A History of St. Philip's Church



as told by Henry The Church Mouse

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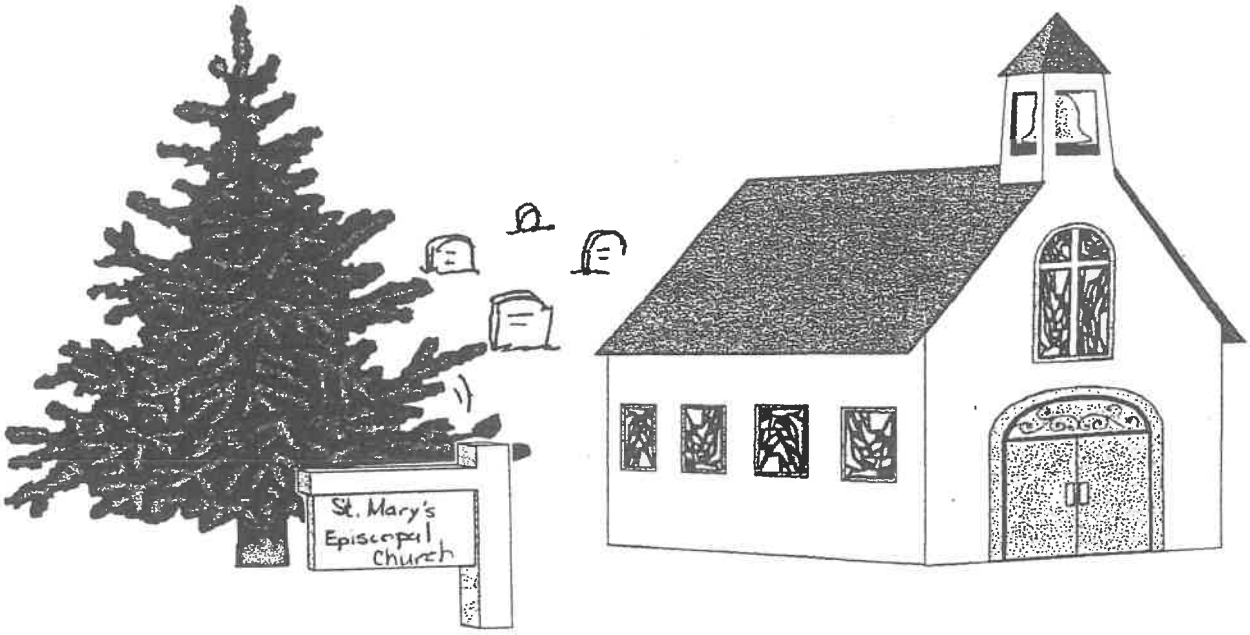
The Church Mouse

to

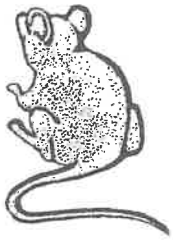
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and Millicent Mason Co-author

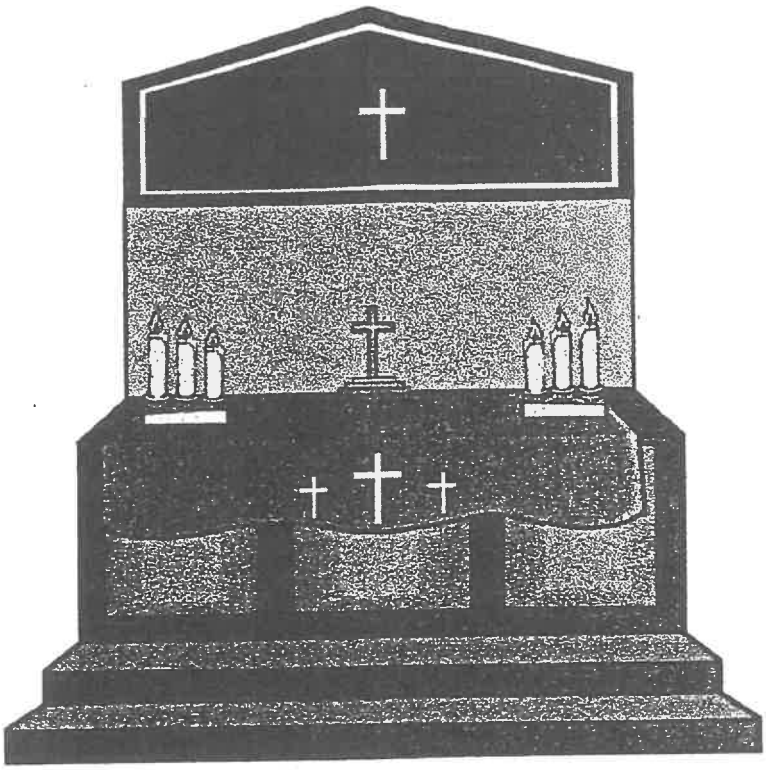
Distributed
Sunday, May 7, 2000

St. Philip's Episcopal Church
13801 Baden Westwood Road
Brandywine, Maryland 20613



