



A Brief History of Augustine Parish

Augustine Parish has two separate churches: the Church of the Good Shepherd located in south Chesapeake City and St. Augustine Church on MD Route 310, approximately 3 miles south of Chesapeake City. Both locations are used alternately for worship and related church matters.

St. Augustine Church, originally called the Manor Chapel, was one of the 30 churches paying tithes to the Bishop of London in 1690. It was the place of worship for the early settlers of Bohemia Manor, an estate of several thousand acres granted to Augustine Herman by Lord Baltimore in 1660.

In 1733, the Vestry voted to raise funds of 55,000 pounds of tobacco for the building of a new Manor Chapel to be built "at or near the place where the old Chapel now stands." On that date, Augustine Parish was formed, embracing "all that land between the Elk and Bohemia Rivers."

The first church was a brick building with a hipped roof and a heavy wooden cornice around the four sides. An old log Vestry room stood as a separate structure, and the cemetery was located around these buildings. The Vestry room had an enormous fireplace across one end and was used as a school. It was still being used in 1816. Now only a depression in the ground marks the spot.

Augustine Parish, like large numbers of former Anglican parishes, lost vitality and influence after the Revolutionary War. Many of its members joined other churches, especially the new, thriving Methodist Episcopal denomination which was, and still is, a leading influence.

By the early 1800's, the old church was starting to fall apart. Vandals removed shutters and doors. It was even used as a stable by a neighbor. Then the bricks were taken and only the arch of the chancel remained. During this time some services were held in the Vestry building.

There seems to be no record which gives the date of when the church was erected. It is known that a frame church was built in the 1830's consisting of a plain Doric style with three large windows at either side and two windows and entrance at the west end. The inside was still simple and colonial atmosphere with box stalls.

In 1829, the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal became

operational; the town of Chesapeake City grew out of Bohemia Village. The first period of real prosperity for the Canal Company and the town was during the Civil War. Following that time, substantial homes were built in the town, and there was a tendency for the prominent families to leave the farms in the area for the city. For these reasons, the Church of the Good Shepherd was built in Chesapeake City and dedicated on March 29, 1883. Good Shepherd was named the parish church in 1887.

Augustine Parish played an active part in the community, and its rectors generally were shared with neighboring parishes. In the 1920's there was a surge of popularity in the community for local theatricals. Mr. and Mrs. James Adams of the Adams Floating Theater had retired to Chesapeake City. Under Mr. Adam's leadership, the Parish House was built with a stage and dressing rooms. It became a center for youth groups as well as the first community hall in the town.

In the 1930's, there was a decline in membership; most services were evening prayer. During World War II the church was closed, except for the annual visit of the Bishop. After the war the church was reopened with a shared minister from St. Mary Anne's in North East. During this period the stage area in the Parish House was converted to a kitchen. The dressing rooms were converted to rest rooms. Fundraisers were held there including public suppers, bazaars, and card parties.

For the first half of this century, the St. Augustine church fell into disuse. For many years only one service was held there annually. In 1962, the Society for the

Preservation and Restoration of Old St. Augustine was formed. Money was raised and many historic items were donated. Its purpose was to restore the Church to a period that would coincide with the lifetime of Augustine Herman, who was born in Prague in the early part of the seventeenth century. Augustine Herman came to this area after he received a generous land grant from the founders of Maryland. He was the first naturalized citizen of the colony.

The restoration was quite extensive, as the entire underpinning of the church was gone due to termite damage. The Green Fingers Garden Club landscaped the grounds. Kneelers were needlepointed by members of the parish. A Reiger pipe organ made in Reiger, Austria, was installed. A few years later, a two-story log cabin was donated to the parish and erected a short distance from St. Augustine Church. This building is an historic log cabin of similar age to the original log cabin and was moved from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to its current location. This vestry House contains a meeting room, office for the Rector and a room for Sunday School. Crewel curtains were designed and worked by a parish member.

Good Shepherd Church was refurbished in the 1980's and 1990's. Coverings were given to provide protection to the stained glass windows. An Allen theatrical organ was purchased to enhance our music program. Substantial work was done to restore the Parish House. The kitchen was updated adding commercial grade appliances. A Rector's study was added.