

Visit sites on the old Brunswick Circuit

Canaan—Rev. Edward Dromgoole House—Valentines, Brunswick County, Virginia

Edward Dromgoole (1751–1835), an early Methodist leader and circuit rider in Virginia and North Carolina, came to America in 1770 from Ireland. Greatly influenced by Robert Strawbridge, Dromgoole began preaching in 1773, later married and settled in southern Brunswick County, VA. In 1786 he retired from the circuit but continued to preach locally until his death in 1835. His home was a frequent stop for Bishop Francis Asbury and other Methodist circuit riders. The eighteenth-century house and one outbuilding remain. While the structures are in deteriorated condition, preservation efforts are underway.

Goal: Restore the dwelling and dependency; and, develop meeting facilities for a historic retreat center and visitor destination.

Location: 2722 Christanna Hwy, Valentines, VA. Open by appointment.

Contact: Message us on Facebook @OBCFVA



Ebenezer Academy Memorial Park Warfield, Brunswick County, VA

Ebenezer Academy was established after the Revolutionary War by Bishop Francis Asbury and was one of the first Methodist schools established in America. It passed out of the hands of the church but remained an important school for many years. A Brunswick County unit of the Confederate Army was named the Ebenezer Grays. Foundation stones form a low wall to mark the location of the long-gone school building and the centerpiece of a small memorial park.

Goal: Erect an interpretive display. Research is ongoing to determine former students and details of the Ebenezer Grays. This information will be used to form the content of the exhibit.

Location: Off U.S. Route 1 in Warfield, 6.8 miles north of Route 46. The park is open to visitors dawn to dusk.

Original Randolph-Macon College—1832–1868—Boydton, Mecklenburg County, VA

This is the original site of the oldest Methodist-affiliated college still operating in the United States. Chartered in 1830 by the Virginia General Assembly, it opened on October 9, 1832. In 1868, largely due to economic and transportation difficulties, RMC was moved to Ashland, VA, where it operates today.



Boydton Academy & Bible Institute (BI)—1878–1938 Boydton, Mecklenburg County, VA

The buildings vacated by RMC later housed a school for African Americans. In 1878 the property was sold to Dr. Charles Cullis of Boston, and under the Faith Missions at Home & Abroad Corporation opened the Boydton Institute, a school for African Americans. The school operated until the mid-1930s. Former students included the Rev. Vernon Johns, Mozella Jordan Price, Archdeacon E.L. Baskerville, and Kirke Smith.

Goal: Historical interpretation of both RMC and BI. Stabilize the remaining Main Building walls as a memorial site; renovate the former Boydton Institute headmaster's cottage as a museum, meeting space, and educational center; and install interpretive exhibits.

Location: 175 Jefferson St., Boydton, VA. Historical markers are located on U.S. Route 58.



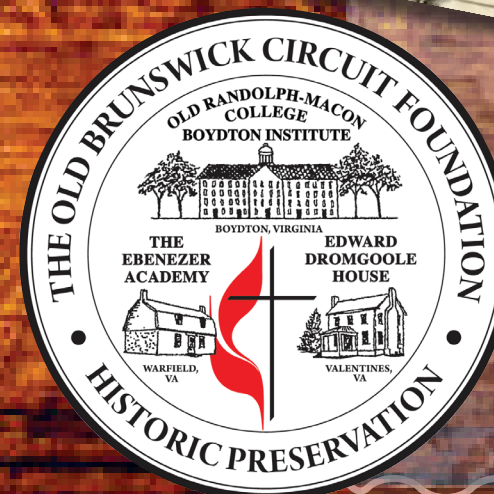
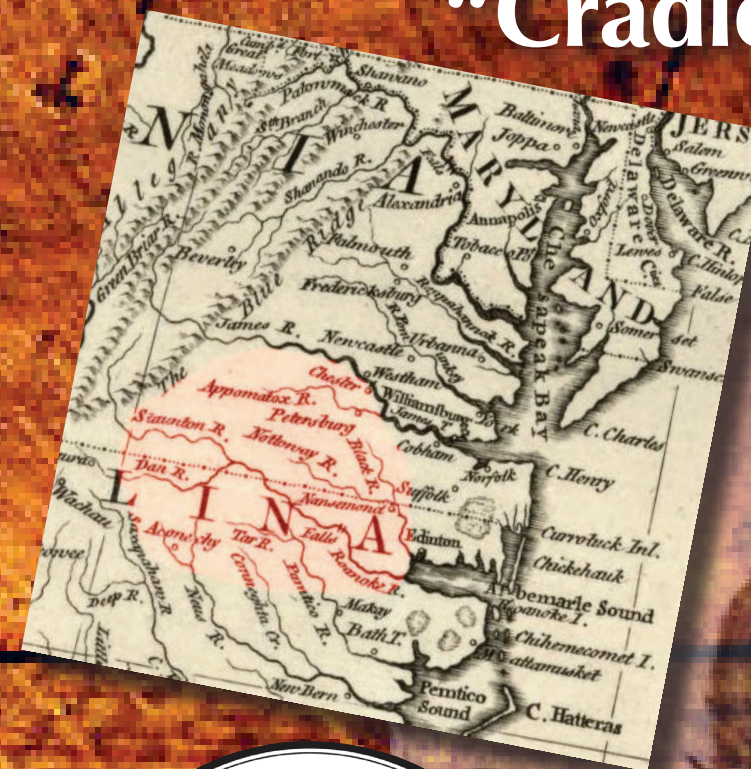
Mason's Chapel (Historical Marker)—Valentines, VA—Rt. 46, south of "Canaan"