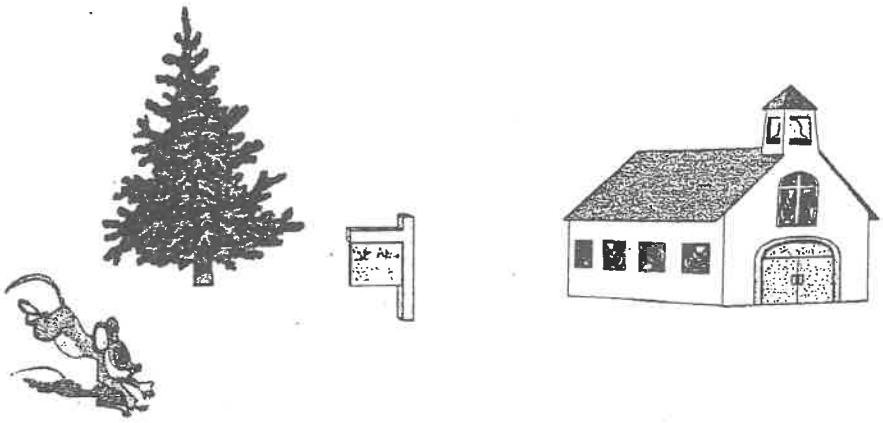
One day as I was roaming around the countryside near the little town of Woodville, I saw a building. The sign in front of it read, "St. Mary's Episcopal Church." I went inside and looked around in wonderment. To my surprise it was filled with people. I noticed that all of the people sitting in the front were white and all of the people that were brown were sitting in the back. I didn't understand it but I later learned that it was because of their color the brown people were not allowed to sit in the front. I looked at myself. Since I was brown, I quietly moved to a corner in the back of the church with the brown people.



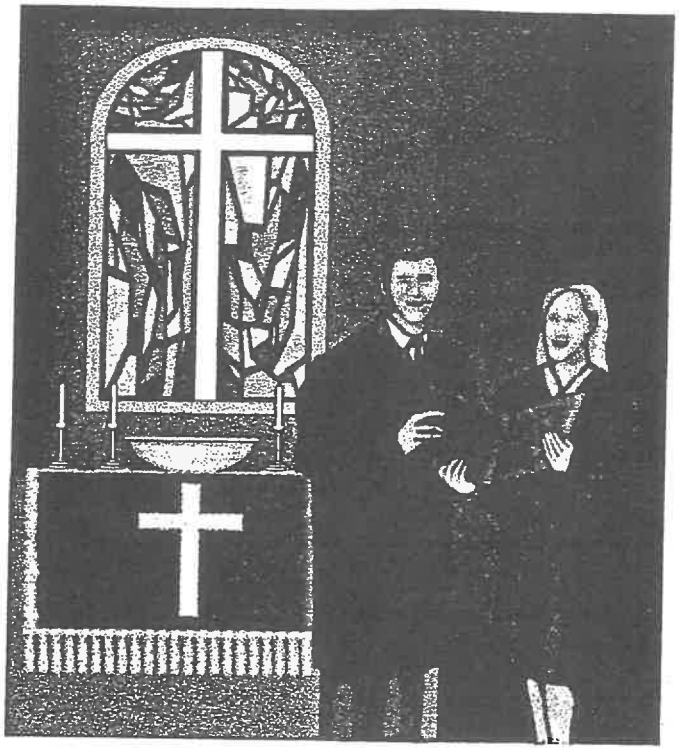


I went to church every Sunday. I enjoyed being with my brown friends. I began to arrive early so that I could watch them as they entered. I sat quietly in my little mouse corner and watched the sadness and pain on their faces as they carefully found a place to sit. They had no books for song or prayer. Even without books, they were able to sing and pray anyway. They looked happy when they were singing. They knew God was watching over them. I listened and soon I was singing and praying along with my friends. Tears of joy fell as quietly as I sang.





