the entire depravity of human nature -- the awful danger, mankind are in, by nature and practice -- the tremendous curse to which they are obnoxious -- and their utter inability to evade the sentence of the law and the strokes of divine justice, by their own power, merit or good works.” (Chorley 1946:7)
With the Tolerance Act of 1769 providing immunity from the persecution visited on dissenters earlier in the colonial period, dissenting groups grew quickly in number. In fact, Anglican priest Jonathan Boucher reported of Virginia in 1771 that while “thirty years ago there was not in the whole colony a single dissenting congregation, there are now ... not less than eleven dissenting ministers regularly settled, who have each from two to four congregations under their care. As to the number of sectaries and itinerant priests I might almost as well pretend to count the gnats that buzz around us in a summer’s evening.” (Marshall 1938:7) Existing travel diaries provide vivid testimony of the tremendous activity and success among the various dissenting denominations. For example, traveller Nicholas Cresswell’s entry from Sunday, April 14, 1776 from Alexandria notes “Nothing but Methodist meetings in every part of the town.” (Cresswell 1924:141) In another entry made on Sunday, February 9, 1777, he observes: “A Methodist preaching here. In the evening the parson and I had a long discourse about the New Faith, as he calls it. Find him a sensible man not so much bigoted as some of them are.” (Cresswell 1924:184)

Dissenters Build Churches

The resurgence of religion during the Awakening is evident in the marked increase in the number of churches of all denominations constructed during the eighteenth century in Fairfax County. The Anglican Falls Church, Pohick, Christ Church, Colchester and Paynes’ were all built during this period. Dissenters built many permanent houses of worship as well. The effects of the Great Awakening is apparent, for example, in eighteenth-century Alexandria. This tiny cosmopolitan center became home to several religious denominations apart from the Established Church, and many churches were built there.

The earliest dissenting church constructed was the Presbyterian Meeting House in Alexandria -- a clear demonstration of the growing number and strength of Presbyterians in the town. Located on South Fairfax Street in a busy residential area, the land for the meeting house was donated by wealthy businessman Richard Arell in 1772. (Voges 1975:27) Construction of the 60 x 50 foot brick building was completed in 1774. (Brock 1930:78) First organized in the 1760s, meeting
places for this Presbyterian congregation were initially in private homes and later in the upper room of the City Hall. (Rawlings 1963:182) The eventual construction of the still standing Meeting House is symbolic of the “permanent” home Presbyterians found and maintained in Alexandria and the lasting mark they were able to make in the religious consciousness of the town. In fact, when George Washington died in 1799 it was there that the funeral services were held. (Voges 1975:35) From the beginning the meeting house was surrounded by a graveyard, with the first gravestone dating from 1772. Quite a few members of Alexandria’s Scottish families are buried there, including John Carlyle, one of the early founders of the community. In addition, many Revolutionary soldiers are buried in the Presbyterian churchyard. (Miller 1992:375) Burials ceased in 1809, and much of the graveyard has been obliterated by building construction throughout the centuries.

Baptists had grown in strength and numbers in Fairfax County as well, and they too built a church in Alexandria. Located at a central point, on the 200 block of Washington Street, Alexandria’s Baptist church was built in 1805. Although destroyed by fire it was rebuilt in 1830 and has been in continual use since that time. (Smith and Miller 1989) An earlier Baptist congregation held meetings in Herndon, Virginia in the 1740s, and in 1791 they built the Frying Pan Baptist Meeting House in the town at 2615 Centreville Road. The dead were buried around the church from 1791 until 1879, with a total of 48 burials evident. Sixteen headstones have survived the intervening years. (Conley 1994:67)

Methodists built two churches in Alexandria during the early years of the nineteenth century. In 1803 the Trinity Methodist Church was built on the 100 block of South Washington Street, and “occupied this property until 1941 when it was removed to Cameron Mills Road.” (Miller 1992:380) From the yard surrounding the Independent Meeting House, built in 1810, “Fragments of tombstones and bones have surfaced...” (Miller 1992:385), an indication of a churchyard cemetery there as well. Located on South Fairfax Street, its congregation was an early Methodist group.

In 1796 the oldest Catholic parish church in Virginia was constructed in the 100 block of South Washington Street. The first burial was recorded there in 1798, and the graveyard continues in use to this day. However, the church building itself was moved to South Royal Street sometime
around 1809-1810. (Smith and Miller 1989:386) There are no burials associated with the new structure.

And, finally, although the old Quaker meeting house has long since been demolished, the graveyard which once surrounded it has survived. Dating from 1785, fragments of its tombstones are still visible in the yard next to Alexandria Library on Queen Street. (Miller 1992:398) In 1994 a team of scientists, from Alexandria Archeology and the Smithsonian’s Anthropology Department, examined the historic gravesites. (personal communication, 1994) Their purpose was to identify as many burials as possible so that they could be moved prior to a scheduled construction project over the cemetery land. Data from this site will enrich knowledge of colonial period Quaker burial practices.

