

Garth Chapel (St. James Church)
Garth Road (State Rt. 676)
Owensville vicinity
Albemarle County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1023

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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GARTH CHAPEL (ST. JAMES CHURCH)

HABS No. VA-1023

GENERAL INFORMATION

Location:

Garth Road (State Route 676), Owensville Vicinity,
Albemarle County, Virginia. UTS 17.71271.421982

Present Owner:

Trustees of St. James' Church

Present Use:

Private family services

Statement of significance:

This is a typical example of the many small
parish churches built during the late nineteenth
century in response to the ecclesiological
movement.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Thomas Garth, the first of the Garth family in Albemarle County, bought 450 acres of land on a branch of the Buck Island Creek in 1762. He purchased more land in 1770, and in 1779 "he bought another thousand acres of the Lewis estate on Ivy Creek, and continued his purchases in that section, till he owned all the land stretching from near the Staunton Road, opposite Jesse Lewis's place, to the forks of Mechums' and Moorman's Rivers."¹

Thomas Garth's children included William Garth and Jesse Winston Garth. William resided at Birdwood and built the brick dwelling there. Jesse Winston resided on the plantation on which he built the large brick mansion known as the Barracks.

William Garth's son William was responsible, with the help of William Colthurst and George Gordon, for the construction of the chapel which would come to be known as the Garth Chapel. Formally known as St. James' Church, the chapel is located in what was the Fredericksburg Parish from 1742 into the twentieth century. Garth Chapel was one of three mission chapels built by Christ Church, Charlottesville, at the turn of the century. The three chapels include St. Luke's Chapel in Simeon, four miles southeast of Charlottesville, Edge Hill four miles to the east, and St. James' eight miles northwest of town. The missions were designed to bring the faith to the poor.

The congregation to be served by the Garth Chapel consisted of approximately 25-30 people in the Garth family and from the surrounding community. The congregation had been meeting in what was called the Garth Post Office, near where the chapel

1 Albemarle County, by Rev. Edgar Woods, p. 203

would be built. On May 30, 1896, J.H. Whitmore and his wife Naomi sold one acre of land to William Garth, William B. Colthurst and George Gordon for thirty five dollars, for the purpose of erecting a church. This acre of land, less than a mile from the town of Owensville, was a corner of the Whitmore farm.

The chapel is representative of many of the small Episcopalian churches built as a consequence of the Ecclesiological movement that was so strong in the late nineteenth century.

Typical of this low-style, vernacular church is the center aisle with pews on either side. In more high style ecclesiological gothic revival churches, the main worship space was a sequence of two spaces - the nave and the chancel, placed end to end on a single axis. The chancel was distinguished from the nave on the exterior as well as the interior. In the Garth Chapel, the chancel is distinguished merely by a raised platform on which normally were placed two chairs, a communion table and a lecturn. Often there was a credence table used to store the items used for communion. Frequently in low Episcopalian churches there was both a lecturn and a pulpit; it is conceivable that in the Garth Chapel the lecturn and pulpit were one - and used interchangeably.

The provisions for the choir were on the outside edges of the chancel along the side walls. Pews of a different style and size are placed along those walls providing accommodations for about eight people, which would have been a sufficient choir size for the Chapel. The organ in the Garth Chapel was placed on the chancel, although this is not ordinary practise.

The Garth Chapel began serving the congregation about once a month, sharing the services of a minister with the other mission chapels in the area. The first wedding to take place in the chapel was that of the first cousins Edgar Graham Michie and Helen Carter Garth, on September 1, 1897.

The church faithfully served the congregation for thirty or forty years until 1930 or 40; from that time until 1974 only graveside services were held. Of the two graveyards on the site, one consists of graves of Garth family members and their relatives whose graves were moved to the site after the construction of the church. The other graveyard has been the burial ground for the church since 1896. With two exceptions, the only people buried in the graveyards are members of the family. The parents of a three year old girl and a Catholic couple who loved the plot of land were given permission to have graves located on the Chapel's land.

New interest in the Chapel was sparked by the children of F. Bradley Peyton, the grandson of William Garth, and his wife Gertrude Bayne Breckinridge Peyton. In 1974, their daughter Gertrude Bayne Peyton Russell, the great granddaughter of William Garth, and Munro Cannon Russell, had their son Munro Cannon Russell, Jr., baptized in the chapel on April 28. Two years later, their daughter Genevieve Bayne Russell was baptized there on November 14.

William Garth's great grandson F. Bradley Peyton, IV, and his wife Claudia Winant Peyton had their two children baptized in the Chapel: Kathryn Ashby Peyton was baptized on April 24, 1977 and Francis Bradley Peyton, V, was baptized on September 16, 1979.

The first wedding in the Chapel in more than fifty years was that of Scott Breckinridge Peyton, great grandson of William Garth, and Margaret Page Edwards, on January 19, 1980.