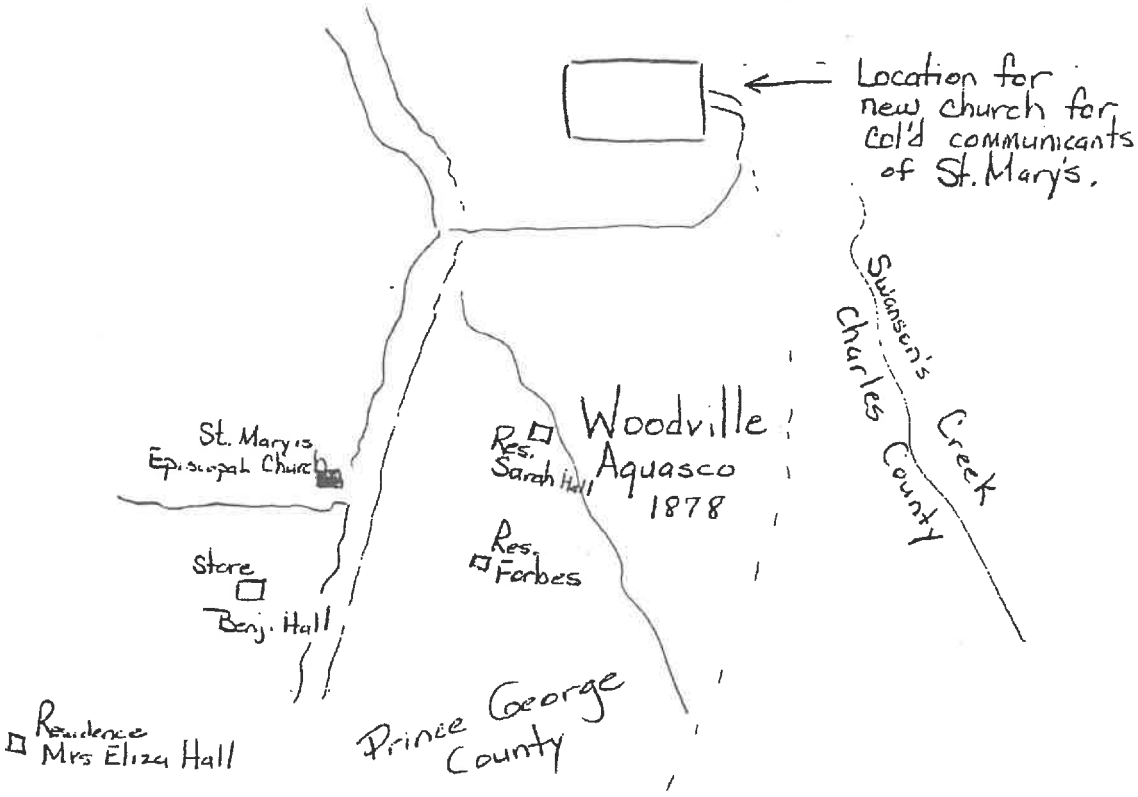
I hurried to get to church one special Sunday morning and sat in my usual corner. There was to be a special announcement today. Two of the brown men, Walter Fowler and Adam Craig had met with the leaders and asked , . . . "to have a place about the grounds of the chapel to bury their loved ones." You see, they were treated quite differently from the white members of the church. When someone in their family died, they had to bury them away from the church cemetery, sometimes near the edge of the fields where they worked or near their homes. They had heard about a place that was set aside especially for people of their color, but it was too far away.



When the service was over, a man stood up to speak. He was one of the leaders at St. Mary's. He carefully explained that St. Paul's and St. Mary's thought it would not be a good idea to share the grounds of the cemetery. Instead, it was decided that they should have a church of their own. Walter and Adam thanked the leaders,then they all left for home.

Later that day, many of the brown people met at Walter's home to talk about their plans. They were overjoyed about the announcement. Before the meeting started, we all bowed our heads in prayer and gave thanks to God.

