

# A Not-So-Plain and Simple People 1892-1945

185

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During the last two decades of the nineteenth century a new phenomenon appeared in the churches across the Eastern Shore: the fund-raising social. There is hardly a weekly newspaper of the period that does not invite the people of the Shore to some such function somewhere in the two counties.

In 1893, Freewill, the black Methodist church on Chincoteague Island, planned one such event: "They have engaged a brass band," advertised the county papers, "and will have many match games of baseball, croquet, etc., for the entertainment of those in attendance." In 1896 the southern Methodists of Smith's Chapel in Quinby advertised "an interesting drama entitled 'The Flower of the Family'...perfect stage management, talented dramatists, a thorough entertainment, and a variety of refreshments served at usual prices." The Methodist Protestants of Parksley announced a fair in 1895: "Among the many interesting features will be a donkey party and fish pond. There will be a bicycle race each afternoon beginning at 3 o'clock. A handsome prize will be awarded to the successful contestant."<sup>1</sup> And there were hundreds more: festivals, cakebakes, balloon ascensions, picnics, ice cream socials, even parades. By the end of the century the announcements alone fill entire columns in the county papers.

From Wachapreague in 1885 came another announcement in the papers suggesting that the Shore and its churches were becoming more modern:

*... That fascinating amusement called "Dancing" is now the rage among our country denizens... We hear that even the quaint old Methodists have in some instances become contaminated with the fascination to such an extent that their feet have become unruly, and ceased to listen to that discipline by which they promised to be governed. Our good old Brother [J. W. A.] Elliott gave our Methodist brethren some sound advice upon the subject a few days ago from the pulpit... We would suggest that a wholesome dose of the Methodist church discipline be administered, and we doubt not but it would have a salutary effect upon those whose feet have become troubled with lightheadedness.<sup>2</sup>*

In 1899, Thomas E. Martindale, presiding elder of the northern Methodist churches, lamented that class meetings were being neglected:

*I believe that a deliberate return to the former well-nigh universal attendance on this means of grace would result in a great spiritual awakening. Let our people once begin to come together in private meetings before God and break the long silence with contrite confession and downright repentance in the presence of their Church associates, and there will follow a mighty upheaval of the tides which are now so low and sluggish in much of our church life.*

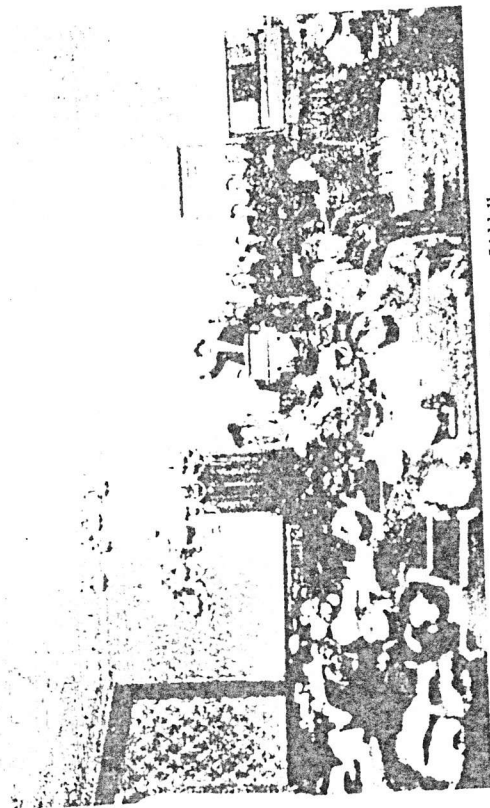
The plain fact was that the Methodists were changing, and their churches were changing with them. Once the automatic center of village life, the churches were now forced to compete with the many other things that an increasingly prosperous and up-to-date constituency could do. As if to signify that fact, the final general camp meeting was held at the Turlington Campgrounds in 1899, replaced for all practical purposes by the very secular Keller Fair, held almost next door to it.<sup>3</sup>

To many persons inside the church, Methodism was simply becoming more worldly. The people who had once placed their colleagues on trial for attending shows were now putting on shows. The old campaigns against cardplaying, dancing, Sabbath-breaking, theatregoing were no longer being waged so vigorously; instead Methodists were fighting for national legislation, for social and not individual change. The church's old concern for "signs of salvation" was fast diminishing. And to a great many Methodists, even national legislation on temperance, however great an achievement that might be, could not hide the simple fact that religion was supposed to change individual people and the way they lived.

Against a background of increasing modernity and worldliness, and in specific reaction to it, a new movement reared its head in Methodist churches across the country and on the Eastern Shore. It was called the Holiness movement. It, too, was connected in an unbroken line of descent to the early days of the Methodist movement, but the connecting link was far more individual than social. And its force was to change the course of Methodism, on the Shore as on the national scene, and to illustrate just how much the denomination had changed over the years.

The origins of the Holiness movement lay in two things decidedly Methodist: the teachings of John Wesley on perfection, and the evolution of his church into a modern denomination in America.

In the early days of Methodism, no teaching was considered more characteristically "Methodist" than the doctrine of "perfection," a venerable teaching of the Church to which Wesley gave a new emphasis. "Going on to perfection," a Wesleyan catchphrase, meant not that persons could become sinless, but that they could enter a state of grace in which the "perfect love of Jesus" became the ruling passion of their lives. There were, taught Wesley, two distinct steps to salvation, both of which were available to all people. The first was "justification," the step taken when one repented of his sins and was converted. Beyond justification lay "sanctification," a "second blessing" in which the Christian could enter yet an-



AN EASTERN  
SHORE WORSHIP  
SERVICE, 1907

Rev. Ervin Thomas Liddell  
preaching in Union Baptist  
Church, Chincoteague; on the  
platform behind him are the  
deacons of the church, one of  
whom is a woman.

other state of grace and experience "perfect love." For Wesley and his followers this "second blessing" was considered altogether possible and desirable within the present human life.<sup>4</sup>

The second blessing idea remained firmly embedded in Methodism as the movement spread across America and to the Eastern Shore. The report from the Pungoteague camp meeting of 1806, for example, states that "there were two hundred and sixty three conversions [justifications], and one hundred and twenty-three reported to have been sanctified [perfected] during the day and night." And for a century or more the idea was contained peacefully in the teaching and practice of the Methodist churches.

