

## Christ Church: Fincastle



THE QUIANT AND HISTORIC TOWN of Fincastle nestles in the Blue Ridge Mountains in Botetourt County. This county seat was formerly the gateway to all the territory stretching west to the Mississippi. Here lived pioneers who, as framers and signers of the famous Fincastle Declaration (which antedated the Declaration of Independence), strongly influenced the cause of national liberty.

On a hilltop overlooking the village is Christ Church. Built about 1770, it was first the property of the Church of England. In 1785, after the Revolution, with the dissolution of the Church of England in the United States, Christ Church was closed. During the postwar period many large families of Presbyterians who had come from Scotland, via Ireland and Pennsylvania, settled in the vicinity. In 1795 the church property was transferred, by act of the legislature, to the Presbyterians. Repairs and alterations were made to the structure in 1813 and again in 1849, when the church was enlarged. At that time the entrance was moved from the east to the south facade, and a Doric-columned recessed porch and a tall steeple were added.

In the years before 1940 the active congregation shrank to two or three families and there was no regular pastor. The property became neglected through lack of sufficient funds for its upkeep. Locust trees sprang up in the churchyard, which was overgrown with tall grass and weeds.

Realizing the seriousness of the situation, the Roanoke Valley Garden Club proposed the restoration of the churchyard to The Garden Club of Virginia in 1940. The project was favorably received, and restoration followed in 1942 and 1943.

The work to be done was evident on the ground; so no plan was drawn. First, thirty or more truckloads of rubbish had to be removed before the tall grass and locust trees could be cut. The constructive work began with the building of a wall along the west side of the graveyard and the repairing and resetting of the tombstones. Existing iron fence and gates were also repaired.

Immediately in front of the church a brick terrace was built and a brick walk that had been discovered in the cleanup was restored between the entrance to the churchyard and the church. This brick paving provides a practical and pleasant architectural feature. An oil-burning lamp—one of the original town lamps—was repaired, converted to electricity, and mounted at the gateway.

After these structural repairs had been completed only simple planting was needed.



One of the original street lamps was restored and installed at the entrance of the church (Deyerle Studios)

Enclosing fence and wall, restored (Deyerle Studios)



Climbing euonymus was planted on the west wall and on either side of the entrance gate. Virgin's bower was trained over the iron fence of the south wall. Weeping willows, magnolias, holly trees, and crape myrtles were scattered along the iron fence. In the foreground of the west facade boxwood, cedars, and Adam's needle were planted.

The congregation added an education wing at the rear of the property in 1958. To relate this to the historic setting, The Garden Club planted white pine, a catalpa, and boxwood.

Today the Fincastle Presbyterian Church has a congregation numbering more than a hundred. It stands as a living monument to the past and to the men and women whose valiant spirits made the settlement of the West possible.