

Cranford United Methodist Church - History

Cranford Church traces its history back to the 18th century. The sacred and historic spot is the site of three churches and two school houses. The first Pohick Church was located here from 1730-1774, making it one of the earliest sites of a religious institution in Fairfax County. One of the oldest stones in the cemetery is that of Thompson Clarke, who died March 8, 1842, aged 51 years. The old Pohick Church is reported to have been located near this grave.



Map of Colchester & surrounding area in George Washington & George Mason's day.

In 1765, the old Pohick Church, a frame building, began to show symptoms of decay and the question of rebuilding or removal came before the vestry. George Washington favored removal to a more central site. George Mason of Gunston Hall opposed removal, pleading that their ancestors had worshipped at the old church and many of them were buried in the adjoining cemetery. Washington prepared a map of the neighborhood that showed the houses of the members of the congregation. This map also provides evidence that the church was moved to what is now Pohick Episcopal Church on US Rt 1.

Methodism in this area started in 1830 in Bates' barn of the Lebanon farm; the services were conducted by traveling preachers. Some years later the Episcopalians organized a Sunday school in Pohick Church, having for its Superintendent that dear and lovable lady, Mrs. Ellen Mason of Gunston Hall. At that time there was no permanent rector at Pohick Church, so the students from the Theological Seminary near Alexandria, conducted the services one Sunday for the Episcopalians, while the Methodists held services the alternating Sunday. The following quotation is taken from Lossing's Mount Vernon, published in 1858:

"I visited Pohick church a few years ago, and found it falling rapidly into decay. The next day being the Sabbath and being informed that a Methodist meeting was to be held in the church, I repaired thither at the usual hour, and took a seat in Washington's pew near the pulpit. there I awaited the slow gathering of the little auditory. When all had assembled, men and women, and children, white and black, the whole congregation numbered only twenty-one persons."



The Rev. John Lewis

After the Methodists had held services in Pohick Church for a number of years, a Methodist circuit rider by the name of Rev. John Lewis saw the needs of the striving Methodists. He began work with the aim of building a church. He first started with meetings held in an old log schoolhouse, near "Hard Bargain," on Colchester Road. In 1857, the first Methodist Church in this community was built. James and John Cranford did much of the work on the new church. The spot selected for it was the former location of the first Pohick Church. When the church was dedicated, it received the name of Lewis Chapel, in honor of the Rev. John Lewis, who inspired the movement.



The Circuit Rider with his Lord, His bible and his horse brought Methodism to this area in 1830.

LEWIS CHAPEL

The First Methodist Church stood on this site from 1858 - 1953



The original Lewis Chapel

The Lewis Chapel attendance increased to such a point it became necessary to enlarge the building. This was done by adding ten feet to the rear end, and by taking out the gallery, which had been placed in the front of the church for use by the slaves. At the same time, a new roof was put on the old building, and it was newly plastered. The first "free" school in this neighborhood was located near Lewis Chapel. While Lewis Chapel was being enlarged and otherwise undergoing repairs, the schoolhouse was used for church services.

As the church membership kept increasing and the old building became overcrowded, a new building was built nearby in 1900 on newly acquired land. The new church was named Cranford Memorial, and was dedicated June 9, 1901. Dr. Register, who was the Presiding Elder, preached the dedication sermon, using for his text the words found in Ephesians 2:2022:

"And are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth into a holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit."



Cranford Memorial Church prior to the Lewis Chapel addition

In December of 1953, the Lewis Chapel building was moved about one block and joined to the Cranford Memorial Church. At this time, the original exterior clapboards on Lewis Chapel were reversed, inside to outside. This work was accomplished under the supervision of architect Hayward Davis of Lorton.



Cranford UMC prior to enlarged parking lot and handicapped accessible ramp.

A walkway of oversized brick, possibly dating from the time of the first Pohick Church traverses part of the Churchyard, in which there is a cemetery. An engraved stone marks the site of the first Pohick Church, 1730-1774.

The church parking lot was expanded and paved in the early 1990's. A grand piano was purchased in 2001 with monies donated and offerings from the Centennial concert series. The sanctuary, Lewis Hall, a Sunday school room, and the fellowship entryway underwent redecorating and structural reconstruction in 2004/05. In July of 2004, the Lorton Cranford Korean Methodist Church began a ministry, alongside the Cranford UMC congregation, ministering to the growing Korean population in our area. The steeple has been restored to its original beauty.

October 2000 through June 2001, Cranford Memorial Church held their Centennial Celebration to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the "new" sanctuary building. Cranford's history is rich in traditions including special times of celebration. Their future in ever-growing Fairfax County is safe & insured as they reach out to their community and beyond to spread the Word of God into all corners of the world.