By the end of the Civil War it was becoming increasingly obvious that two separate strands of thought and action had evolved from Wesley. The great body of Methodists were content now to see the Christian life after conversion as a process of growth in grace. The old emphases upon personal behavior and lifestyle as a response to the gospel were, among these people, increasingly addressed as "social concerns." For a smaller but increasingly vocal group of Methodists, the Christian life still meant the pursuit of individual holiness, even a second sanctifying experience. The social dimension of religion, for these people, was not nearly so important as the individual dimension; the way to save the world was by the sanctifying of individuals. To the people of this latter point of view, Methodism had simply fallen away from the very thrust that once made it effective, the pursuit of personal

holiness. The "plain and simple people called Methodists," as Wesley had described them, were gathering in larger and more elaborate churches, worshipping in more formal and less spontaneous ways, and fast becoming a cold and sedate middle-class church.<sup>6</sup>

By the 1890's the parting of the ways had been reached. In 1894 the bishops of the southern church denounced the Holiness wing of the church as disruptive and exclusivist. With other such rulings and increasing tensions within the church came the widespread withdrawal of the Holiness people from the ranks of Methodism. Unlike the Methodist Protestants half a century earlier the schismatics in this case did not form one distinct new church. Instead, dozens of small independent new groups sprang up around the country. For decades the new Holiness groups merged, divided, and merged again, until finally a number of Holiness denominations arose. Two of the larger ones, the Pilgrim Holiness Church and the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), found their way to the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

But by the time they arrived, one Eastern Shore church had already been wracked with a Holiness schism, and given birth to its own new sect. That story is one of the most remarkable chapters in the religious history of the Shore, or of Virginia.

It was on Chincoteague Island, in a now-vanished church named Goodwill, that the Holiness movement first appeared on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

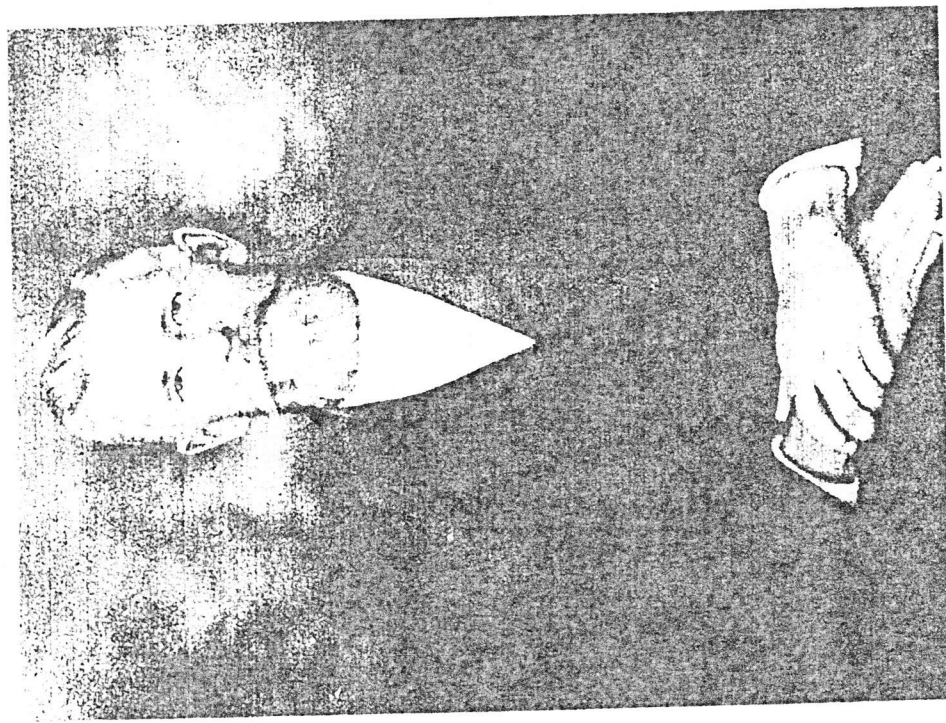
Goodwill Church was founded as early as 1876 by the residents of the northern end of Chincoteague Island, and it was conceived and erected as a community church for persons of all religious persuasions in that neighborhood. The northern end of the island constituted a distinct and growing community at that time; a recent influx of people, many of whom were members of Goodwill, had recently arrived from Maryland and Delaware. The church's official name was Goodwill Independent Church, and the pastors of the three other white churches on the island, Baptist, Methodist Protestant, and Methodist Episcopal, took turns preaching there. Such ecumenicity apparently produced a good deal of theological ferment. The first mention of Goodwill in the local papers is from 1884, when each of the island's pastors is mentioned by name as having preached there recently with the result that "the congregation at Goodwill Independent Church are very much divided... and they are not likely soon to be of one mind."<sup>7</sup>

Goodwill Church did not stay independent for long, for by August 1884, J. M. Reese, the Methodist Episcopal pastor on the island, persuaded the congregation to become Methodists and annexed them to his charge as the Goodwill Class. In 1886 when the downtown congregation abandoned their old building for a newer one, it was given to the "upper" church of Goodwill, who moved it north to their end of the island, outfitted it for use, and moved out of their older building.<sup>8</sup>

The Methodist Episcopal Church had gained a vital new congregation, but with it came the seeds of controversy.

The controversy began with Joseph B. Lynch (1840-1900), a native of Sussex County, Delaware. Lynch had moved his family to Chincoteague by the early 1880s.

1869, was a member first of the downtown Methodist church, then of independent Goodwill, and finally of Goodwill when it became a Methodist church. In 1887, Joseph Lynch became "deeply convinced that he could not be saved without holiness." Though a stalwart and influential member of the church, he longed for the second blessing about which he read in scripture and which the older Methodists still spoke of. And so "he sought and obtained the blessing of sanctification by the power of the Holy Ghost...and immediately commenced preaching and teaching to all whom he had the opportunity."



JOSEPH B. LYNCH



Lynch had plenty of opportunity to make his views on sanctification known, for he was leader of the class meeting at Goodwill. As in so many other places on the Shore, this once small and intimate institution had swollen in size to more than 100 persons at Goodwill, and resembled more a large Sunday school class than the old time of mutual sharing and quest. Lynch testified to his experience of sanctification frequently as class leader, and soon a cluster of other sanctified Methodists grew up around him, chief among them Sarah Collins, a dynamic woman who obtained sanctification in 1889. By 1892 the group had grown in size and enthusiasm so much that "their zeal was more than their minister could endure." When George P. Jones, the young Methodist Episcopal pastor of Chincoteague, proved that he had little patience with them, they petitioned Bishop Edward G. Andrews of the Wilmington Conference to send "a holy man of God to preach to them."