The increased construction of churches in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Fairfax County provides clear testimony to the tremendous upwelling of religious interest spurred by the Great Awakening. And, the increase in dissenting church construction is evidence for the phenomenal increase in number and power of colonial period dissenters by the end of the eighteenth century. For example, in 1769 100 people reportedly called themselves Methodists throughout Virginia. Just four years later, in 1773, Methodist membership had rapidly increased to a reported 4449 persons. ((Olmstead 1961:177) By the Revolution, Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists predominated in Virginia with the Established church membership clearly of minority proportions. By the end of the eighteenth century, in fact, dissenter influence became so great that they were able to achieve significant changes in the government of Virginia which effectively brought about the collapse of the Anglican Church.

Church Disestabishment

In the early years of the eighteenth century, dissenters not only had to pay tithes in support of the Anglican Church, but they also were fined for not attending regular church services in the Established Church as imposed by law. (Campbell 1847:267) With the implementation of the Toleration Act in 1769, however, fines were no longer levied against dissenters not attending the
Established Church, so long as they did in fact attend some sort of church service at least once in two months. (Brydon 1957:189) But while tolerance meant they could worship wherever they liked, state law still required dissenters to pay tithes in support of the Established Church. This custom remained unquestioned throughout the early colonial period, until the increasing membership of dissenting churches in the middle and later eighteenth century began to voice dissatisfaction with supporting a church not their own.

Dissenting ministers, too, took issue with the manner in which tolerance was implemented in Virginia. For, although toleration was legislated, dissenting ministers were compelled to secure special license and register the places where they preached with the county court. Many Baptist ministers in particular resented this requirement and perceived it to be an attempt at government control of their activities and influence. Therefore, they refused to comply with the law. (Dabney 1971:158) The most militant dissenting group, called Separate Baptists, made it a point of flaunting their non-compliance and, worse, their clergy preached against the Established Church and the aristocracy to in order to recruit larger congregations. Their methods met with great success and more and more members were attracted to the Separate Baptist’s “unlicensed” gatherings. In retaliation the “Anglican conservatives decided that the way to meet this threat was to enforce the law against preaching by unregistered dissenters, and in 1768 this process began. Between this year and the outbreak of the Revolution, about thirty-four Baptist ministers were arrested and thrown into jail, some of them several times.” (Dabney 1971:159)

The great success of dissenting ministerial recruiting efforts is no doubt partly due to the lethargy noted in the Established Church’s ministry in Virginia. Many citizens might have echoed the remarks made by traveller Nicholas Cresswell, whose journal notes are filled with descriptions of uninspiring preachings. For example, from Sunday, October 23, 1774: “Went to Church and heard a very indifferent Sermon.” (Cresswell 1924:43) And from Sunday, October 30, 1774: Went to Church, a pretty building and large congregation, but an indifferent Parson.” (Cresswell 1924:45) Both of these entries were written concerning Christ Church, an Anglican church in Alexandria. Overall the quality of the Established ministry continued to be inconsistent. James
Madison wrote disparagingly of his own local rector and the clergyman for neighboring Culpepper County. Madison was against the idea of a state supported church and with “these warm feelings against an established church and some of its ministers, Madison became a part of the Virginia government in May 1776...” (Buckley 1977:17)

Too, with the onset of the Revolutionary war, many colonists became suspicious of the Episcopal Church; it was after all the official Church of England and the British King himself had decreed it the Established Church in Virginia. Its clergy was suspected of Tory sympathies, although these were largely unfounded suspicions. In reality the majority of Virginia’s ministry and Anglican congregations sided with the patriots in the Revolutionary war. (McManners 1990) Many of the Revolutionary leaders such as Jefferson, Mason and Washington were themselves Anglicans.

But, as the war drew to a close, and legislators turned their thoughts to the problem of formulating legislation for the new state of Virginia, the idea of a state-supported religion met with increased opposition. Dissenters loudly and repeatedly proclaimed their belief that equal religious status should be granted to all denominations. No one church should be given preferential treatment by the government. Dissenters also feared that strong church and state association would lead to religious persecution -- historically the bitter experience of many dissenters in England. (Freeman 1976:23, Isaac 1982)

To guarantee and safeguard individual liberties throughout the colonies, Truro vestryman George Mason composed the Bill of Rights adopted on June 12, 1776. Section sixteen deals with religion and mandates that all men should be allowed to follow their own conscience in the exercise of religion. This legal action set the stage for religious freedom. However, the Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia, as it came to be called officially in 1785, was still controlled by and tied to the state as the Established Church. (Freeman 1976:32) Too, Virginia law still required that all citizens pay tithes for financial support of the Anglican church, a situation which continued to cause dissenters much dissatisfaction.