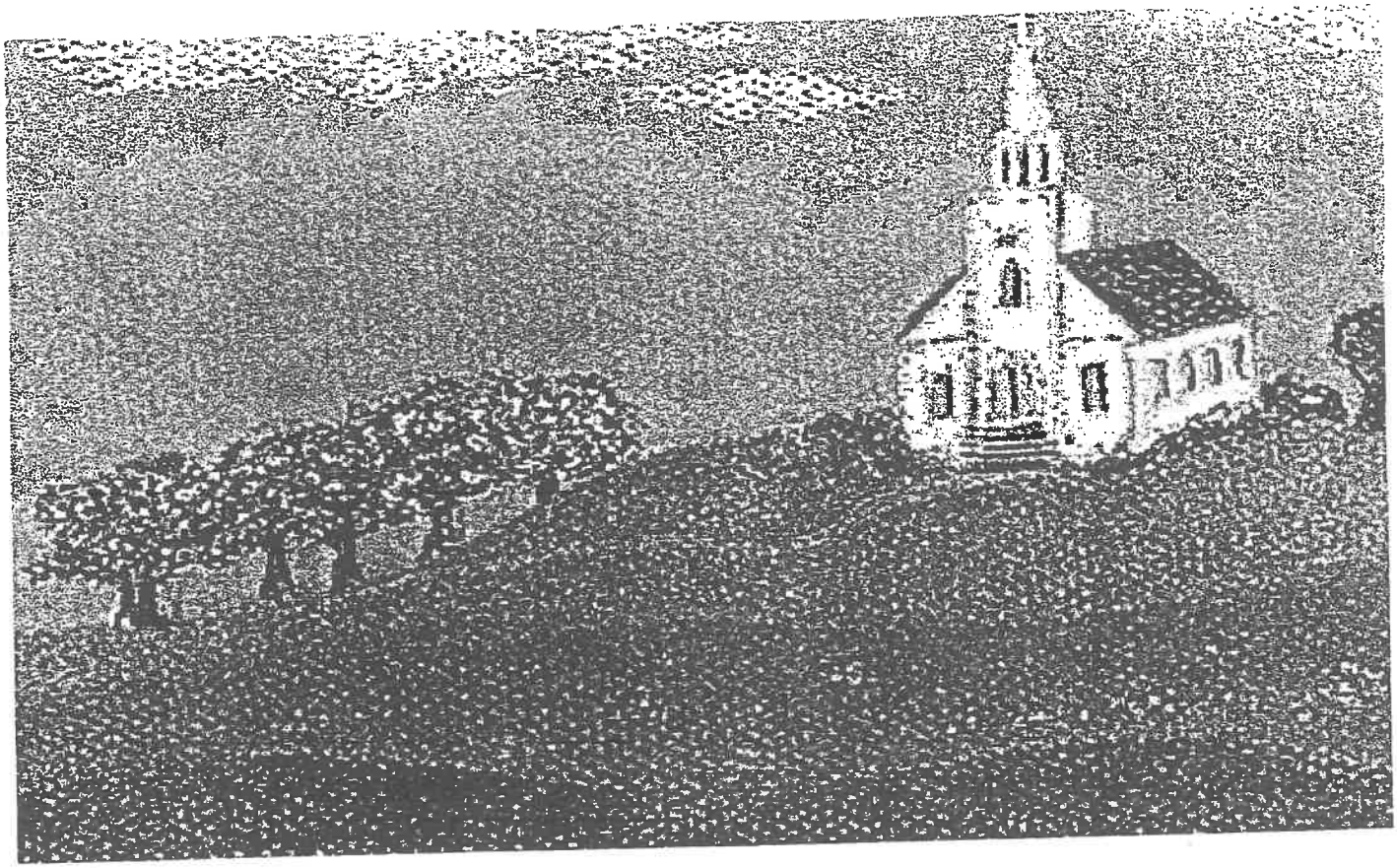




A message was sent to them that a lady named Eliza Hall had agreed to purchase a plot of land which was not too far away for the new chapel. It was located on a hill a little further down the road in Aquasco. They began talking about ways to raise money. I was very happy. " A church of our very own", I thought, " but who will sit in the back?"

In the spring a festival was held at St. Mary's to raise money. Eliza Hall paid $137.45 for the acre of land that had been promised. Many people gave donations. Even though I didn't have money to give, I gave a great gift. I prayed.

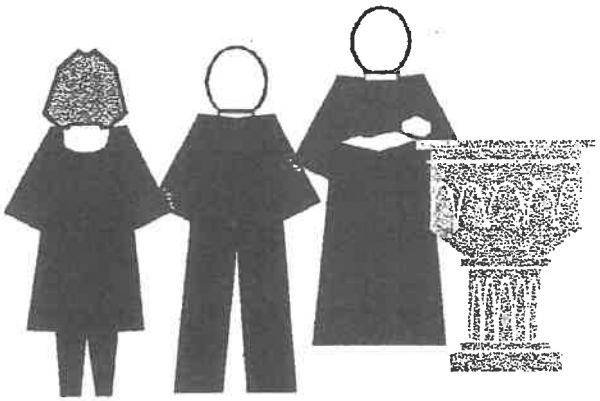




It was with great joy that the people in the community cut, sawed and nailed boards together as they watched as the chapel was built. By the time it was completed in 1880, it had cost about $1,200.00 to build. I thought it was the most b-e-a-u-t-i-f-u-l church I had ever seen.

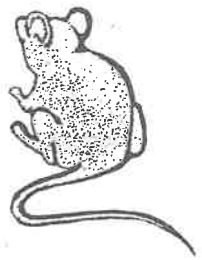
They named the chapel St. Philip's - Aquasco. One Sunday in August 1880, the first service was held there. The first leader at St. Philip's was a Deacon named Joseph Bryant, a colored man sent by St. Paul's.