The request was not unlike any number of other requests received by other Methodist bishops across the country from Holiness groups, but it was unbearable to Pastor Jones. Its clear implication was that he was not "a holy man of God," and he rose to this challenge by dismissing Lynch from his position as class leader and forbidding any of the 51 persons who had signed the petition to conduct classes or hold meetings at Goodwill. At the next Quarterly Conference of the congregation, all officers of the church who had signed the petition were deprived of their positions by the rest of the congregation, most of whom were not in the sanctified group. And so, "the sanctified people, feeling that the entire Methodist Episcopal Church was in opposition to them, organized themselves into a body on February 14, 1892," and began to hold classes and services in a nearby "workshop." They chose a completely new name for themselves: Christ's Sanctified Holy Church.

On the next Sunday a committee of ten waited upon Jones to present him with a second petition that asked his formal consent to the withdrawal of members "who had already joined Christ's Sanctified Holy Church." Sarah Collins handed Jones the list of names before the service opened, but Jones ignored it and began the service as usual. After a hymn and a prayer, Joseph Lynch arose to ask publicly that the pastor attend to the request. Jones refused, and the ten sanctified people present left the building. On the following Tuesday the regular Methodists brought the committee of ten before a magistrate on a charge of interrupting public worship, but the charge was dismissed. The nineteen members of Christ's Sanctified Holy Church dated their new organization from that day before the magistrate, February 16, 1892. Heading the list of the names of the new congregation were Joseph Lynch and Sarah Collins.<sup>9</sup>

The new Holiness church took to the field in a big way. By summer they had erected their own church building, and it was the largest one on the island. (It stood next door to Goodwill.) By October the group had spread to Franklin City on the mainland and were holding services there. By the next summer they held a revival on the island, and the bower erected to house it was "the largest and most expensive ever put up on the island," and the large crowds that attended came from as far away as Delaware. Before long the faith had been carried north into Worcester County, Maryland, where services were held in an abandoned Methodist church near Boxiron.<sup>10</sup> The Maryland effort was short-lived, but even farther north in

Sussex County, Delaware, where the sanctified people had many relatives and friends, a second new church was ultimately established.

The Methodists of Goodwill, meanwhile, went their way, glad to be rid of the dissidents. The 1892 report for the Chincoteague congregation reads: "Chincoteague Island has given us a striking illustration of the baneful results of zeal without knowledge, but Brother Jones the pastor has brought victory out of seeming defeat. With the disturbing element out of the church, the sailing is plain for the future."

Thus did the Methodists dismiss, in a casual way, the first appearance of Holiness doctrine on the Shore. Little did they know that this was just the first of a new wave of churches, and that the future into which they sailed was to be far from smooth.

Never before had an Eastern Shore congregation separated itself so completely from the Methodist mainstream as did Christ's Sanctified Holy Church in 1892. The churches formed by schism in the 1830's and 1840's were still called Methodist; even Coe's independent Convention of Accomack was avowedly Methodist. These earlier defections had involved differences in polity or practical affairs. The new Chincoteague dissidents differed at a more fundamental point, that of belief.

Lynch and his new congregation set about drawing up a rule of order, and by 1893 he and Sarah Collins had produced *The Doctrines and Disciplines of Christ's Sanctified Holy Church*. This remarkable little book (referred to from the beginning as the "Dis-CIP-line") is one of the few theological works ever published on the Shore. It is still republished and updated quadrennially as the definitive statement of rule and order for the church.

The doctrines in it, often stated in question-and-answer form, illustrate how the Holiness people drew their inspiration from Wesley, but in an entirely different manner from the main body of Methodism:

*Are you a sanctified holy person?*

*I am.*

*Are you a witness that [sanctification] is not a growth in grace, but received instantaneous after justification?*

*I am.*

*Were you ever saved before you were sanctified?*

*No.*

In some ways the new church reflected its Methodist origins, for there were created annual conferences, deacons and deaconesses, a Board of Church Extension, and even the term "Discipline." In some ways the new sect reflected social attitudes of the Methodists at that time, as when the *Discipline* directed that "There shall be



sell intoxicating liquors, nor uses or sells tobacco, but only to join on probation." But in other ways the new sect saw itself as the Church purified and made holy, as Methodism in its view was not. The *Discipline* is critical of salaried and learned ministers, and states uncategorically what must have seemed to be a non-issue to most Methodist churchgoers on the Shore at that time: "Christ's Sanctified Holy Church shall not hold any festival, nor anything that will not promote and honor God."<sup>11</sup>

Chincoteague's new sanctified church might well have lived in peaceful co-existence with the rest of the island, once the initial hard feeling of its formation was over, had not new doctrines arisen within its ranks, further extensions of the Holiness understanding and experience of Christian life that drove even further the wedge between the sanctified people and rest of the community. At first the new church went about its way without interference from the islanders. Its ministers, Joseph Lynch, James Workman, and Sarah Collins, the first female minister on record on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, married and buried and preached as did the other ministers of the island. Membership increased rapidly, from nineteen in 1892 to as many as 120 in 1894, swelled perhaps by converts among family connections still moving to the island from Delaware and Maryland.<sup>12</sup>

Soon, however, the island community learned of two of the church's teachings that brought peaceful coexistence to an end. The first was a teaching concerning marriage between sanctified and unsanctified persons. The *Discipline* forbade such mixed marriages:

*Any minister of Christ's Sanctified Holy Church joining unequal persons together, holy and unholy, white and black, the minister shall be expelled, also the matrimony shall be void.*<sup>13</sup>

Yet the experience of sanctification had split many a marriage and family, as husband or wife or child obtained it alone of the household. There was only one thing to do: those marriages contracted before the experience of sanctification must be dissolved, if either partner were unsanctified. Married sanctified persons must separate from unsanctified spouses and come out from among even unsanctified children, where practical.

