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**MOUNT CHURCH/RAPPAHANNOCK ACADEMY
FORT A P HILL, VIRGINIA**

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Historical Background

After the Revolution the large brick structure that had served as the second St. Mary's Parish church fell into disuse and was allowed to deteriorate. Although the Reverend Abner Waugh continued to serve as rector of the parish until 1808, his lack of religious zeal combined with the dis-establishment of the organized church in Virginia and a lack of interest in the Anglican faith in the area resulted in Mount Church's virtual abandonment by or before 1800. The building soon became the abode of snakes and the site of drunken parties.¹

In 1804 the Reverend Waugh and others petitioned the Virginia General Assembly for permission to sell the glebe land. The petition also requested that the interest from the principal sum received be used to support Waugh during his incumbency. The following year the Assembly authorized this action and appointed five trustees to be responsible for carrying out the glebe sale, the loaning out of the proceeds, and the payment of the interest.²

By 1808 the Reverend Waugh was dead, and a group of citizens asked the Assembly to allow the glebe money to be applied toward establishing an academy in Caroline. The legislature again acted promptly, and in January 1809 a bill was passed establishing the incorporating an academy to be located in St. Mary's Parish. The five trustees -- John Taylor, John T. Woodford, Laurence Battaile, Hay Battaile and Reuben Turner -- were to use the glebe money to buy

public stocks and to buy another tract of land in the county, and to use the profits from these investments for the proposed school. Permission was also given for the trustees to sell the organ at Mount Church to add to the permanent funds. One additional provision in the act gave the other parishes in the county the option of adding funds gotten from selling their glebe lands to the proposed academy fund and in return receiving representation on the Board of Trustees.

3

The five trustees did not hold their meeting until a year later, in January 1810. During the ensuing year the trustees began making progress by investing 500 pounds in a nearly 400 acre farm bought from Rodham Kenner, selling the Mount Church organ, and deciding to try to renovate the old church for use as the main academy building. In December 1810 the trustees again petitioned the legislature. Stating that the other parishes in the county had refused to join St. Mary's in establishing an academy, the trustees asked permission to use the old Mount Church building and gave a number of reasons why this was desirable. First, the trustees had been promised 20 acres immediately surrounding the church as a gift from the owners. Second, the location was both healthy and central. Third, "The brick walls of the church are strong and sound, about 20 feet pitch above the ground and its three gable ends are entirely of brick, as are the walls of the vestry house, and a spacious inclosure of the yard; so that it may be converted into two stories at little cost, for which, and the chimneys, there are a sufficient number of bricks." Among other justifications the trustees noted that the converted two-story building would contain 6 480 square feet, whereas the money then available would only pay for a new building one-third that size. They assured the legislature that a room 40 by 30 feet would be set aside as a schoolroom and that it would be made available for divine worship on Sundays. They also pointed out that the church was nearly in ruins and that the roof was about to fall in. The trustees assured the Assembly that such a large, spacious building could only increase their chances of attracting students and offering them a better education. The legislature again acted promptly and amended the earlier law to conform with the trustees' proposals and established the academy's name officially as "The Rappahannock Academy". One more amendment was enacted by the General Assembly in January 1813, which fixed exactly the duties and powers of the trustees, the extent of the trust property, and a provision for funds for a library. 4

The trustees had been very busy throughout 1811 and 1812. Ambrose Jones was contracted to renovate the church into the academy building and to build a steward's house and a kitchen, books were purchased, and the search was begun for teachers and a president. On January 20, 1813, the Rappahannock Academy opened for its first session. Alexander Keech was the first headmaster or president, Stafford H. Parker was his assistant tutor, and Richard Samuel was the steward. Board was to be \$75.00 and tuition set at either \$41 or \$21 depending upon whether a boy took the full course of instruction or only English, writing, and arithmetic. During the following three years the trustees were very busy overseeing the completion of the three main buildings and contracting for additional new ones, setting out the rules and duties of students, teachers and the steward, and making a number of decisions about tuition costs and how to deal with discipline problems. There may have been as many as sixty boys enrolled (including local day students) during the first three years of operation. 5

By 1817 the physical appearance of the academy site must have resembled a small village. In addition to the brick two-story converted church/academy building, the academy complex included a two-story brick steward's house with an annexed brick dining shed, a kitchen, stable, meat and corn house, wash house, and a well. Also in 1814 John Oliver contracted to build a "new house" similar to the steward's house. This structure, still unfinished in 1817, was probably the brick, two-story house with a cellar that was later referred to as the "President's" house. In 1817 Alexander Keech resigned and Ansel French, who had been his only assistant tutor, was selected to replace him as president of the academy. French, with the help of several successive assistants or tutors and Henry T. Chevis (who had replaced Richard Samuel as steward in 1815), ran the academy until 1821. During this period (since no additional tutors were hired after 1815) the enrollment probably remained between forty and sixty. 6

