



First Presbyterian Church FAMILY HISTORY SERIES



Why God selected our FPC family for centuries to be and remain a powerful beacon of light we do not know. We only know what Christ tells us.

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last." JOHN 15:16

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
820 Colonial Avenue Norfolk, Virginia 23507
office: 757.625.1697 web: fpcnorfolk.org

Seeking Christ; Sharing His love

PART THREE

OUR FORMER FPC CHURCH BUILDINGS

The following is an excerpt from a 1912 Ledger-Dispatch newspaper article.

Our FPC family met in homes for many years prior to erecting our first church building.

In the early part of the year 1802, the Presbyterians of Norfolk were holding services in one of the rooms of the Town Hall, but their new church was nearing completion; the board of trustees, consisting of Messrs. William K. Mackinder, Robert Maitland, Christopher Fry, William Cuthbert, William B. Lamb, Tristram Butler and Thomas Allan, having bought the property on the northwest corner of Catherine (Bank) and Charlotte streets caused to be erected thereon at the corner, a brick church, handsome and even stately for the period; the frontage of the lot was 128 feet on Catherine street with a depth of 159 feet on Charlotte; the building cost \$12,000; the spacious grounds added much to the beauty of the church home; within these walls the Presbyterians of the borough and county worshiped for a generation; the initial service was held Sunday, March 14, 1802, at 10:30 a.m., with Rev. Benjamin Grigsby its first pastor.



**The Old Bell Church
1802-1836**

Norfolk was now to hear the sound of the church bell for the first time, as neither the old parish church, not Christ Church, on Church street, possessed one. The bell for the new Presbyterian church was installed a few weeks prior to March 22, 1803, at a cost of \$209.34. The novelty of its



sound was pleasant to the people at first, then so deeply touched were their hearts by its call to prayer that they soon forgot the denominational designation of the church and spoke of it only as the bell church and even today when the aged who treasure the past stand before the modernized building they never forget to tell this part of its history; it is now occupied by the colored Baptists.

Our Second Church Building

Some years passed and the Presbyterians wanted another church building, the site of old Christ Church was still vacant and appealed to the trustees; the land was bought by Messrs. N.C. Whitehead, Benjamin Emerson, Robert Soutter, Sr., Charles Reid, C. R. Stribling, E. P. Goodridge and R. H. Chamberlaine, who caused to be erected thereon the church which is the subject of these lines. The original building was without the ornamental front and steeple which made the old landmark in more recent years so attractive; the church was dedicated Sunday, November 20, 1836, with ceremonies most impressive; its doors closed to open no more Sunday, March 31, 1912.



**Church Street Edifice
1836-1912**

The architecture of the building was changed from time to time as has been stated; the borough's old relic, Norfolk's first church bell, remained in the old belfry until 1844, then it was carefully removed to its new home and tenderly hidden away to await the completion of the long delayed steeple. The officials discovered April 2, 1849, that the bell in some unaccountable way had been cracked and could not be re-hung; in 1854, one from Maneeley's, West Troy, N. Y., was placed in the steeple, and this is the bell which the Norfolk people now recall as one of the memories which



their hearts will long retain; its voice was heard every Sunday, and when death entered a home of the congregation it mourned with the mourners at the funeral hour.

This bell of 1854 was rung Sunday, March 31, 1912, at the morning and evening service, and as the record now stands for the last time.

How can the work of a faithful church be measured, who will undertake to tell what was accomplished from 1736 to 1912; consecrated pastors ministered at her alters with increasing devotion; when the blessing of peace rested upon the land their services were unceasing; when pestilence and war came and Norfolk felt their blight, sorrow only drew pastor and people closer to each other; in this list of servants of God there is one whose name shines forth with a radiance peculiarly its own that of Rev. George D. Armstrong, D. D., LL.D., 1851-1891, who led his people for forty years; no word of praise can add anything to his fame, the silence of love is the heart's highest tribute.

From the mother's bosom have gone forth many sons and daughters to establish other churches of her name and faith; these have planted and reaped abundantly, many blessings have come to them but their hearts have never changed in their veneration for the old mother, not in their love for her past.

Sunday, March 31, 1912, will long survive as a precious date. In the evening the last regular service was held within the old sanctuary; the scene comes back, the benediction has been received; its words linger in the heart, farewells are spoken in subdued voices, the organ still plays and in softest tones delivers its final message from the past, one long lingering look and then all is darkness within her walls, only the golden light of memory is there.

The old First Church may look young in her new dress, but she is still the dear old mother, her children with pride in her past and unquestioning faith in her future kneel at her altars, not only with all the devotion of bygone years but with an ever increasing love which shall know no change through all the coming years.

Man's judgment has acted and the people have accepted its verdict as wisest and best, it declared that the days of the church on that spot had been accomplished, then came the end; as the passerby calls it the building has ceased to exist.

The old sanctuary can never be forgotten because "love makes memory eternal," and love has enshrined her walls within many hearts, finally rises higher and higher the thought which crowns the whole with its heavenly glory; whatsoever has been done "In His Name" can never die, it is faith's farewell note of victory from the ruins around.

We should leave no less a legacy for future generations than was left for us.

"For the Love of Christ urges us on..." 2 CORINTHIANS 5:14

Presented by FPC Long Range Planning Committee in conjunction with our Growing in This Love capital campaign.