The islanders were horrified by this development, which seemed to them to be "indecencies totally at variance with the moral law!" The county papers carried indignant reports of the strange goings-on of this new sect: "A Mrs. [Charlotte] Gray has deserted her husband and four little children. She left the children alone while asleep one night last week while her husband, who was a surfman at Green Run Life Saving Station, was from home, and who has since been compelled to resign his position to take care of them." Another person singled out for such reprehensible actions was John W. Johns, one of the original nineteen founders, a "worthy and thrifty man...until he joined the [sanctified] band." Johns, it seems, had also left unsanctified wife and children for the sake of his religious convictions.<sup>14</sup>

As if this were not enough, the island soon got wind of a second practice among the sanctified band, something they called "two-plus-two." At heart it was a simple

and innocent idea: basing their belief on the Biblical observation that Jesus always sent his disciples out two by two, not singly, the sanctified people insisted that scripture was to be studied and proclaimed by pairs of believers. This belief came about in part because of the sect's reaction to the "unholy" ministers who held sway in Methodism. The *Discipline* explained:

*Are the professing ministers out today according to God's Word? No. The Scriptures teach us all Christ's disciples were sent out two and two and those that are out single today preaching...are not sent by God.*<sup>15</sup>

The islanders were more than ready to believe that what happened when the sanctified people gathered two-by-two was more scandalous than the study of scripture. Gradually a few eagle eyes announced what so many were more than willing to believe: some of the sanctified people, Joseph B. Lynch among them, had done more than repudiate their old marriages to unsanctified spouses: they had also taken new husbands and wives from among the band of the faithful.

Had the Eastern Shore not been so isolated, reaction to this development might not have been so heated. Chincoteague's sanctified people were hardly unique among Holiness sects of the time in repudiating old marriages and contracting new ones, with or without benefit of law. As it was, few if any saw any saving grace in the deep religious conviction of the sanctified people, and soon the county papers were alive with reports of "orgies" and "free love" on Chincoteague Island.<sup>16</sup> Not only the island but also the entire county was soon buzzing with moral indignation, made all the worse no doubt by the standards that decreed that Christian men and women of that day did not even speak of such possibilities.

By the fall of 1894 the sanctified congregation was held in hostile contempt by most of the rest of the island. Even apart from their doctrines were their meetings, which in good Holiness fashion were much noisier than most Methodist and Baptist services of that day. "Wild frantics," the islanders called them, and they were increasingly convinced that they had to go.

On September 1, 1894, the island's antipathy erupted into violence.

It was Saturday night on the island, and eleven young men of the village, apparently out for fun, determined to exact some punishment from the sanctified people for their "immoralities." They mounted their horses and rode noisily up Main Street towards the church looking for James Workman, "to get a move on him." Workman was nowhere to be found, so the gang turned around to go home when one of them produced a gun. This time their ride down the street was punctuated by whooping and shouting and shots fired into the air.

One of the shots went aside into the Main Street residence of Aaron T. Bowden. Bowden was asleep in his second-floor bedroom when a bullet went through the side of the house and struck him. He died a few hours later.

The incident sent shock waves across the island community. The eleven young men were arrested and jailed, but the island rose to their defense. "The young men," read the county paper, "made the mistake...[of] taking the law in their own

hands, but there is no doubt that so great is the indignation of people on the Island generally against [Workman] and others of the Sanctified Band that they reflected by their action the sentiment of the best people of the Island..." The community was all but unanimous in their opinion that "the young men implicated in the affair are among the best of the Island," and that, as for the Sanctified people, "the wonder is that the lewd and lascivious habits of the Sanctified crowd practiced by them under the guise of religion has not lead to bloodshed before."<sup>17</sup>

Aaron T. Bowden, the victim, was said to have been a completely innocent bystander, in no way connected with either group. Yet Bowden was one of the original nineteen founders of Christ's Sanctified Holy Church, and had left it in August 1894, only shortly before his death. Though his death was termed accidental, at least one of the men charged with it had been fined previously for assaulting Joseph Lynch, and was known for his strong dislike of the Sanctified people.<sup>18</sup>

Convinced that they knew who the real villains were, and that the wrong people were in jail, a group of islanders brought charges against four the Sanctified band within the week. Joseph Lynch, Sarah Collins, John Collins, and William Chandler were arraigned before a justice of the peace and charged with four misdemeanors:

- (1)...that they did...conspire with one another to commit acts of indecency
- (2) That they did cause Mary E. Burton to leave her husband Woolsey Burton
- (3) That the said persons did conspire together and promulgate "free love," teaching married women to disregard their marriage vows
- (4) That said persons did conspire to appoint a male and female member as fellow-watchers, to sit up at night and watch.<sup>19</sup>

When the four refused to put up bail, they were jailed in Accomac.

On the island the air was hot and heavy for action against the Sanctified people. While Lynch and his comrades sat in the county jail, a petition circulated to get the court to revoke the license of Sanctified preachers to marry, and locals vowed that "if the grand jury and courts do nothing, the aid of the Governor will be invoked — and if neither act, then means will be found in some way perhaps to rid us of them." "This fool craze has got to stop, say our citizens, by peaceable means if possible — by forcible means if necessary."<sup>20</sup>

In October 1894, the four Sanctified leaders were tried before a crowded courtroom. John Collins was acquitted. The other three were found guilty and given different sentences: Joseph Lynch was fined \$250 and given eight months in jail; William Chandler was fined \$150 and given six months; and Sarah Collins, \$100 and four months. All put up bail and were released pending an appeal.<sup>21</sup>

It was obvious to Lynch and his people that the time for decision had come, and the community breathed a sign of relief when the word spread that the Sanctified people were preparing to leave the island altogether. Joseph Lynch left first, heading

for Baltimore to find a place where his people could live in peace. In his absence, Sarah Collins and the others prepared themselves for departure, and the trustees announced that the church was to be put up for sale. "The Sanctified band has about disbanded," reported the newspapers. "Private meetings continue to be held occasionally, but will not continue to be held long, it is believed."<sup>22</sup>

By the end of 1894 there had begun one of the strangest chapters in the history of the Eastern Shore: a religious migration, not unlike that of the Mormons under Brigham Young fifty years before. Thirteen members of Christ's Sanctified Holy Church sailed by schooner from Chincoteague Island, rounded Cape Charles into Chesapeake Bay, and joined up with their leader near Baltimore. The rest of the band stood ready and waiting to leave at a moment's notice, as soon as word reached the island that a new home had been found. Lynch led the vanguard southward to Montross, Virginia, on the Northern Neck, where they were very obviously made to understand that they were not welcome. Southward down the Bay sailed the community, and within a few weeks they sent word to their brethren in Chincoteague that a refuge had been found in northeastern North Carolina, near Elizabeth City.

