

THE DRANESVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

This is the story - the history - the life of a church. The Dranesville United Methodist Church also known as the Sugarland Chapel and the Liberty Meeting House.

A small group of colonists planned and built the Sugarland Chapel, a small log cabin located in a wooded area known as Sugarland Run, sometime in the late 1700's.

In 1786 Virginia led the way toward Freedom of Worship by being the first state-to support Thomas Jefferson's Act for Religious Freedom.

In 1789 the first Congress met in New York; George Washington was inaugurated as the first President of the United States; Congress created three executive departments, State, War and Treasury; the Bill of Rights was adopted and sent to the thirteen states of the union for ratification.

In 1790 the Sugarland Chapel was relocated in a parcel of land granted to James and Eliza Coleman. It was on a hilltop, built by the same people who were no longer colonists, but citizens of the United States. They called their Church, The Liberty Meeting House and the hill upon which it was built, Church Hill. It symbolized the most important freedom - The Freedom of Worship. It was a place of worship for all Christians, no matter what denomination.

In 1790 at a small dinner party given by Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton and Virginia's leading Congressional spokesman, James Madison, after long, heated arguments finally reached a compromise in relation to the geographical location of the capitol of the United States. Hamilton agreed to exert his influence to secure enough northern votes to assure location of the National Capitol along the Potomac, instead of Philadelphia, in return for Madison's pledge to obtain sufficient southern votes to effect passage of the proposal.

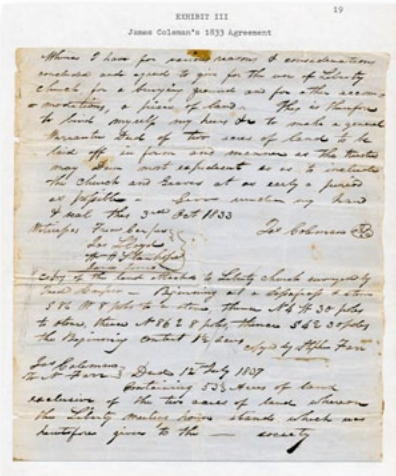
On the 10th of July, 1790, Congress fixed the site of the projected National Capitol in a district 10 miles square along the Potomac River, and not quite 30 miles from the Liberty Meeting House.



The new capitol, called Washington, in the District of Columbia, began to grow. A road from the new capitol up to the mountains of Virginia was used more and more. Citizens were moving East, West, North and South.

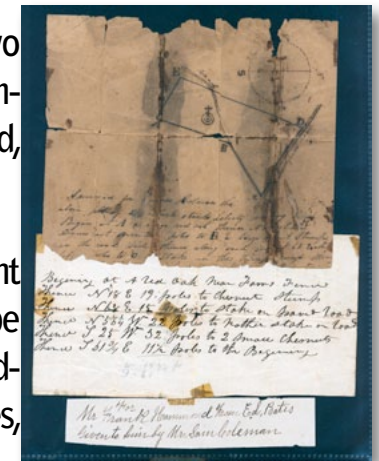
In 1810 Baldwin Dade Drane and his family travelled by wagon along the stagecoach road from the capitol and established a saloon, hotel and general store in a log house at the junction of Old Georgetown Pike and Leesburg Pike (on what is now the north side of Route 7 at the intersection of Route 193).

Mr. Drane's enterprises became the center of the village of Dranesville's public life - as the nearby Liberty Meeting House became the center of the area's spiritual life.



In 1833 warrantee deed was given by James and Eliza Coleman for a two acre lot for "the use of the Liberty Church, burying ground, and other accommodations." The deed was handwritten and probably never officially registered, but at least the land belongs, more or less to the people of the church.

In 1852 Victoria was Queen of England. Millard Fillmore was President of the United States. America was building a new dome for the Capitol to be made of cast iron painted to resemble stone was under construction. The "wedding cake" house in Kennebunkport, Maine, was high fashion with its pinnacles, high pointed arches, and decorative incrustations.



The members of the Liberty Meeting House in the village of Dranesville, Virginia, were also building, their church had been destroyed by fire and records lost. This time they wanted a permanent home. The land was now officially theirs, having been legally deeded to them by Eliza and James Coleman. The deed for the church property was in the name of six trustees and their successors who were at that time prominent citizens of the Village: Dr. William Day, a doctor living adjacent to the church, Benjamin Bridges, William Barker, Thornton Johnson, Thomas Carper and Joseph Bixler.