Powerful men of government, such as James Madison and Edmund Pendleton, were dissatisfied with continued mandated support for legislated religion. When the newly established
Virginia government opened for business in October 1776, Pendleton, elected Speaker of the House, established an eighteen-member committee to review the state of religion in Virginia. (Buckley 1977) Dissenters seized upon the opportunity to express their ongoing dissatisfaction with an established state church through an outpouring of petitions. They also attacked the Established Church in articles which they published in, for example, the Virginia Gazette. Both in the press and through petitions the dissenters’ main objective was “disestablishment of the Church of England and the cessation of all taxation for religious purposes.” (Buckley 1977:22) The establishment did not let such attacks remain unanswered. They emphasized the importance of a mandated religion for protection of the general welfare of the state. Both petitions and newspaper articles were issued which argued that civil stability could be ensured only by an educated clergy operating within the confines of a state established church. Without such restraints the result would surely be moral anarchy and civil war. (Buckley 1977:24)

The religious controversy raged in the press and in the legislature until Thomas Jefferson’s draft law for establishing religious freedom was adopted by the General Assembly in 1785. The Statute for Religious Freedom was passed on January 16, 1786. (Freeman 1976:45) This measure allowed for the passage of an act which exempted Virginia’s citizenry from financial support of any religion. None of Virginia’s citizenry could be forced into attendance of religious services, nor were taxes to be used for the support of any denomination. (Buckley 1977:36) So read the law: “That all and every act of parliament ... which renders criminal the maintaining of any opinions in the matter of religion, forbearing to repair to church, or the exercising any mode of worship whatsoever, or which prescribes punishments for the same, shall henceforth be of no validity or force within the commonwealth...That all dissenters of whatever denomination, from the said church shall from and after the passing of this Act be totally free and exempt from all levies, taxes, and impositions whatever towards supporting and maintaining the said church as it now is or hereafter may be established, and its ministers. “ (Freeman 1976:43)

Although law guaranteed freedom of worship, the Episcopal Church remained the Established Church in Virginia. It was also allowed to keep those funds and glebe properties
which it had accumulated through years of state support. (Isaac 1982) Dissenters, unhappy with
the Anglican Church’s continued privileged position, appealed to the General Assembly demanding
disestablishment of the Episcopal Church and confiscation of its properties obtained through
association with the state. Petition after petition flooded the General Assembly between 1788 and
1799 when finally “wearied of the strife and desirous of putting an end to the dissension, the
Assembly on January 22, 1799 repealed every law which in any way favored the Protestant
Episcopal Church in Virginia...totally disestablishing it. Thus did the Commonwealth of Virginia
completely divorce itself from that Church to which it had been wedded since 1619.” (Freeman
1976:46) This disestablishment nearly brought the Anglican Church to ruin. Suddenly, with tax
support halted and glebe lands confiscated, the Church vestry was without means to compensate
its clergy.

Without financial support, Anglican ministers in Virginia were forced to abandon their
churches, many of which fell into disrepair or were taken over by other denominations. (Olmstead
1961) In 1784 there were 107 Episcopal churches throughout Virginia, but of these “no more
than 37 percent appear to have been able to support ministers during the decade from 1802 to
1811.” (Freeman 1976:58) With state support withdrawn, parishes were no longer able to support
a rector and “Episcopal vestry after vestry throughout Virginia simply gave up the struggle and
dissolved.” (Freeman 1976:58) Because they were built with public funds, the populace came to
view Episcopal church buildings as public property. Many were “appropriated by neighboring
landowners for secular purposes, turned into union churches open to any denomination, or taken
over by other denominations.” (Freeman 1976:58) For example, a Baptist congregation took
possession of Falls Church in the first decade of the nineteenth century. (Freeman 1976:59)

Based upon his travels in the late eighteenth century, the Marquis de Chastellux offered a
vivid description of the state of the Episcopal Church following the combined blows of Revolution
and disestablishment: “The predominant [church] before the Revolution was the Anglican religion...It
is therefore impossible, under the present circumstances, to fill the pastorates that have become
vacant. What has been the consequence of this? The churches have remained shut; people have
done without a minister, and have not even thought of any future arrangements...” (Rice 1963:442) Freeman (1976:59) notes that this devastation was due predominately to an “atmosphere of denominational enmity...almost impossible to understand today.” This enmity resulted in the disestablishment of the Church through legislation whose destructive effect Freeman insists “is amply displayed by the fact that, out of approximately 250 churches and chapels belonging to the Established Church at the start of the Revolutionary War, no more than thirty-five -- or fourteen percent -- remain in use today in the various Episcopal dioceses of Virginia.” (Freeman 1976:59) The fall of the Episcopal Church in the state of Virginia was swift and resounding with repercussions obvious even today.
Early Colonial Burial Practices: An Overview

Until the early eighteenth century, settlers in Fairfax County commonly buried their dead in the family burial plot. The distances to the nearest churchyard were often too great to allow churchyard burial. So remarks the Reverend Hugh Jones (1724:96-97): “The Parishes being of great Extent...many dead Corpses cannot be conveyed to the Church to be buried; so it is customary to bury in Gardens or Orchards, where whole Families lye interred together...” Respect for the dead demanded a quick burial before the corpse began to decompose. As a result there was a striking break with custom of churchyard burial as practiced by the Anglican Church in England. (Conley 1994; Miller 1992) Unorthodox burial places came frequently to be used, and during this “pioneer” phase Virginian Anglicans often buried their dead at home. Practice which began as a necessity eventually became customary as indicated by Bishop Compton’s complaint: “‘that that profane custom of burying in their gardens, orchards and other places still continues...’” (Isaac 1982:62)