In May 1895 the bulk of the congregation said goodbye to the island. "The sanctified band sold at public auction on last Saturday all their real estate and personal property, and will leave for North Carolina as soon as possible. They expect to take all with them that cannot afford to pay their way by sail boats — and among them will be husbands deserting their wives and wives deserting their husbands." In all, there were three waves in which the Sanctified people left Chincoteague Island. The first was over by the summer of 1895, when most of them left to settle in North Carolina. The remnant left on the island were led by Parker Bowden, under whom the church there was virtually dormant.<sup>23</sup>

The second wave occurred the following summer, when "seventeen more of the sanctified band, and the last of them, left here to join the band in North Carolina last week. They sold their oyster boats, houses, etc., at a sacrifice." In the fall of that year the church building, erected only four years before for \$2000, was auctioned off for \$100.

In December 1896, after the second migration, some of the band returned to Chincoteague, having found that North Carolinians were no less hostile to them than Chincoteague Islanders. By early 1897 there were enough on the island to resume worship services, the islanders keeping a close watch. Meanwhile from across the Bay came news that Lynch, quitting North Carolina, had once again taken his "floating ark" into Chesapeake Bay. Again an attempt was made to settle on Northern Neck, and again the attempt was repulsed.<sup>24</sup>

The third and final movement from the island began on May 15, 1897, and lasted throughout the summer. A party of 18 left in May, after selling all their property, and sailed away in a schooner. "Their departure is due to the fact that they would not be permitted by our citizens to indulge in their 'frantic meetings' here any longer," wrote the Chincoteague correspondent to the county paper.<sup>25</sup> By August when another small band left, the old church building had been purchased again, this time by none other than the congregation of Goodwill Methodist Episco-

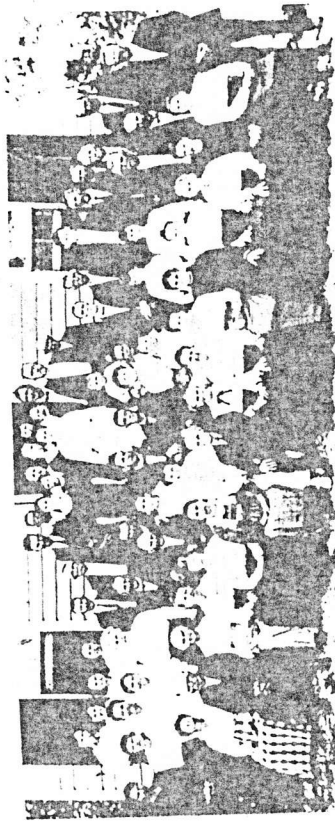


pal Church, who were busy painting it and putting in new pews for their own use. Methodist Episcopal records of that year read: "Perhaps this will rid the island of that old heresy."

For the six years following 1897, when the Methodists occupied the building in which the Sanctified people had worshiped, there is, for all practical purposes, no history of Christ's Sanctified Holy Church on either Chincoteague Island or the Virginia Eastern Shore. Apparently a few Sanctified persons remained on the island but there was no church and apparently no organization or worship or gathering. The real story of the sect during this period is found off the Shore, as the band moved from place to place looking for a place to settle. Joseph Lynch died in 1900, and the group moved on. Gradually parts of the Sanctified band found homes in various places until the sect was dispersed across the South, from Norfolk to Oklahoma. In 1939 a headquarters was established in Perry, Georgia, when a camp meeting ground and a cemetery were purchased. By then Christ's Sanctified Holy Church was one of many similar, independent Holiness sects scattered across the country, and Eastern Shore names could be found in places far distant from the Shore.

It was in 1903 that the Chincoteague remnant resurfaced, reorganized, and reestablished the faith on the island. A. J. Dolbow of Wilmington and T. F. Tabler of Philadelphia began a revival<sup>26</sup> that resulted in the establishment of a permanent Sanctified congregation and the erection of a new church building not far from the old site. Here the congregation began again the same old-fashioned, noisy services that had previously been dubbed "wild frantics," but this time they encountered no opposition from the community. The Sanctified persons whose marital practices had offended the community were now gone, and the new congregation was blameless with regards to what had been the chief bone of contention a decade earlier. Freed from what the community considered the one unforgivable taint, the new Chincoteague congregation of Christ's Sanctified Holy Church grew unmolested. With the passing of the years, the individual Sanctified members moved from ostracized persons to acceptable stalwart citizens to prosperous and respected people. By 1920 there were some sixty Sanctified persons in the congregation, and social ostracism was so much a thing of the past that one of the persons who conducted services in the church that year was Ervin Thomas Liddell, a Baptist evangelist who only a few years before had been pastor of Union Baptist Church in Chincoteague. By then both church and community had, by a kind of unspoken consensus, drawn a veil of silence over their former differences, a veil which in large part remains to this day.

There are several interesting footnotes to the story of Christ's Sanctified Holy Church. One of them involves the absence of Mormons on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. In September 1894, the month in which Lynch and his comrades were jailed, two Mormon elders named Taylor and Nibley entered Accomack County from the south and worked their way up the peninsula "distributing tracts upon their faith among the people." By late September they were in Accomac, by November in Parksley. It was their misfortune to arrive in Chincoteague in early December, just as the Sanctified people were preparing to quit the island. It had been only four years previous to their arrival, in 1890, that the Mormon Church,



CHRIST'S  
SANCTIFIED  
HOLY CHURCH

The congregation sat for this picture in front of their church in 1920, dressed in the plain and simple clothes that were characteristic of them. Ninth from the left in the second row (holding a Bible) is the Reverend Ervin Thomas Liddell, former pastor at Union Baptist Church who later preached at this church

after many delays and under great pressure from the United States government, had revised its laws and ended its long-standing practice of plural marriage. Chincoteague, of course, wanted nothing to do with them and dismissed them with obvious contempt. "Our people, still sore over the two-by-two arrangements, are not prepared to listen with much patience to the teachers of strange doctrines," wrote the local correspondence to the county newspaper.<sup>27</sup> Taylor and Nibley apparently passed quickly on to Maryland, and Mormonism never gained a foothold on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

A second event worthy of footnoting took place in Louisiana. It was at the same time that Sanctified services were resuming on Chincoteague Island that the black people of Calcasieu County received a strange set of visitors. Three "saints" from Virginia came into their midst preaching a new doctrine called "Holiness," which the black people received with enthusiasm. "Many of them believed their doctrines and began reading their Bibles and praying, and sought and obtained the blessings of sanctification."<sup>28</sup> The first of the new converts was C. E. Rigmiden, a black woman who began preaching in her own right.