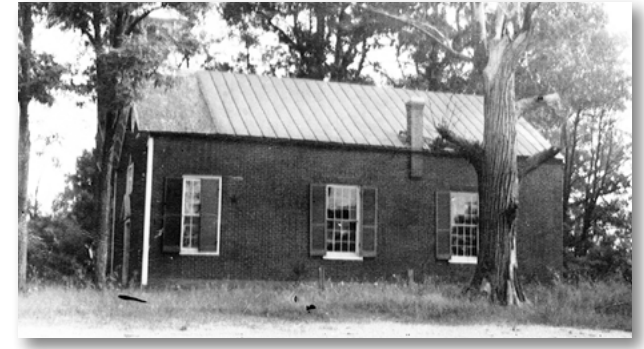
The deed for this land and building was given for "the purpose of public use as a place of resort for the purposes of religious worship, free for all denominations of professing Christians, without distinction, and also as a site and place for a school house for the establishment and maintenance of a school or academy for the instruction of youth."



The 1852 church building was built simply and without following the style of arches, domes, incrustations. It was a plain, square brick church. It reflected the directness of the people who worshipped there.



In 1861 came the Civil War: One hundred ninety-seven men were killed in "Action at Dranesville". The Liberty Meeting House was used for a stable and a hospital. Destruction was rampant.



On November 19, 1863, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated.

On May 26, 1865, the costliest United States war in proportion of casualties was ended. There was ruin everywhere. The little Church still stood - but just a shell, the interior had been destroyed.

The reconstruction period in the United States moved slowly and was difficult. The members of the Liberty Meeting House continued to meet during the rebuilding period - even though they sat on wooden slabs and met at irregular intervals depending upon the availability of a minister.

In 1879 Thomas Edison invented the incandescent electric light. This marked the beginning of a new era. After the black years of the reconstruction, the country was again united and planning for future growth and development.

In 1880 a one-room schoolhouse was built by Morris Renney of Fairfax, Virginia, on Church Hill on the land deed to the Liberty Meeting House. People moved into the area. The larger tracts of land became small farms. The one-room schoolhouse became crowded, at times having eighty pupils in the one room.

In 1882 the Northern Pacific Railroad was completed, the second transcontinental line.

In 1883 the Reverend J. H. Dulaney, pastor of the Liberty Meeting House planned and began the remodeling of the church which was completed in 1886.



In 1906 claims were made to the Federal Government for Civil War damages. Congress appropriated \$700.00 for the damage done while the Liberty Meeting House was used for stables and a hospital.

In 1909 Henry Ford announced that his company would manufacture only the Model T at a price within the reach of the average man.

In 1911 "tin lizzies" as well as horses and buggies were seen Sundays outside the Liberty Meeting House.

In 1912 an additional room was added to the schoolhouse on Church Hill. School continued in session until it was closed in 1930, due to the consolidation of the small schoolhouses in the county of Fairfax.

The schoolhouse was then used for Sunday school classes and special activities the most important of which was a place to cook for the popular church dinners using the wood burning stove. During those depression days, a fried oyster feast with hot biscuits, potato salad, vegetables, and dessert was priced at 25¢!!

In 1933 Franklin Delano Roosevelt was President of the United States. The banks closed and business was at a standstill. The New Deal was inaugurated.

In 1935 the second New Deal was launched, and the parishioners of the Liberty Meeting House, now called the Dranesville Church, and their minister, the Reverend Garner Butt, planned and remodeled the interior of the church. Wainscoting was placed on the walls with a diamond design. Floors were refinished and the interior painted.

In December, 1950, the interior of the Dranesville Church once more was destroyed by fire. The members of the church helped the Fire Department fight the fire, saving the outer structure. There in the snow on the charred grounds with the brick walls still standing, the members of the church planned the reconstruction. The rebuilding began in the spring of 1951, and finished in August of that year. In remodeling the vestibule, formerly on the East side, was relocated in the center of the South side. Church school classrooms were placed on each side of the vestibule and one large classroom on the second floor. Old brick





was used to match the original bricks and the East end of the church was enlarged four feet. The wainscoting, of which the congregation had been so proud, was badly burned. The walls were plastered just as they were before the 1935 remodeling.

For almost one hundred years the Dranesville Methodist congregation had been using the Liberty Meeting House for their services. The Liberty Church had a slate of trustees for the real estate, and the Methodist Church had a slate of trustees for the contents of the building.

In March, 1959, the Dranesville Methodist Church became the legal owners of the property of Church Hill. At this time, the Dranesville Methodist Church Personal Property Trustees became the trustees of all buildings and real estate.

In 1964 the new Dulles International Airport, ten miles from Church Hill, - Washington, D.C. is 30 automobile minutes away, - and California, four jet hours, was completed. Within a five mile radius of Church Hill, new houses and large communities are under construction. The Dranesville Methodist Church built again to meet the needs of a growing community.

A large Fellowship Hall was added as well as several rooms for Sunday School classes, youth group meetings and nursery care, choir rehearsals, and a new, fully equipped kitchen! The long lines of hungry gourmets waiting outside for the famous church dinners were no more. The lines are all inside!

In 1982 the building plans continue. The Sanctuary will be enlarged, the balcony reinforced, and the tower will once again house the church bell.

The story – the history – the life of the Dranesville United Methodist Church goes on.



Evelyn Davis
Dorothy Looker



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