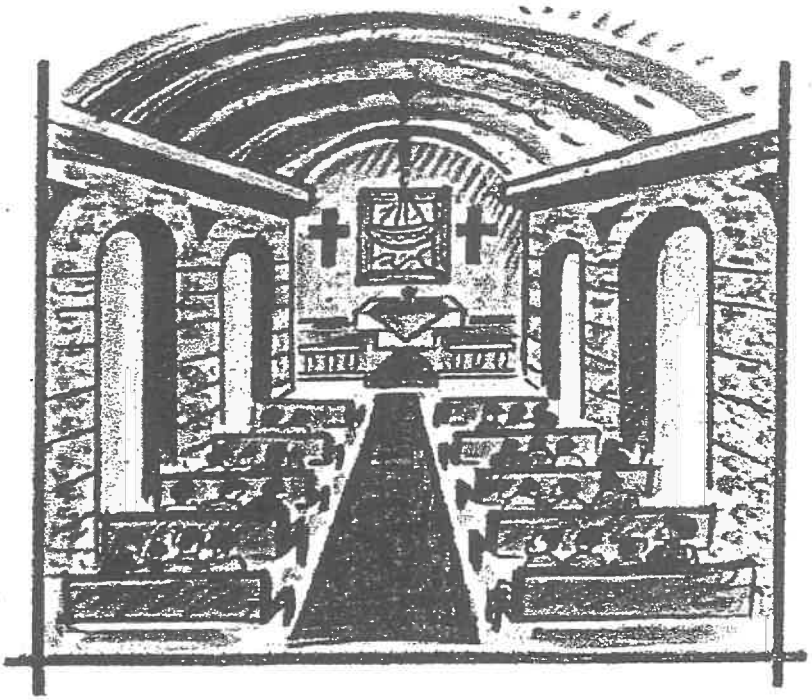




Bishop Pinkney came to baptize and confirm the members. Some people were received as members by the bishop. They had come from other churches. They wanted to become a part of St. Philip's.

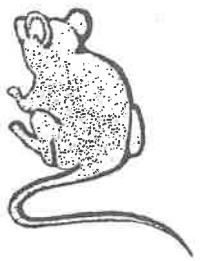
Getting to the new church meant that I had to leave home a little earlier and walk a little faster, but it was worth it. I soon discovered, no one had to sit in the back of the church . . . unless they wanted to.

