

Old Chapel will celebrate 220 years

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By Stephanie M. Mangino

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BOYCE- Old Chapel will celebrate its 220th anniversary with an 11 a.m. Sunday service that will include a blessing of the gravesites of the man who provided the land on which the church and its cemetery were built, and his second wife.

The church replaced a log-clapboard chapel built in the mid-1750s and served for decades as the primary place of worship for Episcopalians in what would become Clarke County.

It is the oldest Episcopal church in continuous use west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, according to the website of its parish, Cunningham Chapel Parish.

By the 1840s, the parish outgrew the chapel and built Christ Church in Millwood. The chapel and its cemetery are maintained by the Trustees of Burwell Cemetery Inc.

But for many, Old Chapel remains a spiritual home. Twice a year, services are held there - in September and on Easter, with a sunrise service.

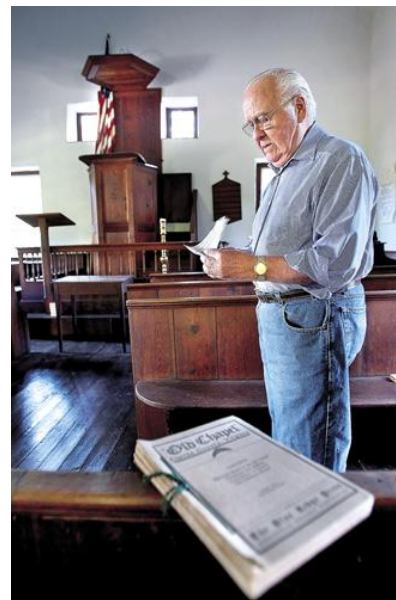
Those who gather sit on shallow dark wood pews and drink in the chapel's long history.

Sunday's service, said Maisie Maguire, senior warden of the vestry of Cunningham Chapel Parish, will use the old Book of Common Prayer in the stone church, which remains as it was in the past - uncooled and unheated.

The service is basic, but for Maguire of Berryville, who grew up in Cunningham



Robert Kern is a member of the Cunningham Chapel Parish, stands outside of the Old Chapel in Clarke County. Old Chapel will celebrate its 220th anniversary Sunday with a special service. (Photo by Ginger Perry/The Winchester Star)



Robert Kern checks records in Old Chapel in Boyce in Clarke County. The book in the foreground includes a history of the chapel. (Photo by Ginger Perry/The Winchester Star)

Chapel Parish and whose parents are buried in the cemetery at Old Chapel, the experience is homey. "It's a very personal time, that service," she said.

Many of those buried in the cemetery are descended from Col. Nathaniel Burwell of Carter Hall, who provided the land for the chapel and cemetery, his children and their spouses, and his close friends and their families.

The northern and southern portions of the limestone wall he had erected around the burial grounds remain.

As she looked around the cemetery, Charlotte Kern of Clarke County, chairman emeritus of the Trustees of Burwell Cemetery, noted that with Old Chapel, "everybody is related to everybody."

Inside the church, she pointed to a memorial plaque on the wall and revealed that the subject was her father Everard Kidder Meade.

Her husband Robert said Sunday's service will include an annual meeting of the lot holders at the cemetery. When everyone gets together, he said, "It's somewhat like a reunion."

It will also include the blessing of Nathaniel Burwell's gravesite and that of his second wife Lucy Page Burwell. Their flat ledger stones were damaged several years ago, when a large sycamore branch above them snapped as Hurricane Isabel blew through, Robert Kern said.

The stones, added Maguire, "were well-worn with time." The stones, under the direction of Donald Shade, superintendent of Mt. Hebron Cemetery in Winchester, are being re-created from photos.

The new stones will be in the old style, with identical lettering, size, and style. The material will change, however, with granite replacing marble. The former will hold up much better than the latter, Shade added. The new stones, being carved in Elberton, Ga., will not be ready for Sunday's service, Shade said.



Many members of the Burwell family are buried in the Old Chapel cemetery in Clarke County These graves were damaged when a large tree limb fell on them several years ago.

(Photo by Ginger Perry/The Winchester Star)



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Regardless, the blessing will still occur Sunday, said Maguire, and when the stones do arrive, "We will enjoy seeing them up again where they should be."

The Rev. Karin MacPhail of Shenandoah County will conduct Sunday's service. She is one of the supply priests serving Cunningham Chapel Parish following the retirement of the Rev. Anne Manson, who served the parish for four years.
