

## **"I'm Not Cracked Like My Sister:" The Bell and Bruton Parish Church**

(Author: Unknown)

(Originally Published: Unknown)

I was born in England and came to America in 1761. I have an older sister who lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania--she's known as the "Liberty Bell." She was also born in England. We both came from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London.

*My name is "Virginia Liberty Bell," and I'm not cracked like my sister in Philadelphia.*

I live at the Bruton Parish Episcopal Church in Williamsburg, Virginia, and take care of all the special occasions there. Why on June 1, 1774, I rang and rang and rang! You know that's when the British closed the port of Boston. They surely were upset about all that tea being dumped into the harbor.

Actually, I was pretty busy for a few years. I rang for all the great occasions...May 15, 1776 when Virginia adopted the Resolution for Independence...when we won our independence...and when the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1783.

I was told a fire destroyed the statehouse at Jamestown in 1699, and the capitol of Virginia was moved to Middle Plantation and renamed Williamsburg. The small wooden church at Middle Plantation was replaced with a larger brick one in 1683. They named it Bruton Parish Church and Reverend Rowland Jones was its first rector. His great grand-daughter, Martha Dandridge, married George Washington,

A larger Bruton Parish Church was built in 1715, and that's where I live. Things were surely different back then. Men and Women sat on opposite sides of the church, and the parish was really small--it only had 110 families. There is an upstairs gallery in the church where students from William and Mary College sat ... carved their initials on the pews, and debated religion and the need for self government. Although I wasn't there at the time, I understand Thomas Jefferson was one of them ... expressing his views on *all* subjects.

William and Mary College was new then, too. It was chartered in 1693 and was the second college in the Colonies. In fact, during much of the eighteenth century, the President of the College of William and Mary also served as rector of my church.

My church soon became the center of activities for Williamsburg and surrounding areas. When the legislature was in session, it was filled with members of the House of Burgesses. George Washington, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and George Mason all worshiped here.

My belfry is so high, I can't hear everything, but I know the services were often used for political discussions and debates. Since there wasn't separation of church and state then, plans for independence, propaganda and allegiance to the King of Britain were all discussed inside my church.

We have many priceless relics of yesteryear here at Bruton Parish. The baptismal font that George Washington stood before fourteen times as a godfather is believed to be original to Jamestown, as is a communion service given to Governor Botetourt by King George III. In 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt gave a bronze lectern commemorating the 300th anniversary of the first English Church built at Jamestown.

Throughout colonial times, people gather here to discuss troubling issues and seek comfort and assurances from one another. Men who first saw young America as a free republic gathered here to exchange ideas and preach their convictions.

During the Civil War both Confederate and Union soldiers wounded in battle sat in the churchyard visiting while their more seriously injured comrades were treated at the Union hospital inside the church. Fortunately, the church didn't suffer damage during the hostilities.