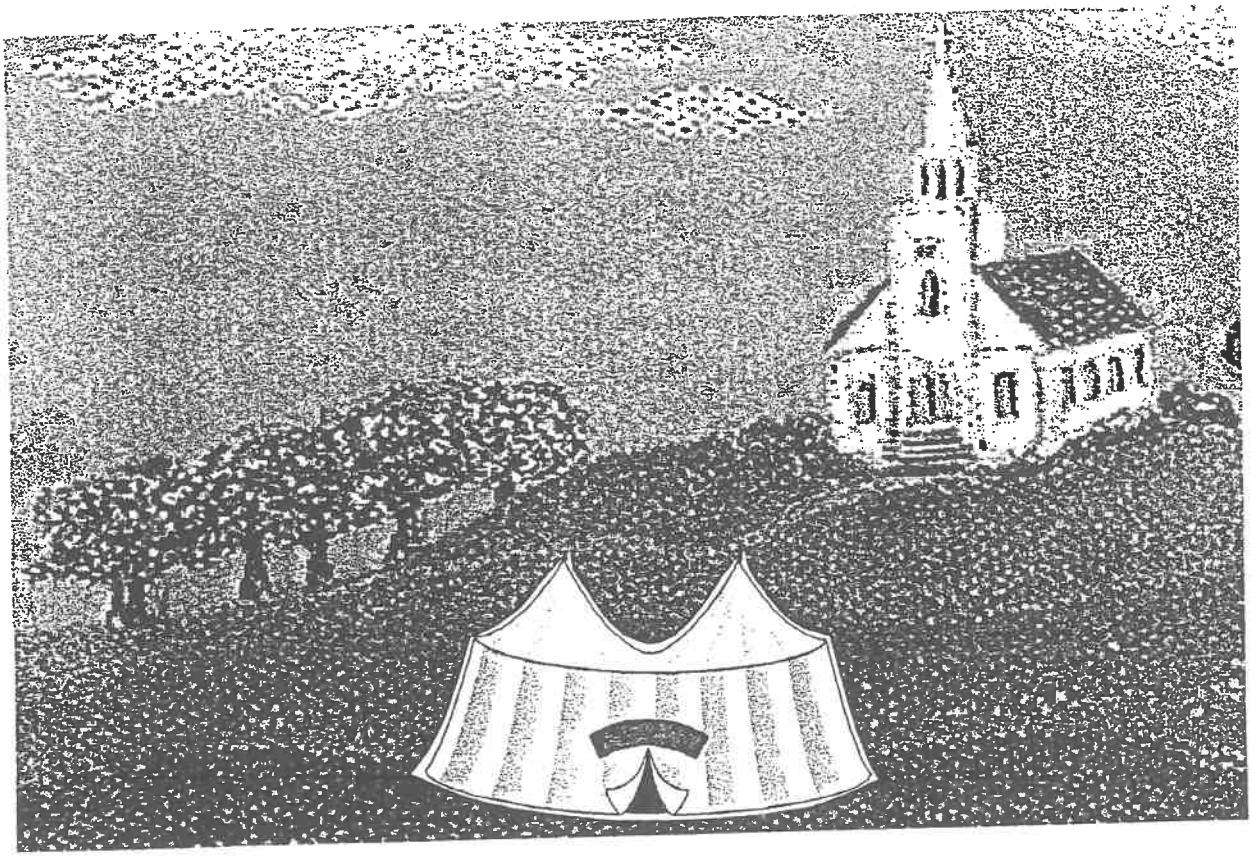




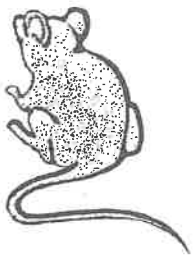
The chapel was filled with people every Sunday. It was the center of the community and God was the center of the church. The people of St. Philip's had a new life and they began to share it with the town of Aquasco.

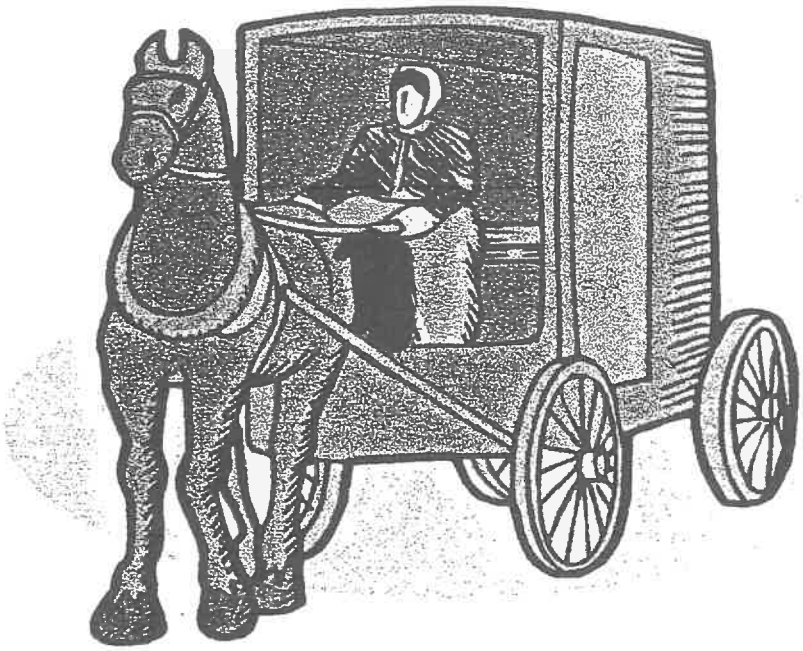
Many people came through the doors of St. Philip's over the years. I learned that they were called colored people and later African Americans, not brown people as I called them. Some of their parents and many of their grandparents had come from a faraway place called Africa where there were many people who looked like them. To me, they were still the "brown " people.