By the mid-eighteenth century, during the transitional period, churchyard burials became more common in Fairfax County. (Conley 1994; Miller 1992) The very fact that there were more churches after mid-century certainly gave impetus to churchyard burial. The funds needed to support parish churches were gathered readily through the additional tax revenues available as populations increased throughout Fairfax. With more churches, distances from plantation to churches were shortened and mourners were more likely to transport their dead to church for burial. (fig. 4)
Top: The Falls Church (1769). Bottom: Pohick Episcopal Church (1774)
Historian Brock (1930) has also argued that the use of new materials in the construction of churches may have been another reason for the noticeable increase in churchyard burials beginning in the eighteenth century. For example, the 1733 wooden Parish Church of Pohick was replaced by another built of brick in 1774. (Slaughter 1907:63) Such brick structures would have given an impression of permanence which the earlier wooden structure lacked. This suggestion of permanence may have provided mourners with the comforting perception that their dead could rest unmolested in a lasting church precinct until judgment day. And, although home burials continued in Virginia, burial in Anglican churchyards was practiced more frequently in the period just prior to the Revolution than at any other point in the colonial period -- tangible testimony to the strength of the Established Church in eighteenth century Fairfax County.

**Nineteenth Century: New Burial Habits**

The first act prohibiting churchyard burial followed shortly upon disestablishment of the Episcopal Church. In 1809 legislation was passed by Alexandria’s City Council prohibiting burial within the corporate limits. Until that time Christ Church had served as the town’s primary graveyard, but after 1809 “interments ceased in the churchyard, though spacious and by no means filled with graves...” (Clark 1907:137) Based on earlier 1804 law the act was “For the prevention and removal of Nuisances” and read:

No burying ground shall be opened, or allotted for the interment of human bodies within the limits of the corporation. Any person who shall dig a grave, or cause it to be done with a view of burying a human body therein in any ground within the corporation, not opened or allotted before the twenty-seventh day of March, eighteen hundred and four to that purpose, shall forfeit and pay twenty dollars for each offence, and moreover be compelled to remove the corpse, if discovered within three days after interment, under the penalty of twenty dollars for neglect. (Alexandria City Council 1821:66)

With the passage of this law, burial ceased in Alexandria. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, town burial was prohibited throughout Virginia. (General Assembly of the State of Virginia 1876:39) (fig. 5)
Post-Revolutionary Episcopal Churches without graveyards: St. Paul's Episcopal Church (1817) and Immanuel Church on the Hill (1944).
Findings

Burial in Fairfax County conforms to the general pattern outlined above. According to Conley (1994), there are a large number of family burial grounds dating from the eighteenth century in Fairfax County. While this practice continued to be popular throughout the nineteenth century, field survey revealed a large number of burials in the yards surrounding Anglican churches in the eighteenth century. However, the number of churchyard burials decreased with disestablishment of the Church, and then finally ceased in towns and greatly decreased in the countryside with the passage of law prohibiting municipal burial. During this modern period, beginning around the middle of the nineteenth century, the lawn cemetery became the customary burial place for the vast majority of Virginians -- a trend noticeable nationwide. (Coffin 1976; Curl 1980; Mitford 1963) A list of Fairfax County churches, which clearly demonstrates the trend toward burial and church disassociation, has been generated from observations made in the field during the period 1991-92. (fig. 6)