On April 16, 1904, the "white saints" from Virginia organized some of the former members of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church of West Lake, Louisiana, into a new church named Christ's Sanctified Holy Church Colored. One of the founding "saints" was Mrs. Charlotte Gray, formerly of Chincoteague Island, who ten years earlier had left husband and children to find a new home with her spiritual family.<sup>29</sup>

In time Christ's Sanctified Holy Church Colored was set apart from the parent church as an independent church. Today it boasts some 600 members in thirty separate



congregations. The white members of Christ's Sanctified Holy Church now number about a thousand in 21 communities from Delaware to Louisiana. Both of them stand as a monument to the life and experience of Joseph B. Lynch, the first person on the Eastern Shore of Virginia to recover something of what John Wesley had taught about "going on to perfection."

No sooner had Chincoteague Island weathered this turmoil than a Holiness storm began to brew for the entire Eastern Shore of Virginia.

It was in Wachapreague that the Eastern Shore's second Holiness congregation appeared, founded by Cole Hope (1873-1954), a preacher of the denomination known then as the International Apostolic Holiness Union and Churches. Hope, a Marylander who was converted and later sanctified in the woods of his father's farm, was living in Wachapreague when he invited three Holiness preachers, Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Adams and Miss Etta Gibson (later Mrs. Hoffman), to conduct a tent meeting in the village.

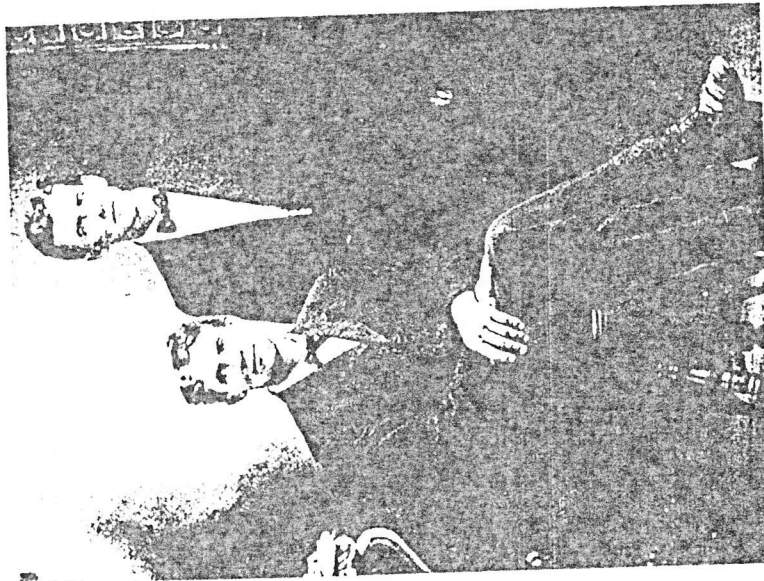
Like Chincoteague a decade before, Wachapreague did not at first look kindly on this noisy and aggressive new religion, and it was not long before a delegation of townspeople appeared at Hope's door with orders for the three visiting evangelists to leave town. The Holiness people calmly ignored the order. Etta Gibson, an accomplished singer and harpist, even stood on the front porch of the Hope residence and sang, throughout the tense incident, "The Judgment Day Is Coming."

Local disfavor was not enough to dampen Holiness spirits, and the Wachapreague tentmeeting was such a success that by 1907 a small congregation had been formed and a church erected on Lee Street. Chief pillars of this congregation were Cole Hope, who later moved on to establish another church in Shelton, Maryland, and Levin Badger (1871-1936), who actually owned the church building. Once the church was established, townsfolk tended to leave the Holiness people alone. Mrs. Badger, however, once had to dodge the eggs thrown at her one night as she walked home from the worship services. And some of the people who lived next door to the new church were known to insist for years that Holiness worship services were so loud because the devil himself was present.

In 1909 Annie Bradford Pearson, a Methodist of Johnson's Church, first heard Holiness preaching from T. Lewis Adams and Etta Gibson at the Wachapreague church, and she became the founder of the Shore's third Holiness church. Returning to her home in Birdsnest, she began a prayer meeting group that ultimately evolved into the present Community Church of God, which is affiliated with the Church of God of Anderson, Indiana.

All of this was mere prelude to the advent of the man who was to be for the next thirty years the foremost advocate of Holiness doctrine on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, the Reverend William Vickers.

William Vickers (1882-1945) was a minister in the same church as Cole Hope, a church that in 1922 changed its name to the Pilgrim Holiness Church.<sup>29</sup> Born on Taylor's Island, Maryland, Vickers was in his early life a waterman and a Metho-



COLE HOPE (standing)  
LEVIN BADGER  
(seated)

dist until he was turned around by Holiness preaching. After obtaining the experience of Holiness for himself, he became an active minister and evangelist. "He carried a burden for souls," they said of him, and his aggressive preaching was to make him simultaneously the most revered and the most reviled preacher on the Shore.

It was as a young man — stout, almost corpulent, and a prodigious eater — that Vickers began his ministry on the Shore. In the summer of 1916 he arrived in Grotons in upper Accomack County, pitched a large tent, and announced a series of services. For the next four weeks the community resounded to his spirited preaching, once a day and once a night and all day on Sundays. When he moved on he left behind him a small group that met for prayer meetings in private homes. He returned to Grotons in 1917, pitched his tent in a different spot, and by the end of the year a new congregation had been organized and had erected a church building on the site. After Grotons, Vickers repeated his performance in Chincoteague,



WILLIAM VICKERS

and then in Saxis, where a church stood by 1918. In Chincoteague large crowds flocked to the Holiness Tabernacle which he constructed, but he was unable there to establish a lasting congregation.

In each of these communities Vickers conducted a hard-sell, well-advertised campaign that generated either enthusiasm or hostility. His message was an outright criticism of the worldliness of the churches and of Christianity gone bad. Had not the great camp meeting become a worldly county fair? Were not Baptists and Methodists alike more concerned about fine clothes and fine buildings with stained glass windows than about the pursuit of the holy life? Should not Christians turn from their worldly pursuits and seek the holy life? Vickers made no bones about it: he called to repentance sinners who were within the churches, as well as the unsaved outside the churches.

