

St. Anne's Parish Glebe House in Essex County

One of the most significant structures in Virginia's Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula is the Saint Anne's Parish glebe house in Essex County. Willard J. Webb and Anne C. Webb in *The Glebe Houses of Colonial Virginia* state: "The St. Anne's Parish Glebe House in Essex County was one of the most elegant of colonial glebe houses. It stood a full two stories high above a cellar and had beautiful Flemish bond brickwork with glazed headers and rubbed brick trim around the doors and windows. It survives today The exterior remains unaltered with no additions or changes and the brickwork is in nearly pristine condition."¹

In 1618 the Virginia Company in London directed that one hundred acres of land be set aside in each of the Virginia parishes for the maintenance of the clergy. In 1642 the crown instructed Governor William Berkeley that two hundred acres of land were to be set aside for a glebe in each parish of the colony. In 1655 the General Assembly passed an act that required parishes to provide a glebe and stock, and five years later the General Assembly passed another act that required parishes to provide "convenient housing and stocks upon the same."²

The Rt. Rev. Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London, had jurisdiction over all churches in the English colonies. In 1724 he sent a questionnaire to all colonial clergy. Among the questions asked were "Have you a House and Glebe? Is your Glebe in lease, or let by the year or is it occupied by yourself? Is due care taken to preserve your house in good repair and at whose expense is it done?" There were at the time a little over fifty parishes in Virginia. There were thirty two responses to the questionnaire from Virginia. Only one response stated that the parish had no glebe. Sixteen reported that they had a glebe and a glebe house in satisfactory condition. John Bagge the minister at Saint Anne's Parish at the time reported: "I have a house and glebe but live on my own plantation in the parish" In response to the question concerning maintenance of the house and glebe he stated, "Reasonable care is taken, and at the expense of the parish."³ The house and glebe that Bragg referred to were replaced in less than a decade.

Three years later the General Assembly passed an act "That in all parishes within this dominion, where good and convenient glebes are not already purchase and appropriated, a good and convenient tract of land to contain two hundred acres at the least, may be purchased by the vestry, and shall be assigned and set apart for a glebe, for the use of the minister of such parish, and his successors... And where mansion-houses, and other out houses and conveniences are not already erected, for the habitation of the ministers, it is hereby declared and enacted, that the vestry of such parish shall have the power to erect and build on such glebe, one convenient mansion-house, & such other convenient out houses as they shall think fit: And they are hereby authorized, empowered, and required, to levy the charge of the said several buildings, and purchase of the glebe, on the tithable persons in their respective parishes"⁴

In 1696 the General Assembly fixed the salary of all the clergy in the colony at 16,000 pounds of tobacco a year. This uniformity of salary meant that parishes that wished to attract or retain clergy would have to offer other benefits to clergy in order to be competitive. One of the principal ways a parish could distinguish itself was with the glebe and glebe house provided to the clergy. Saint Anne's elegant glebe house shows that this Essex County parish wished to attract and retain the best of colonial clergy.

In 1704 Saint Anne's parish in Essex County was created out of a portion of Sittenbourne Parish. The Rev. James Smith served as the first minister of the new parish. He served until 1714. In 1706 Saint Anne's wardens purchased one hundred and fifty acres near the present site of Vauter's Church for a glebe. This was the glebe reported to the bishop by John Bagge. This glebe did not contain the required minimum of two hundred acres. Bragg was the second minister to serve Saint Anne's Parish. The wardens and vestry had chosen Giles Rainsford as their parson in 1716, but Governor Alexander

¹ Willard J. Webb and Anne C. Webb: *The Glebe Houses of Colonial Virginia*, p. 77.

² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³ William Stevens Perry, editor: *Historical Collections Relating to the American Colonial Church, Volume I. Virginia*, p. 317.

⁴ William W. Hening ed: *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Lawes of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 161*, Volume 4, pp. 204-208.

Spotswood appointed John Bagge. It was the last time a governor forced his choice on a parish. Bagge served until 1726. In 1726 the parish called Robert Rose as its minister, and he served until 1748. During the tenure of Robert Rose Vauter's church was built and the parish purchased a new glebe and built its elegant glebe house.

It is plainly evident that the glebe house and Vauter's were built at the same time. The brick work is identical.



Vauter's Church



Saint Anne's Parish Glebe House in 2002

While it was once claimed that Vauter's was built in 1719 and an addition put on it in 1731, it is well established now that it was built as a single unit in 1731. The 1731 date can be seen carved into a brick over the south entrance.



This brick establishes not only the date of the construction of Vauter's church but also the approximate date of the construction of the glebe house.