In 1821 French incurred the displeasure of the trustees by expelling a large number of students. The trustees promptly discharged him and one month later in September hired J. T. O'Flaherty as his successor. A close reading of the trustees' minutes indicates that this disagreement over disciplinary matters had been brewing for some time, and the Board was consistently lenient with offenders. At this point the book of trustees' minutes ends, and information on the state of the academy is not as complete or as detailed, although it is apparent

Page 4

that additional research, especially in newspapers of the period 1820-1860, would uncover much useful data.

It is not known how long J. T. O'Flaherty continued as headmaster of the Rappahannock Academy after 1821. Charles A. Lewis is believed to have held this office for several years during the late 1820s or early 1830s. The academy may have fallen on hard times during this period and may have closed down briefly about 1835 since it was without a headmaster. 7

By 1840 the school had twenty-five students and the headmaster was a "Mr. Foster". Several letters written in 1841 by Edward Phelps, a tutor at the academy, have survived. Phelps, who was from Vermont, described his impressions of the countryside and society of Caroline County, his students, and his bachelor life-style. He was paid well, \$30 per month with board, a room, fuel and a servant for teaching five days per week. 8

By 1843 the academy was in financial straits. The trustees were forced to seek permission to sell part of the land held in trust to obtain enough money to pay for badly needed repairs to the dilapidated buildings. The trustees pointed out that during recent year enrollment had been low (it stood at only twenty boys that year), and therefore income from tuition had been falling. The General Assembly duly granted the necessary authority to sell no more than 250 acres of the academy's land. 9

The next five years seem to have brought improvement in the academy's fortunes. By 1847 the school had in effect become a military academy and was now called Rappahannock Academy and Military Institute. The school was under the direction of George B. Butler as president. During the sessions of 1848 and 1849, William Mahone, a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, was a tutor in charge of the mathematics and military departments. The school was divided into three departments -- English Mathematics and Classics -- with additional military instruction in tactics and drilling. Tuition and expenses were set at \$130 yearly. There were three brick buildings built specifically for the use of the school, rooms for seventy-five boarders, and a library of seven hundred volumes. 10

Despite the abundant room available, there were apparently only thirty boarding students at the academy in 1849. Butler seems to have continued in

charge of the academy in the 1850's. A.F.N. Rolfe, a graduate of Oxford, was an assistant teacher during part of this time. The military training course seems to have become an important aspect of the curriculum. In 1848 the legislature authorized that the arms lately belonging to the Port Royal Guards be transferred to the trustees of the Rappahannock Academy. 11

The exact fate of the academy during the Civil War years is unclear. It is likely that the school shut down shortly after the war began. One scholar believes that at least some of the buildings were burned by soldiers at this time. Civil War maps indicate two buildings and a Mr. Buckner's home located near the site. Military activity near the academy area was particularly intense during the Fredericksburg campaign and again during the last year of the war. Jubal Early's Confederate troops spent the winter of 1862-1863 near the academy, and Union troops raided throughout this part of the county in 1864 and 1865. The most recent verifiable mention of structures at the academy site indicates that the kitchen was still standing as late as the 1930s.

Private academies dominated secondary education in Virginia from 1776 to 1861. Because there was no public school system, these influential institutions were largely responsible for training the middle and upper middle class citizens of the state. Often founded as the result of religious enthusiasm or philanthropic concern, these institutions received very little public help and relied on income for tuition to meet expenses. By 1860 as many as four hundred of these academies may have been in operation in the state, a surprisingly large number of which accepted girls as students. Despite a constant shortage of trained instructors by the 1850s native Virginians gradually outnumbered the "Yankee" schoolmasters who had dominated faculties in the period from 1810 to 1850. Despite many defects in the academy system, such as a tendency to stress political and patriotic oratory or the failure to accept students from poor families, these institutions were successful in education as many as ten thousand students a year. 13

The Mount Church/Rappahannock Academy complex is one of the most historically significant sites investigated during both the archaeological and historical survey of Fort A. P. Hill. If further Archaeological and historical research is undertaken, there is every reason to expect excellent results. The historical survey has uncovered a wealth of documentation relating to this site in the nineteenth century, and it is likely that much additional information could be uncovered by further research.