Figure 6
Episcopal Churches in the County of Fairfax, Virginia

| Church & Location                  | Construction Date | Attached Graveyard?
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------
<p>| 1) Falls Church Episcopal 108 East Broad Street | 1769             | Yes                  |
| 2) Christ Church 118 North Washington Street | 1773             | Yes                  |
| 3) Pohick Episcopal 9301 Richmond Hwy | 1774             | Yes                  |
| 4) Saint Paul's Episcopal 228 South Pitt Street | 1817             | No                   |
| 5) All Saints-Sharon Chapel Episcopal 3421 Franconia Road | 1848, rebuilt 1963 | Yes                  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Renovation Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6)</td>
<td>Saint John's Episcopal</td>
<td>5649 Mount Gilead Road</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7)</td>
<td>Olivet Chapel</td>
<td>Franconia and Beulah</td>
<td>1853</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8)</td>
<td>Meade Memorial</td>
<td>322 North Alfred Street</td>
<td>1870</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9)</td>
<td>Church of the Good Shepherd</td>
<td>9350 Braddock Road</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9)</td>
<td>Chapel: Theological Seminary of the Diocese of Virginia</td>
<td>Seminary Road</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10)</td>
<td>Saint Paul's Episcopal</td>
<td>Payne &amp; Church Street</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11)</td>
<td>Immanuel Church on the Hill</td>
<td>3606 Seminary Road</td>
<td>1944</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12)</td>
<td>Saint Clement Episcopal</td>
<td>1701 Quaker Lane</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13)</td>
<td>Emmanuel Episcopal</td>
<td>1608 Russell Road</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14)</td>
<td>Grace Episcopal</td>
<td>3601 Russell Road</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15)</td>
<td>Olivet Episcopal</td>
<td>6107 Franconia Road</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16)</td>
<td>Saint Patrick's Episcopal</td>
<td>3421 Brush Drive</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17)</td>
<td>Saint Patrick's Episcopal</td>
<td>3241 Brush Drive</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18)</td>
<td>Saint John's</td>
<td>6715 Georgetown Pike</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19)</td>
<td>Saint James</td>
<td>Mount Vernon Memorial Hwy</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20)</td>
<td>Dunstan's Episcopal</td>
<td>1830 Kirby Road</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21)</td>
<td>Saint Albans Episcopal</td>
<td>6800 Columbia Road</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22)</td>
<td>Saint Thomas Episcopal</td>
<td>8991 Brook Road</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Church Name</td>
<td>Address</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Saint Barnabas Episcopal</td>
<td>4801 Ravensworth Road</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Church of the Holy Comforter</td>
<td>543 Beulah Road</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Church of the Resurrection</td>
<td>2280 North Beauregard</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Holy Trinity Ministry</td>
<td>6320 Hanover Avenue</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Saint Christopher’s Episcopal</td>
<td>6320 Hanover Avenue</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Saint Timothy’s Episcopal</td>
<td>432 Van Buren Street</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Saint Luke’s Episcopal</td>
<td>8009 Fort Hunt Road</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Saint Aidans Episcopal</td>
<td>8531 Riverside Road</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Saint Mark’s Episcopal</td>
<td>6744 Kings Highway</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Saint Andrews</td>
<td>6509 Syden Stricker Road</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Church of the Apostles</td>
<td>3500 Pickett Road</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Saint Francis Episcopal</td>
<td>9220 Georgetown Pike</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Church of the Holy Cross Episcopal</td>
<td>2455 Gallows Road</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Saint Anne’s Episcopal</td>
<td>1700 Wainwright Drive</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Church of the Epiphany</td>
<td>3301 Hidden Meadow Drive</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As illustrated in Figure 6, six of the thirty-eight Episcopal Churches in Fairfax County have burials in the surrounding churchyard. Those churches within town limits which had attached burial grounds, Christ Church and Falls Church, were constructed in the eighteenth century. Neither has been utilized for burial, except under special honorary circumstances, beyond the first decade of the nineteenth century. The yard surrounding the 1774 Pohick Episcopal Church is currently used for burials. However, it is located in a rural area, along a highway where it is still separated from commercial areas and neighborhoods. Evidence also exists for two other Anglican Churches with attached burial grounds -- Payne’s and Colchester. However they have not been included in the field-generated survey list. In both cases, the church buildings have long since been destroyed although their foundations remain as do remnants of the burial grounds which surrounded each. In neither case is the graveyard still in use.

Three nineteenth century churches, All Saints-Sharon Chapel Episcopal, Saint John’s Episcopal, and The Chapel of the Theological Seminary of the Diocese of Virginia, also have churchyard graves which are still utilized. The Theological Seminary is located in a quiet area outside the town limits of Alexandria. Its grounds, however, are used for burials now only in special honorary cases.

All Saints-Sharon Chapel Episcopal and Saint John’s are also both still in use. Each was constructed early in the nineteenth century, after burial restrictions were enacted, but in locations well outside town limits. Neighborhoods have since grown up around these structures, but in both areas populations still remain relatively sparse. Neither area is zoned for commercial use.

This survey of the extant Episcopal Churches of Fairfax County, Virginia, corresponds with documented historical trends of Church and burial associations. Since the enactment of the town burial prohibition, only church-annexed burial grounds located outside towns and in county areas -- Pohick, The Seminary Chapel, All Saints-Sharon Chapel, and Saint John’s -- are currently in use. As is true for much of the United States (Schuyler 1979) most of those who have died in Fairfax County have been buried in large, corporately owned and “perpetually maintained” cemeteries.
located outside city limits since early in the nineteenth century. Many of these cemeteries exist throughout the County, for example, Mount Comfort, which serves Alexandria and the surrounding area, and Fairfax Memorial Park, which provides burial spaces predominantly for the Fairfax City dead. Each is located well outside town limits, and is quite large. Despite constant use, it is not likely that either will become overcrowded in the near future. Both offer perpetual care in a comfortable setting; in appearance each is reminiscent of a park — hence the name “lawn” cemetery.

**Churchyard Burial Restrictions Considered**

Alexandria’s 1809 legislation restricting town burials appears as a single paragraph among others which addressed and outlawed various practices termed “nuisances”. Outlined in the preamble they include: “Kitchen offal, how disposed of...Stagnant water to be removed...Swine, geese, &c., regulations concerning...Cruelty to beasts forbidden...Hulks not to be sunk in docks...Spars, &c. not to be kept within tide...Penalty for allowing hulks to sink, &c...Drum or fife at night prohibited...” (Alexandria City Council 1821:65) In fact, there are so many seemingly disparate items contained by the list of nuisances, that the term should be examined more closely in order to understand why burials were included.