First mentioned by Asbury in November 1775, Mason's Chapel was one of the earliest Methodist worship sites in southern VA. The first Virginia Conference after the formation of the new Methodist Episcopal Church was held there in 1785 with Bishop Francis Asbury presiding. Although its exact location is uncertain, according to Asbury's journals Mason's was very near "Canaan."

Marker Location: Route 46 Brunswick Co. 0.1 mile south of Gasburg Road (Route 626).

The Old Brunswick Circuit

"Cradle of Methodism"



The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization that exists to promote preservation and interpretation of significant sites within Methodism's earliest circuit.

<https://vaumc.org/oldbrunswickcircuit/>



Timeline

- 1769** – Robert Williams is thought to have preached the first Methodist sermon in Virginia at Norfolk.
- 1769** – Devereaux Jarratt, Anglican minister of Bath Parish, Dinwiddie County began “preaching about the ‘Christian experience’...in a most un-Episcopal way, traveling forty or sixty miles and speaking to strangers by the wayside.”
- 1770** – Edward Dromgoole emigrated from Sligo, Ireland, and converted from Catholicism to Methodism. He met Robert Strawbridge in Maryland.
- 1771** – Francis Asbury arrived in America at Philadelphia
- 1773** – Robert Williams met Devereaux Jarrett in Petersburg. Jarratt directed Williams toward Brunswick County, VA.
- 1773** – Robert Williams formed the first circuit in the Methodist faith in Virginia. Originally named the Petersburg Circuit it was renamed the Brunswick Circuit in 1774.
- 1774** – Brunswick Circuit had 218 members of the Methodist society of the Church of England.
- 1775** – John Wesley appointed five preachers to the Brunswick Circuit: William Glendenning, Robert Lindsay, Edward Dromgoole, Robert Williams, and George Shadford.
- 1775** – Brunswick Circuit had 800 members of the Methodist society.
- 1776** – Brunswick Circuit membership doubled to 1,611.
- 1776** – Church of England tithe abolished.
- 1775–1783** – American Revolution.
- 1777** – Edward Dromgoole married Rebecca Walton, daughter of a prominent Brunswick County, VA, landowner.
- circa 1777–1802** – Dromgoole established his plantation, Canaan, in Brunswick County, VA.
- 1786** – Dromgoole retired from circuit riding and ministered locally —Asbury Journal, Dec. 7, 1793: “Rode through the rain to Woolsey’s barn—now Drumgoole’s chapel.” He also preached at Mason’s Chapel, and at the original Olive Branch Church built about 1801 (closed in 1878 and relocated to Gasburg).
- 1784**, Christmas Eve – Lovely Lane Church in Baltimore, MD: American Methodism declared independent of Church of England and the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) was formed.
- Sept. 18, 1784** – John Wesley appointed newly ordained Bishop Francis Asbury the first general superintendent of education.
- 1785** – “Marriage Law” passed. Non-Church of England marriages recognized.
- May 1785** – First Virginia Conference of the new Methodist Episcopal Church was held at Mason’s Chapel near the Dromgoole home. The question of slavery was an important issue at this Conference.
- 1788** – Rev. John Easter appointed to Brunswick Circuit. Conference records show a membership increase of 1,138. Rev. Edward Dromgoole recognized Easter’s work as “the greatest revival of Religion I have ever seen.”
- Nov. 6, 1792** – Ebenezer Academy: “Rode through the rain to Edward Drumgoole’s [sic]: Here I found a few friends, and formed a constitution for a district school, which, with a little alteration, will form a general rule for any part of the continent.” (Asbury’s Journal)
- 1796 & 1798** – Asbury is known to have stayed the winter at Canaan and with other families in Brunswick.



- 1798** – Problems with Ebenezer. Asbury stated: “Ebenezer Academy is under poor regulations; and what is more than all, some of the gentlemen of Brunswick County had the confidence and want of propriety to wish to wrest it wholly out of our hands.” The school was out of Methodist control by 1800.
- 1825** – Virginia Conference of the Methodist Church meeting at Zion Methodist Church, Union Level, VA, began plans for what would become RMC. In 1828 Boydton, VA was selected as the location for the college.
- Feb. 3, 1830** – Randolph Macon College chartered by Virginia General Assembly. Methodist Bishop John Early was the first president of the Trustees. Contractors William A. Howard and Dabney Cosby constructed the main college building: “The plan embraces a centre brick building 52 feet by 54 feet deep, with wings east and west 67 and a half feet each, making a total front of 187 feet, all four stories high.”