Vickers' message and his medium created a sensation in upper Accomack, and as the devout and the merely curious filled his tent to overflowing the established churches, the Methodists in particular, began to feel the heat. The Methodists were now, for the first time in their life on the Shore, in the defensive role, and many a pastor and congregation must have breathed a sigh of relief to be still intact when Vickers pulled up his stakes, literally, and moved on to another town.

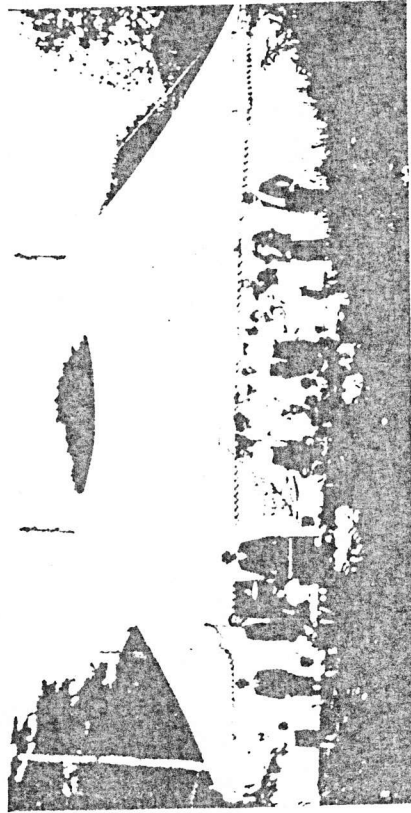
In 1920 Vickers ventured into Bloxom. When the locals there burned his tent, he erected a more substantial tabernacle and announced not a tent meeting but a camp meeting. It was a fortunate move. Not since the last Turlington Campmeeting

in 1899 had the whites of the Shore had a general and not just a local encampment, and the Bloxom Campmeeting was a huge success. A small Bloxom congregation was on the record books by 1925 because of it. In 1929 Vickers with the help of two other evangelists, Mayme Parker and Winifred Mears, conducted an even more successful camp meeting in Bloxom. Over \$7000 was received in offerings, and with it the denomination was able to purchase the campground and put its Accomack work on a sound footing. By the end of the year a new parsonage stood on the edge of the campground, and a full-time pastor, F. C. Walls, was firmly established there. "His address is Bloxom," reads the report of that year, "but Accomack County is his parish. His preaching places are so many, his schedules so complicated, that his wife is often at sea to know where he goes next."

In the early 1920's Vickers was elected to the district superintendency and he set out to do all across the Shore what he did best of all: pioneer the faith in new regions. Heading south, he took his tent to town after town in a concerted effort to preach Holiness to the entire Eastern Shore of Virginia. He arrived in Wachapreague to find Cole Hope's earlier church there "practically gone down" after Hope had moved to Maryland. It was reorganized and set up under a new pastor, Merrick Lowry. Vickers himself bypassed Wachapreague and concentrated his efforts on nearby Quinby, where by 1925 he had set up his tent, held his spectacular meetings, and left behind him a small band of Holiness people meeting in private homes. Soon there were tent meetings in Oakland Park, just south of Exmore, with the same result. The tent made its appearance in Chesconnessex, in Mearsville, and in Oyster. By 1933 the tent had been raised in Cape Charles and a congregation formed there. Meanwhile Levin Badger had held similar tent meetings in Poulson, west of Hallwood, and near Greta, west of Atlantic. Though not every community had hosted a Holiness tent, Holiness doctrine was at last becoming something to be reckoned with throughout the two counties.

Vickers did not march down the Shore; he became a part of the scenery. Each year the tent would appear again, the curious and the faithful would flock to it, the inevitable criticisms of the worldliness of the churches would echo across the community, the Methodists and the Baptists would steel themselves for the duration, and then in time the tent would move on again. His appearance upon the horizon was especially dreaded by the Methodists. In 1931 the pastor at Smith's Chapel in Quinby reported to his superiors that few menfolk were attending Methodist services there because they were drawn away to Holiness meetings.<sup>30</sup> In Riverview and Leatherbury, the northern Methodist churches of Chesconnessex, the people were "torn apart" after Vickers and his tent appeared there. The Methodist cause was not aided when T. S. Dixon (1881-1953), pastor of Ayres Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church, surrendered his Methodist credentials and joined the Holiness people shortly after the first Bloxom camp meeting. Dixon was ordained in the Pilgrim Holiness Church in 1927 and assigned to Mardela Springs, Maryland, where he founded and built a new church. He preached a great many times on the Virginia Shore after that date, but in Holiness, not Methodist, churches.

Vickers, meanwhile, was ever-present and ever-vigorous. In a typical year (1926) he preached 390 sermons, more than one a day, a practice that had not been



Vickers is standing third from the left, hat in hand

## WILLIAM VICKERS AND HIS HOLINESS TENT

common among the Methodists for almost a hundred years. He established seven-teen new congregations in Maryland and Virginia and "endured many types of opposition to open work in new fields and to establish churches." Although there is no record that it happened in Virginia, it is known that he was on at least one occasion pelted with eggs by an angry crowd.

Two possible courses of action lay open to the Methodists: either fight the Holiness movement on its own ground, or ignore it and go a different way. There was some attempt made to take the former path, to recover the Methodist claim to some of the Holiness message. Instead of their usual annual revival, the Methodists of Belle Haven imported a special guest evangelist in the summer of 1922 and widely advertised the Reverend Victor Lightbourne and his "Big Gospel Tent." And the southern Methodists resurrected the old Turlington Campmeeting in 1923 in hopes of combating the growing Holiness defection. The camp was a great success, but despite continued talk about keeping it open it was not repeated.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, most Methodists were finally content to ignore Vickers and to separate themselves from everything he represented. The result was that while Vickers railed against the growing worldliness of the churches, Eastern Shore Christians, Methodists chief among them, rushed headlong into what was perhaps their most prosperous, worldly, and acculturated period.

The prosperous period that began with the coming of the railroad, the prosperous period that ushered in the comfort and prosperity against which the Holiness people reacted, continued unabated from the 1880's into the 1920's. The first quarter of the twentieth century was indeed a "golden age" for the Eastern Shore. Population increased and villages grew. Farms prospered and bountiful crops brought a high degree of comfort, even wealth to a great many. Communication and

transportation were modernized, and the Shore became less and less isolated, and more and more in touch with and concerned about the world beyond its shores.