Robert Rose was an extraordinary priest. He was born in Scotland in 1704 and ordained in 1726. Prior to ordination he was a bookkeeper, surveyor and physician. He came to Saint Anne's Parish immediately following ordination and served the parish until 1748 when he went to Saint Anne's Parish in Albemarle County. Bishop William Meade, who was very critical of most colonial clergy, praised Robert Rose. Meade wrote of Rose:

"He was a kind of universal genius. Now he is in the house reading Cicero's Orations, now on the farm engaged in all kinds of employment, now at his neighbors, instructing and helping them in various operations. Now he writes in his journal a recipe for the best mode of curing tobacco."⁵

Robert Rose kept a diary which has been transcribed and annotated by the Rev. Ralph Fall. The diary does not cover the period in which Vauter's and the glebe house were built but it does cover the last years of Robert Rose's tenure in Essex County. It gives us a sense of this extraordinary man, of his travels, of the men and women he knew throughout the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula, and of life in 18th century Virginia. Robert Rose's brother was Charles Rose who served Cople Parish. In the entry for December 30, 1747 Robert Rose writes: "Rode to Mr. Spence's, Northumberland, with Mr. Dickson and my son John in our way to make my Brother Charles the first visit at his Glebe, spent the Evening with Mr. Hunter." The next day he notes: "Got to my Brother's – and stayd that day."

⁵ William Meade: *Old Churches, Ministers, and families of Virginia*, Vol. I, p. 400.

Robert Rose was succeeded as Rector of St. Anne's parish by John Smelt, a graduate of Oxford, who served from 1748 until 1765. John Matthews who was born in Virginia in 1739 and graduated from William and Mary was ordained both deacon and priest in June of 1764 and became Rector of Saint Anne's in 1765. He served until 1792 and was the third and last clerical inhabitant of the glebe.

The Saint Anne's Parish glebe house, Vauter's church, and the *Diary of Robert Rose* are joint witnesses of an earlier era and their continued availability to us can enrich our knowledge and appreciation of the rich heritage we have here on the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula.

On August 12 Preservation Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula offered a field trip to the Saint Anne's Parish glebe house and Vauter's Church in Essex County. The Rev. Dr. Christopher Agnew, former President of PNNMP and former priest at Vauter's Church, led the tour. Mr. and Mrs. James Hundley, the owners of the glebe house, have been working on the preservation and restoration of this historic property for a number of years, and PNNMP gave them a small grant to help.

The tour began at Vauter's Church which is the church of the sole surviving congregation of St. Anne's Parish. This parish was formed on June 1, 1704. There is a reference in a 1719 deed to a church being located where Vauter's is located. That building most likely was a wooden framed structure that was replaced in 1731 by the lovely brick structure that can be seen from US Highway 17. The date of the construction of the church building can be clearly seen in a brick above the south door of the church. An examination of the construction by experts from Colonial Williamsburg has made it clear that the church was constructed at one time, that is, it has never been enlarged by any addition. Currently the main entrance used is the south door. In colonial times the main entrance was the west door, and this west entrance is clearly more ornate than what is now used as the main entrance. When entering the church through the west entrance, one faced the altar which was against the east wall of the church where the organ is currently located. In 1827 the interior of the church was significantly altered. The altar was moved from the east wall and as a simple table was placed in front of a new pulpit. The new two-deck pulpit replaced the old colonial triple-deck pulpit. The new pulpit was placed against the north wall. At the same time the box pews were reduced in height and turned into the slip pews now in the church. There were further smaller changes made to the interior of the church in 1886, and, of course, in the twentieth century modern conveniences such as electricity and ventilation have been added.



Vauter's Church west door, the colonial main entrance



Vauter's Church south door, now the main entrance

The tour continued at the Saint Anne's glebe house. This structure was built at the same time as the church and most likely by the same craftsmen. Both the church and the glebe house are of Flemish bond brickwork with glazed headers. From the time of its construction around 1731 until the state seized the glebes in 1804 it was one of the most, if not the most, elegant glebe houses in Virginia. This is shown not only by the brick construction of the house but by the surviving interior woodwork. The significance of the molding around a fireplace cannot be overstated. We all are indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Hundley for what they are doing to restore and preserve the Saint Anne's glebe house. For more on the glebe house, see the entry for the glebe house on page 210 of *Historic Sites in Virginia's Northern Neck & Essex County*, and the entry on this structure in Willard J. Ebb and Anne C. Webb: *The Glebe Houses of Colonial Virginia*.



Rear view of Saint Anne's Parish Glebe House in 2017



Original woodwork in the glebe house



Detail of original woodwork