The Garth Chapel, because of the renewed interest and care of the building in recent years, again serves the members of the family in a manner similar to that of its early years. It does not serve a congregation on a monthly basis; it is unlikely that it will serve that purpose again. It does, however, provide a chapel for the family for private services and, more importantly, it provides a sense of pride to those fortunate enough to be associated with it.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General statement:

1. Architectural character: The Garth Chapel is typical of the small country parish churches built in the late nineteenth century in response to the ecclesiological movement: a reform movement which encouraged the revival of medieval forms in church building. Stylistically, the structure is vernacular Gothic.
2. Condition of fabric: Good - restored.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The rectangular main body of the church measures 20'3" by 35'5" and the entry vestibule is 5'2" by 10'10". Both the main body, which measures 24½' in height at the highest point, and the vestibule roof, which measures 19'2", both have 45 pitch roofs. The main body of the chapel is three bays in length.
2. Foundation: Rough coursed masonry covered with plaster and painted white. The foundation height accommodates the site slope; specifically, at the front there is no foundation; at the rear it measures 36" in height.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The entire structure is sheathed with five-inch horizontal weatherboarding painted white.
4. Structural system, framing: Wood framing. The subflooring consists of a summer beam (8" by 6") which runs longitudinally down the center of the building, and joists (9½" by 1 3/4") spaced two feet on center connecting the summer beams with the sills. The sub floor boards rest on this and

another framing system begins which ultimately carries the floor.

5. Porches: A concrete slab serves as an entrance porch.
6. Chimneys: There is a small brick chimney measuring two bricks by eight bricks surmounted by clay piping. The chimney is no longer in use.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main door, centrally positioned in the south facade, is a double paneled door. The door opening has plain moulding four inches in width and is topped with a tripartite transom with hand blown glass panes.
 - b. Windows and shutters. Wooden double hung windows with tripartite division of glass in the upper part of the window, reminiscent of the entrance transom, are placed symmetrically on the eastern and western elevations. The glass in the windows is hand blown. The trim of the window opening is a plain flat piece of wood measuring four inches. Forest green louvered shutters flank each window.
 - c. Crawl-space. In the rear elevation of the foundation there is a weatherboarded door measuring 3'2" by 4'3" which provides access to the crawl space underneath.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The gable roofs of both the main body and the vestibule are of a 45 pitch and sheathed with cedar shingles. A cushion moulding with a beaded edge rests above the fascia and a moulding on the soffit softens the junction between the walls and cornice elements. The mouldings of the vestibule roof echo the mouldings of the main roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The main double doors open into the vestibule leading to another doorway which opens into the main body of the chapel. A central aisle, flanked by nine rows of moveable pews, continues through the church, and leads to a centrally positioned chancel which is at the north end of the chapel.
2. Flooring: Three inch wide pine boards run longitudinally.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Wainscoting with beaded edges and four central striations panel the wall to a height of 3'6". Above the wainscoting is plaster, painted egg shell white. The ceiling is covered with wood panels identical to the wainscoting with striations running longitudinally. The vestibule is treated in a similar manner to the main body of the church.
4. Doorways and doors: Both pairs of double doors are paneled and evidence pegged construction. Decorative treatment is also similar for both pairs of doors. The trim of the door openings is standard machined mill work. The doors and door trim are dark stained pine.
5. Windows: The dark stained window casements have the same milled moulding as the doors.
6. Hardware: The door latches and window locks have intricate cast hardware: again, a stock item.
7. Lighting and Plumbing: There are no mechanical systems.
8. Heating: Though previously heated by a stove, the chapel presently has no heating system.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The chapel faces south towards Garth Road (State Route 676). The terrain is level at the southern portion but slopes extremely in the northeast corner. Deciduous and evergreen trees are scattered throughout the one acre site, with two evergreens flanking the entrance of the church. Boxwoods can be found scattered near the church and in the cemeteries. The entire lot is covered with scrub grass and moss and enclosed by a white wooden fence.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1. Interviews: Mrs. Theresa Michie Garth, Mr. David Holmes, Mr. THomas Mason, Mr. Nathaniel Pawlett, Mrs. Gertrude Bayne Breckinridge Peyton.
2. Cooke, Charles Francis. Parish Lines, Diocese of Virginia. Richmond, Va: Virginia State Library, 1967.
Woods, Reverend Edgar. Albemarle County. Bridgewater, VA. 1901.
3. Papers: Garth family marriage and birth records. Christ Church Vestry Books
4. Albemarle County Courthouse. Deed Book 106, p. 187

PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation was undertaken by the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Professor of Architecture. It was prepared by Rebecca Trumbull, Graduate Student in Architectural History during the Spring Semester, 1981. The material was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. It was not produced under HABS supervision, nor edited by members of the HABS staff.