With the 1920's came the full-scale advent of the automobile, that invention which would in the next decades end the railroad's domination of Shore life. Automobiles were still a rarity in 1910, but by 1920 they were plentiful in the two counties, and such modern amenities as paved roads, parking spaces, gas stations, and traffic accidents were becoming commonplace. The state began the paving of Route 13, the Shore's main artery, in 1923, starting at opposite ends in Cape Charles and New Church and working towards the center. Not until 1931 was the "stone ribbon" complete, but by then even the outlying communities off the main track were hard at work to get smooth, paved roads.<sup>32</sup>

The twenties themselves were a period of unprecedented progress and change. In 1922, Chincoteague, the largest town, was connected to the mainland by a causeway. In 1927 electricity, previously available only in a few of the larger towns, was made available throughout the peninsula. In 1928 the railroad put into service the "Virginia Lee," a handsome steamer that plied the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay between Cape Charles and Norfolk. It could ferry eighty automobiles, and it made Route 13 a major north-south road for East Coast traffic. Northampton-Accomack Memorial Hospital was opened in Nassawadox in 1928, and two years later a second ferry line was in competition with the railroad at Cape Charles.<sup>33</sup> The churches, like the rest of life on the Shore, prospered. Membership increased, and many a congregation entered into the brightest period of its history.

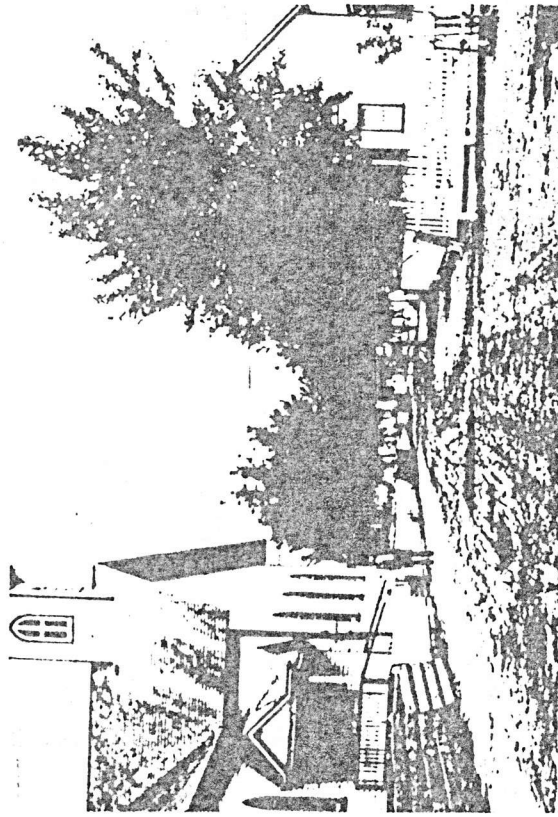
One measure of the prosperity of the churches is their buildings, and church buildings in the first part of the twentieth century became increasingly elegant and expensive on the Shore. Between the erection of St. James' Episcopal Church in Drummondtown in 1838 and the end of the century, there were only two brick church buildings erected on the entire Shore, both in Cape Charles: Centenary Methodist and St. Charles Catholic. Brick has always been an expensive commodity on the Shore, but by the second decade of the twentieth century local congregations began to build brick buildings as never before. The first was Grace Methodist Protestant Church in Parksley, which replaced its burned frame building with a \$17,000 brick structure in 1911. Onley Methodist, Lower Northampton Baptist, and Drummondtown Baptist erected brick churches in 1913. There followed a whole series of new, expensive, and often ornate brick buildings at the rate of almost one a year, among them: Zion Baptist (1917), Drummondtown Methodist (1918), Atlantic Baptist (1919), Atlantic Methodist (1922), Modest Town Baptist (1921), Allen Memorial A.M.E. (1924), and Woodbury Methodist (1926). In 1920 both the Baptists and the Methodists began new buildings in Cheriton, vying with each other in grandeur from opposite corners of the street. If cost is the deciding factor, the Baptists won; they spent \$65,000 to the mere \$45,000 spent by the Methodist. The stone for the new Gothic-style building erected by Christ Methodist Episcopal Church in Chincoteague had to be shipped from the North by railroad to Franklin City, then by barge seven miles across Chincoteague Bay to the island, since the new highway causeway was not yet complete. So large and grand was this building that in 1921 the Wilmington Conference voted to convene there in



## \*BETHEL METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH

[MP 1853-1930]

Chincoteague



(photo c. 1920)

This was the second church on Chincoteague Island, after Union Baptist, and the first of several Methodist churches. The earliest known preacher on the island is said to have been Avra Melvin of the Methodist Protestant Church, who preached to both Baptists and Methodists in a schoolhouse. This ecumenical endeavor ended in 1841 when Union Baptist was organized. Twelve years later in 1853 Evaline Sharpley sold the lot on Church Street on which the Methodist Protestants erected their building shortly thereafter.

During its early years this church struggled through some very lean times. At first attached to the Wattsville Church, it did not become a circuit in its own right until 1876, when I. T. Atkins was the pastor. Even having a pastor to itself did not ease the financial burden. In 1880 the church reported that it had lost five of its most influential and best-paying members, and petitioned to be attached to the Greenbackville church, which the Conference would not do. The next year the Conference reprimanded the congregation for selling the parsonage to pay the pastor's salary, and in 1885 the church lost perhaps as many as seventy members who transferred to the newer Methodist Episcopal church in town.

Toward the end of the century the congregation prospered a bit more, although it had already fallen behind Christ M.E. in size. In 1887 the original building was replaced by the present one; there were 83 members when it was dedicated in 1888. In 1899 the congregation purchased land for a parsonage, and in the following year the church was enlarged by the addition of a wing.

In the early years of the twentieth century the church once again declined, and in 1930 the denomination declared it "extinct." The property, which ultimately fell to the old rival Christ Methodist, was sold in 1943 to Christ's Sanctified Holy Church, which used it for a number of years for worship and meetings. When that church, too, declined in numbers, the building again sat vacant until in 1965 it was sold to the Roman Catholic Church. Since that time it has been St. Andrew's, founded from the Holy Name of Jesus Church in Pocomoke City.

When originally erected in 1887 the building had a steeple, which was removed at an early date.

[Sources: 105, 110, 114, 123, 143, 176]

Location: see CHINCOTEAGUE