According to Webster’s (1983) dictionary a nuisance is “an act, condition, thing, or person causing trouble, annoyance or inconvenience.” Law authorities, Keeton et al. (1984), note that the use of the term nuisance is ambiguous: “There is perhaps no more impenetrable jungle in the entire law than that which surrounds the word ‘nuisance’. It has meant all things to all people, and has been applied indiscriminately to everything from an alarming advertisement to a cockroach baked in a pie.” (Keeton et al. 1984:616) Until the nineteenth century, the term was employed from a legal standpoint primarily in reference to those things which interfered “with the use or enjoyment of land...” (Keeton et al. 1984:617) Along with this notion of land rights there also developed another principle that: “an infringement of the rights of the crown, or of the general public, was a crime.” (Keeton et al. 1984:617)
By the nineteenth century the legal definition “had been extended to such things as interference with a market, smoke from a lime-pit, and diversion of water from a mill...” (Keeton et al. 1984:617) This point is of particular interest here. The preamble to the 1809 act prohibiting burial in Alexandria does describe public health concerns as one purpose behind the law. However, classification of burial as a “nuisance”, with all the term encompassed, implies more complex reasons behind the law. Following Keeton et al. (1984:617) it appears likely, for example, that the act also intended to safeguard “the free use of land.” After all, the utilization of property for human interment tends to block the further use of such land for anything other than burial grounds. For instance, the Christ Church burial ground in Alexandria very much interfered with the free use of town lands. Initially, Christ Church was outside Alexandria’s business and residential centers and was “the church in the woods”. By the nineteenth century the core-periphery had shifted so that the church was at the very heart of the wealthy residential and business district. In 1795, Alexandria’s inhabitants had already discovered the Christ Church location to be an impediment to travel and commerce because it blocked part of Cameron Street—a primary thoroughfare through the town which led directly to the main business district. It was “obstructed by the Sextons House and a part of the Church yard...” (Alexandria City Council 1800:140) In answer to many petitions the City Council agreed finally to move a part of the Church property from the north to south side to free passage along Cameron. (Alexandria City Council 1800:141)

Although there is no specific documentary evidence, it might be logically inferred that the problem of land use and burial yards was exacerbated in Alexandria as more and more dissenters built churches with graveyards in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. As the town prospered, its population grew commensurately and so did its need for burial space. The increasing number of graveyards would have posed an economic inconvenience, particularly as Alexandria became the pivotal political, trade and manufacture center for Fairfax County. Graveyards would have interfered with these more profitable uses of land inside the town. As other towns within Fairfax County grew in size, such as Fairfax, Falls Church, Vienna, and Herndon, they too had increased numbers of dead. Their church numbers and burial grounds increased as well and they
no doubt experienced the conflicting needs for land use -- the immutable burial grounds or space for growing businesses, manufacturing enterprises or even residences.

In the end, as populations expanded and cities grew, state law was enacted in 1876 to ban burials within towns. And so, the County of Fairfax, along with entire state of Virginia, eventually followed Alexandria’s much earlier lead. Section four and five of the Virginia State Cemeteries Act reads:

"4. The county court of any county, on the petition of any ten citizens, may cause to be condemned for any burying ground, any amount of land not exceeding two acres, in any magisterial district...
5. No land shall be condemned under any provisions of this act within the corporate limits of any city or town, or within four hundred yards of any residence outside of the corporate limits of any city or town without the consent of the owner of such residence.” (General Assembly of the State of Virginia 1876:39)

Nowhere in the preamble or the act itself is there any indication that public health was a consideration upon which this law was predicated.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

Changes in attitudes to death, and to social behavior associated with mortuary practices were largely obscured at the time by the overt concern with public health... (Mytum 1989:284)

The disassociation of graveyards and Episcopal Churches in nineteenth century Virginia has been attributed to growing concern for public health, similar to that in England and Europe where horrible graveyard conditions were well-documented and condemned for spreading illness in large cities. Doctors and public health officials in such areas blamed the vapors from putrid graveyards for epidemics and rising mortality, and a terrified public demanded that burial cease around churches and in towns. Accordingly, the custom of churchyard burial was abandoned in many cities in nineteenth century England and Europe.

Town burial bans in Alexandria and Fairfax County were presumably a result of similar public health concerns with prohibitive legislation in Virginia predicated on English models. However, available literature suggests that while health issues strongly influenced the decision to prohibit town burial grounds, such concerns also served to mask the social and religious upheavals ongoing in colonial Virginia which allowed for substantial change in sacred tradition. In fact, there is no record that churchyard burials in Fairfax County created the same anxieties which led to burial bans in the large cities of England or Europe.

Graveyards in those countries were considered unhealthful because of overburial, which promoted unpleasant smells and dangerous “vapors” in the surrounding churchyard. However, the most frequently used graveyard in Alexandria surrounded Christ Church, which was described, in the nineteenth century, as not even close to full. (Clark 1907) The church registry of deaths
indicated the highest rate of mortality was among children during the summer months, and reportedly: “One half of those who are born, die before they are in the age of seventeen.” (Alexandria Daily Gazette, June 9, 1806) Children, however, were most frequently buried at home and, accordingly, would not have been a significant addition to churchyard burials. Alexandria never experienced the enormous death toll from epidemics so vividly described for large and overcrowded cities like London. The yellow fever epidemic of 1803 in Alexandria, for instance, brought the highest mortality rate experienced prior to the burial ban. Although 200 of Alexandria’s 5000 citizens died during the attack, the majority were buried in a paupers’ field located well outside the city boundaries. Their numbers therefore were not an additional burden for the churchyards.