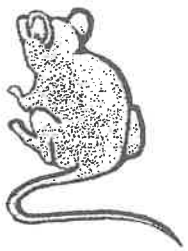


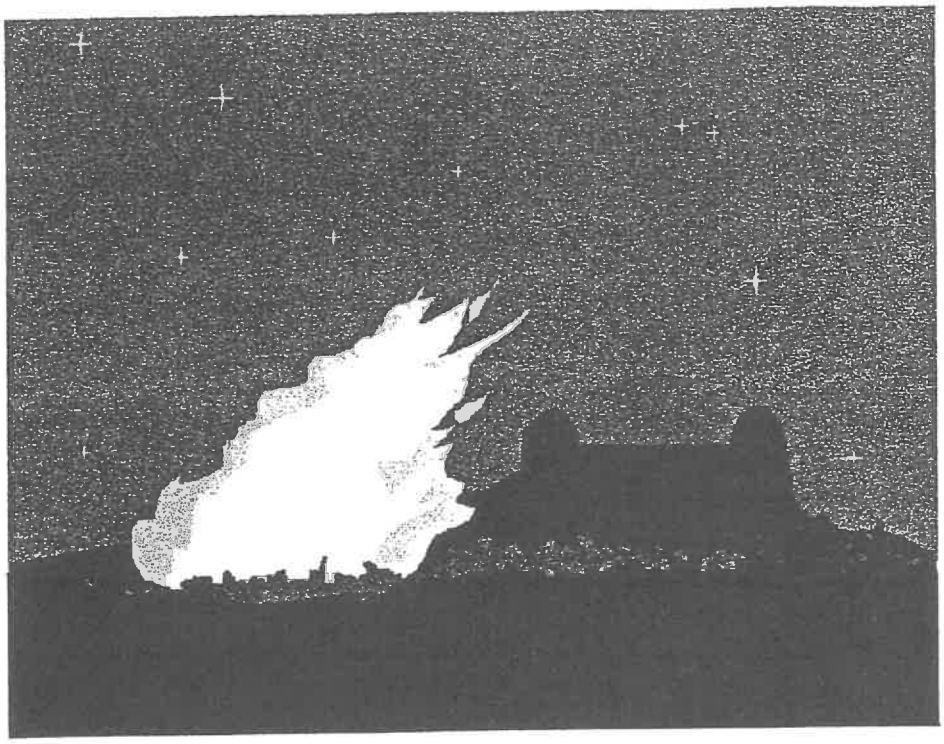
There were many celebrations at the chapel. Things were especially beautiful at these celebrations. At Christmas, the altar was filled with red poinsetta and lots of candles. For Homecoming celebrations they often set up a large tent and the children stayed all day long. I loved to watch them play, but I still kept my distance because afterall, - - - I was a mouse.





There was one priest I like most of all, Rev. Small. He was in charge of three colored chapels. One was St. Thomas' Croom, the second was St. Mary's Charlotte Hall and of course the third was St. Philip's Aquasco. I used to hide in the back of his wagon as he visited the other chapels on Sunday's. The people always gave him food and fresh vegetables from their gardens. I enjoyed eating all the way back home.

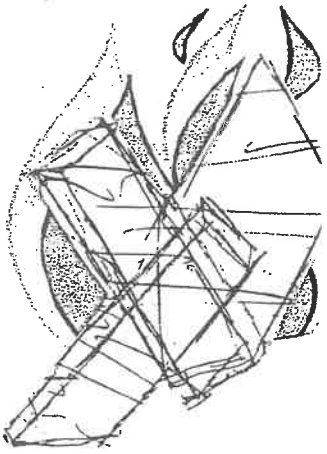


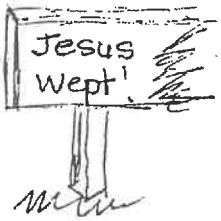


One evening after a meeting, the members locked up the building and went home. During the evening something happened to the furnace and it caught fire. The beautiful chapel was burned completely.

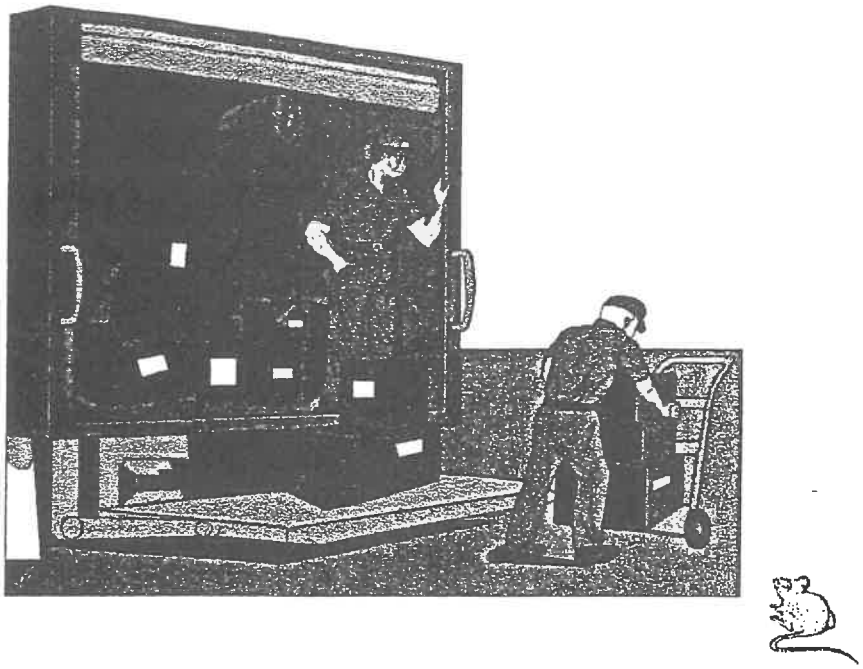
The next day many people came to look. It was hard to believe. The beautiful chapel was gone. Someone had placed a sign near the burnt remains. It read, "JESUS WEPT". I wept too.