The Brunswick Circuit

Brunswick Circuit—formed 1773–1774

The Rev. Edward Dromgoole described the original Brunswick Circuit: Virginia had “*but one Circuit, which extended from Chesterfield County...to the north of Petersburg, to the south of Tar River in North Carolina, including many counties, making several hundred miles to ride once around....*”

The Brunswick Circuit

- The oldest continuing Circuit in American Methodism.
- Listed as “Petersburg” in 1773 (the year of the first official listing of American appointments).
- Given the name “Brunswick” in 1774.
- Groundwork for the formation of the circuit laid by Devereux Jarratt and Robert Williams.
- Area of the most rapid Methodist growth and the most intense revival in 18th-century America (1774–1776; 1785–1788).
- Though no map of the original circuit exists, it is thought that its area in 1775 included 14 present-day Virginia counties and plus Halifax and Bute [now Warren & Franklin] counties in North Carolina.
- Location of first Virginia Conference of the newly formed Methodist Episcopal Church in 1785 at “W. Mason’s” or Mason’s Chapel in Brunswick County.
- Location of Ebenezer Academy—one of the first Methodist schools in America.
- The original site of the oldest Methodist-affiliated college still operating in the United States: Randolph Macon College established 1830 and opened in Boydton, VA, in 1832.

To support the preservation efforts of the Foundation, tax-deductible donations payable to The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation may be sent to P.O. Box 385, Lawrenceville, Virginia 23868-0385; or make a donation via PayPal @OBCFVA on Facebook.

- Oct. 9, 1832** – RMC opened for its first term. Martin’s *Gazetteer* described in 1834: “The buildings are of the best brick, and are covered with tin, extensive and elegant, ... accommodation for 200 students.”
- 1835** – Rev. Edward Dromgoole died. After serving in the Virginia General Assembly from 1823 to 1835, his son George C. Dromgoole was elected to U.S. Congress.
- 1844–1845** – Methodist Episcopal Church split over slavery and MEC, South (MECS) organized.
- 1848** – RMC campus included President’s house, Steward’s Hall, the Centre Building (Main Hall), and the Western Building (built 1839, torn down 1875).
- April 1861** – War Between the States began. Students and professors enlisted. Resulting low college enrollment caused school to close February 1863.
- Spring 1865** – RMC campus occupied by Federal troops.
- Fall 1866** – College reopened with low enrollment and facilities in disrepair.
- Oct. 1, 1868** – Randolph-Macon College relocated in Ashland, VA, a result of troubled finances, lack of railroad access to Boydton and better proximity of Ashland to two Conferences – Baltimore & Virginia.
- 1871–1875** – College trustees sold the buildings first to the Rev. Dr. Henry McGonegal of New York beginning a series of educational endeavors.
- 1878** – Dr. Charles Cullis of Boston bought the abandoned RMC property to be used as a Christian school for African Americans—The Boydton Academic and Bible Institute, aka Boydton Institute (BI).
- Sept. 29, 1879** – Boydton Institute dedicated under leadership of the Rev. Charles W. Sharpe and his wife, Helen B.; opened with 13 students.
- 1880** – Rev. Sharpe died; Helen Sharpe continued to teach at Boydton Institute for 31 years to 1911. The headmaster’s home, “Helensha Cottage,” was built and named for her.
- 1905–1910** – Future civil rights leader Vernon Johns attended Boydton Institute.
- 1911** – The Christian and Missionary Alliance of NYC, founded in 1897, acquired and took over operation of the Boydton Institute.
- 1919–1923** – Charles S. Morris, BI’s first African American principal, took steps to modernize the school.
- 1923** – Holiness Church of Christ took over operation of BI until the Depression forced its closure in 1929.
- 1924** – Widow of Edward Dromgoole, grandson of Rev. Dromgoole, divided and sold the plantation home and 1,424 acres.
- 1931** – The Christian Missionary Alliance transferred the BI property to the Boydton Institute Corporation.
- 1935** – BI alumnus Archdeacon E.L. Baskervill delivered baccalaureate sermon at one of its last graduations.
- 1938** – Attempts failed to open the National Bible Training School after the BI Corp. deeded them the school.
- Sept. 24, 1949** – RMC-BI site sold at auction. Many subsequent attempts to reuse the Main Hall school building fail.
- 2008–2011** – TOBCF purchased the Dromgoole House in 2008; and, 12 acres containing ruins of RMC/Boydton Institute Main Building and the headmaster’s cottage of BI in 2011.
- Present** – TOBCF is striving to raise money to preserve and interpret these remnants of religious freedom and early educational institutions.



Charles Morris with his father-in-law, Frederick Douglass