Significantly, too, with rapid increase in churches and graveyards for all denominations during the eighteenth and early nineteenth, there were plenty of available burial grounds for the small county and town populations. Overburial was simply not a problem for colonial and post-Revolutionary Fairfax County with its relatively low number of inhabitants. The grisly churchyard conditions in England and Europe were caused by high mortality rates among large populations and eventual overburial. These conditions, however, did not exist in Fairfax County when town burials were banned in Alexandria. It is also important to note that Alexandria legislation prohibiting churchyard burial significantly predates similar English legislation. Alexandria’s Town Council passed laws prohibiting burials within town and churchyards in 1804 (City Council 1874:66), while similar British law was not codified until much later, in 1852. (Polson, Brittain and Marshall 1953:150) Thus, it is difficult to argue, as some have done, that legislation prohibiting burial in Virginia was predicate upon similar English law.

It has been argued, as well, that burials were prohibited primarily because they were believed to pose a major threat to public health in the colonial period. However, primary sources do reveal that lawmakers and health officials alike in Alexandria, for example, alarmed primarily by the possible negative public health consequences of the town’s proximity to water. In 1809 when intramural burials were prohibited, yellow fever was the most significant threat to Alexandria’s citizenry, and local physicians and officials believed that proximity to water was concerned somehow
with spread of the disease. Most of the legislation enacted to protect the public health in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries then was consumed with limiting the threat of yellow fever.

Smallpox too posed a major threat in the early eighteenth century. However, by the turn of the nineteenth century it was largely controlled by widely available vaccine. Indeed a December 16, 1808 report in the Alexandria Gazette indicates that the town had been free for some time from the threat of smallpox.

As for rural Fairfax County, there is no record of epidemic disease. Therefore, by the late eighteenth century, Alexandria and Fairfax County seem to have been remarkably healthful places and there is little indication that burial lands were feared as potential risk to continued good health. Since burials do not seem to have been seen as a major threat to the public health in the early nineteenth century, it seems reasonable, then, to assume the impetus for town burial prohibition may have proceeded for reasons above and beyond a concern for health protection.

Louis Binford has argued that alterations in burial practices are indicative of innovations in the way social groups cope with changing cultural environments. (Binford 1971:45) This contention certainly appears to be supported in colonial Alexandria where rapid change in the cultural environment seemed to be the major catalyst for burial strategy modification. For example, Alexandria's economic foundation shifted radically from an almost exclusive focus on the inspection and shipment of tobacco to include not only shipping, but also mercantile interests and manufacture of a diverse number of products. Fairfax County rapidly became a center of comparative prosperity, and accordingly town land gained in value. Even real estate located at some distance from the wharves was suddenly seen as potentially profitable since it could be used for retail or manufacturing establishments or residents for local businessmen.

As the economic base changed so too did the manner in which the various social groups arrayed themselves over the landscape. Alexandria's expanded economy attracted an occupationally heterogenous population. In the seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth century, many town citizens were connected with the shipping trade. The local government was in the
hands of a board of trustees constructed primarily of wealthy plantation owners who made their homes outside of town. However, as Alexandria grew and its economic interests expanded, the population came to include merchants, artisans, craftsmen, and men of the professions as well as shippers. Town administration changed from a trusteeship to an elected mayor and council whose membership were as diverse as the townspeople they represented. The laws they enacted reflected the new business concerns and interests of this varied group.

As social groups changed in Alexandria, so too did the material reflections of their value system. For the plantation-owning trustees who had enacted laws for the earliest settlers in Alexandria, permanently binding town land in burial grounds would have appeared of little consequence. The few acres of land attached to churches would have been of no use in tobacco cultivation. With burial primarily conducted on plantations and farms, there would have been little fear of churchyard overcrowding. Of those among the elite who chose to live in town, most resided along the waterfront. None of the wealthy lived in close proximity to churches and their associated burial grounds.

However, throughout the eighteenth century in Fairfax County diversification of economy and professions provided new opportunities and many people prospered. For example, in Alexandria the middle and upper-middle classes increased in size. Trustees were replaced with an elected mayor and town council -- each with membership in and representative of the professionals, merchants, craftsmen and businessmen of Alexandria. For this new elite, town lands would have appeared as possible places of profitable mercantile or manufacture enterprise. In such an atmosphere any function which impeded lucrative use of town real estate doubtless seemed to be a nuisance in the legal sense of the term. Graveyards certainly tied up potentially valuable town lands, especially as increasing numbers of Protestant churches were constructed in Alexandria during the Great Awakening.

The problem posed by burial was exacerbated as Alexandria grew and the areas chosen by the elite for residences and places of business shifted to those locations where most churches were located. Prior to the 1790s the elite chose to array themselves outside of town or along the
waterfront near their shipping interests. By 1810 the elite and upper middle classes were clustered around the major streets of Alexandria, for instance, so that “No Upper Middle Class street-face is more than two blocks away from King or Washington Streets.” And such neighborhoods “have a distinctive relationship from other Alexandria groups to land uses. Anglo-American Churches of all denominations are concentrated within each of the areas except Lee Corner, the most outlying of the wealthy neighborhoods.” (Cressey, Shephard, Magid 1984:15) As Alexandria’s boundaries were extended and the core-periphery population distribution changed, Christ Church went from being the “church in the woods” to being at the center of one of the wealthiest residential and business sections in Alexandria. To those elite citizens who lived and worked in the core area, no doubt it seemed less than desirable to keep several acres of valuable real estate locked into permanent, free-use inhibiting enterprises such as graveyards.