I wondered, "What will we do now?"



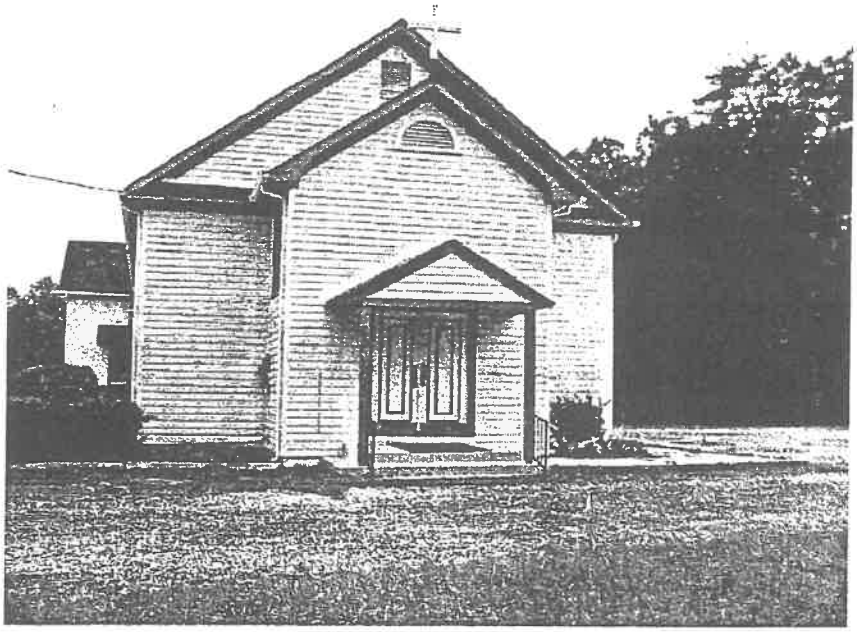






The brown people packed up the few things that had not been destroyed and moved back to St. Mary's. I went with them. I sat and watched the pain and sufferring begin all over again in the same place it started. They worshiped there about three years. They missed having a church of their own.

I heard some men talking about moving up the road somewhere. I could not imagine where that was. On moving day, I climbed into a box filled with books. Someone carried the box into the building and put it down. I stayed in the box until things got quiet and then I climbed out and looked around.



So this was the new church. I paid attention to everything. There were beautiful stained glass windows just like the ones in the old church: I liked that. There were rows of chairs instead of pews and the floor was covered with a carpet. I wandered outside. That's where I saw a sign. It read, "St. Philip's Baden." I knew this was the new home and everything was going to be just fine.

Amen

" And now my brown friends, my crusade with you has taught me much. I can truly say, no book has ever been written and no human voice has described an understanding of your pain or your joy throughout your journey.

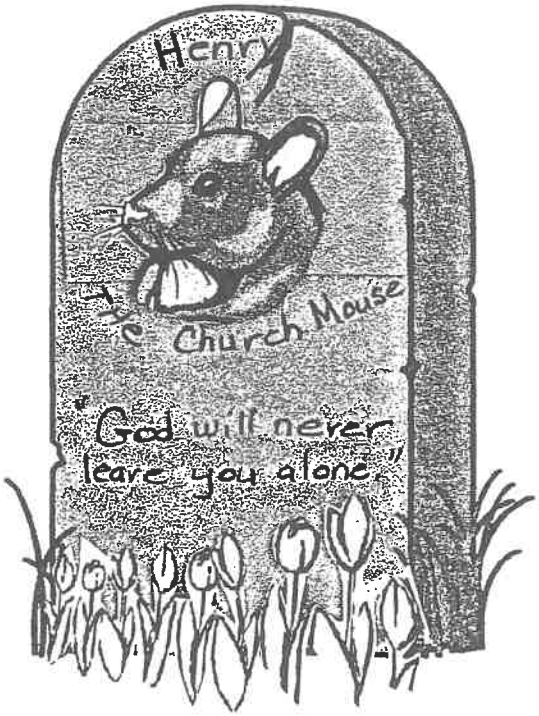
I have traveled with you for many years and now it is time for me to join my ancestors. I leave you with these thoughts. Close the books, tune out the doubting voices and put your faith in God. He will never leave you alone. God speaks to you in many ways. Use his words wisely and strive to make your dreams a reality."

May God Bless You All.

Love,

Henry

The Church Mouse



Henry