But perhaps most importantly, burial patterning changes clearly shadow the changing nature and fortunes of the Episcopal Church in colonial period Virginia. In particular, customs were modified as the Church was forced to adapt to a new and evolving cultural environment. The lack of an American bishop meant that ecclesiastic tradition was difficult to maintain and enforce. For example, despite the dismay expressed by the Bishop of Cantebury’s Commissary, Compton, over the break with custom (e.g. the widespread practice of burying the dead on homesteads), he was powerless to intercede without the authority of a bishop. Accordingly, the custom of home burial continued and increased throughout colonial period Fairfax County.

Noticeable weakening of church custom in the early eighteenth century was partly due, as well, to an inadequate ministry and was symbolized and even exacerbated by the impermanence of its church structures. Without a strong clergy, church custom could not be adequately enforced. Anglican Church congregations would have had little desire to bury their dead in the churchyard of parishes which may not have been able to keep a competent practicing minister to ensure eternal rest for the corpse. Also, wood, an ephemeral construction material, was most often used in the construction of seventeenth and early eighteenth century churches. It has been suggested that the
perceived impermanence of such buildings would not generally have encouraged a view of the churchyard as a fit sanctuary for the dead until judgement day.

By the mid-to-late eighteenth century, an adequate Episcopal clergy had been obtained and a number of brick churches had replaced earlier wooden structures. Many settlers then began to bury their dead in the church precinct. Concurrently, however, other dissenting religious groups began to make substantial inroads in the religious consciousness of Fairfax County during the Great Awakening beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century. Their congregations also built churches, and buried their dead in the surrounding churchyard. The Anglican Church, however, did not give up its control over burial grounds to these dissenting groups easily. Its clergy was reliant upon burial fees as necessary subsidies to often meager salaries. In Alexandria, Christ Episcopal Church was the primary burial ground for the entire town, and, therefore, enjoyed burial revenues. However, dissenters, especially Presbyterians, protested and fought against the control exercised by the Church. In particular they disagreed with the support it received from the general public under duress of custom. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Alexandria’s town council counted among its members many influential Presbyterians. Out of the twelve elected members, information regarding religious preference has been documented for nine: five were Presbyterian, two were Quaker one was Roman Catholic and only one was Anglican. Perhaps the dissenters, who now represented the majority in the elected government but had once suffered persecution under state-supported Church rule, were instrumental in banning churchyard burials as one means of taking control and revenue from the Episcopal Church. Additionally, following the Revolutionary war, the Established Church was highly suspect to Virginia’s citizenry because of its close ties to England. The clear connection between the Church and the British government alone was sufficient to bring both it and its customs under attack.

Finally, the disassociation of churches and burial grounds seems most importantly to be a material manifestation of the dramatic change in world view which heralded the Victorian period and has been amply described by many scholars, including James Deetz. This was a period when the cultural emphasis changed from the corporate to the individual and from the spiritual to the
naturalistic and material. Strongly emphasized is "the individual and his [sic] place within his [sic] culture. The corporate nature of the earlier tradition extended to the organization of living space and, of food consumption, and even of burial practices. We must look at archeological materials of the late eighteenth century for evidence of a new importance of the individual..." (Deetz 1977:43)

In seventeenth and early eighteenth churchyards many of the dead were buried together or over other burials. Often no marker was used to recall the individual who was buried there. As the importance of the individual came to be increasingly accentuated in the life, many wished to be singled out in death and throughout eternity as well. Mytum (1989:295) declares: "The changes in mortuary behavior from the eighteenth century onwards ensured that, for an ever larger proportion of the population, personal identity was not lost at death. Long after the body had decayed...the monument remained, marking property, success, and encouraging remembrance." A cemetery plot in a graveyard which guaranteed perpetual care for a permanent grave became the ideal.

At last, as the overall health of the population improved length of life increased. Concurrently, most people came to dislike any reminder of death and, beginning in the nineteenth century, death became sort of a "pornography" -- not to be mentioned and certainly to be hidden away. (Gorer 1965) A vast body of literature exists, most notably perhaps Phillipe Aries' The Hour of Our Death, which details the evolution toward the now thoroughly entrenched evasion of any reminder of death. The rural and lawn cemeteries are now clearly preferred -- a preference which is clearly discernible beginning in the early nineteenth century. Their location outside of towns removed the increasingly unwelcome sight of the dead to a discrete distance. In addition, notes French (1975:78-9) "the plenitude and beauties of nature combined with art [in such cemeteries] would convert the graveyard from a shunned place of horror into an enchanting place of succor and instruction." In the broadest explanatory terms, therefore, it might be argued that the nineteenth movement to disconnect burials from the precincts of the living was made as a result of improvements in material comfort, health and an overall secularization notable in the society. Graveyards simply came to be seen as the unwelcome representation of the inevitable consequence of life and, accordingly, removed from prominent display.
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