

Churches in the Shenandoah Valley

The Cathedral Shrine of the Transfiguration and Shrine Mont

221 Shrine Mont Circle,
Orkney Springs, VA 22845



A brief History

In 1774 Dr John McDonald, a Scotsman, a Physician, and a church warden of Frederick Parish, purchased 350 acres of the Fairfax Grant including what is now the Shrine Mont land. He was the son of a Scottish Chieftain and practiced his profession in the county of Frederick, and also in that portion which became the county of Dunmore, renamed Shenandoah in 1778. After his death, the land was sold to Major Peter Higgins, who laid out the town of Orkney Springs in 1808, almost half of which is now owned by Shrine Mont. The shape of the town was that of a fortress, with a common public area surrounded by lots.

A short distance from the site were seven springs and the discovery of Indian relics indicate an Indian settlement was there at one time.

The spring waters were attributed to have healing powers so many visitors started to come to

Church website: www.shrinemont.com

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the area, and the public square was reserved for those visitors who frequented the springs. Several hotels were built including the Orkney Springs Hotel which was started in the 1850's, but construction was delayed by the Civil War, Construction continued after the War and the Virginia Building (the main hotel) was almost completed when a heavy snow storm caused the building to collapse. The building was rebuilt and opened by 1878.

In the late 1800's, Episcopal church services were held in the hotel. Frequent services were held by the Sixth Bishop of Virginia, the Rt. Rev Robert Atkinson Gibson and his visiting clergy, from 1876 to 1919. In 1902 the Bishop had purchased a cottage called Tanglewood for his summer residence. He determined to establish an all-year round worship at Orkney Springs and found an abandoned schoolhouse which he fitted up as a chapel.. Bishop Gibson died in 1919 and shortly after his death the Shrine of the Transfiguration was built on part of what had been his land and next to it, the Shelter Chapel. Eventually Tanglewood, with all its buildings, became the very heart of Shrine Mont.

The Shrine was built by his son-in-law, the Rev. Edmund Lee Woodward M.D., D.D. He and his wife purchased land at Orkney Springs and spent their vacations there each year. He cut down 100 trees to clear the area and built a log cabin (named Gibson Cottage), which was finished in 1928 when they took up permanent residence.

The Shrine was built for open-air worship for family, neighbors and others who cared to use it, and was built at the west end of a natural amphitheatre. Dr Woodward commenced building in 1924 and with only a lame helper and a 16 year old boy, laid the foundation from stones which were scattered about the area. From other stones in the area, and also others brought down from the mountain, the altar and other parts of the Shrine were built. Donations and memorials allowed additional building – a bell tower, a sacristy, a shrine crossing, choir and clergy stalls, a pulpit, a font and a lectern were all completed in time for the consecration on August 6, 1925. It had been accepted as the cathedral shrine of the Diocese of Virginia at their May meeting and at the consecration a Deed of Donation was presented by the Woodwards, conveying the land on which the cabin and shrine were built to the Diocese of Virginia. Bishop Tucker then appointed Dr Woodward rector of the shrine for life or until he resigned.

In 1928 after Dr Woodward took up permanent residence, he planned a coordinated institution in connection with the Shrine – he wanted to establish an institution based on the first two chapters of the Book of Acts of the Apostles, where he could accommodate 120 guests and from which he could send them back into the world rested, refreshed and inspired to do greater things for Christ and His Church.

Bishop Tucker approved the plan provided that it was not included in the diocesan budget so Dr Woodward agreed to a pay as you go basis. He began to accumulate 120 acres of land and to provide accommodation for 120 people, and to amass \$120,000 as an endowment to insure continuance of Shrine Mont. Before his death he had obtained the land, secured the accommodations and raised half of the endowment.

Dr Woodward had purchased Tanglewood, so on the other part of the land which had not been conveyed to the Diocese for the Shrine, he would construct other buildings and a swimming pool. He also purchased the house built by Major Steiner and owned by the widow of Judge Newman, which became Peterkin Cottage, the Ice House became Meade Cottage and the Music Hall (built by Major Steiner so his daughter could practice singing without disturbing him), he converted to the Refectory and also added a kitchen. And so Shrine Mont was born.

In 1929, 112 .9/10 acres were acquired from the Orkney Springs Hotel and as time passed

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more land was acquired on which further cottages were situated.

The Shelter Chapel was built by Dr Woodward in 1930-31 up the hill at the back of the Shrine as a memorial to his parents. The dedication took place June 28, 1937 and completed the buildings within the Cathedral Shrine Close.

A large part of Shrine Mont acreage is mountain land covered with a variety of trees. At the top of the southern end Dr Woodward erected a tall wooden cross. In 1956 it burned to the ground but was rebuilt in 1957.

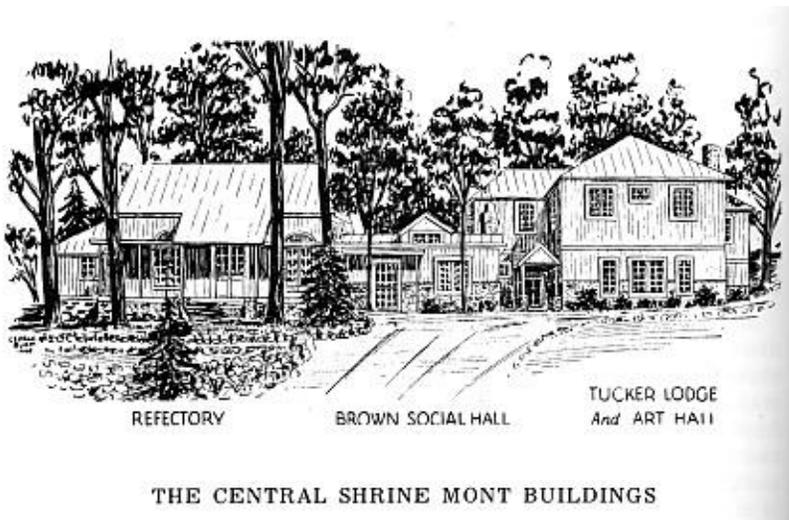
After Dr Woodward's death in 1948, the then Bishop of the Diocese appointed Mr Wilmer E. Moomaw as director manager and Rev. Francis Tyndall as temporary chaplain and director. In 1950 Mr Moomaw was appointed Director of Shrine Mont with full responsibility for and authority over Shrine Mont and its operation and development for the physical care and protection of the Shrine.

Rev. Tucker was made rector of Beckford Parish and dean of the Cathedral Shrine of the Transfiguration and chaplain of Shrine Mont.

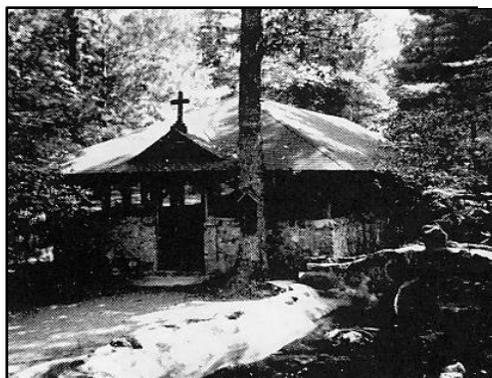
Mr Moomaw improved and renovated the entire property, adding new facilities, increased the number of people attending and thus broadening the scope of its operation.

Generations of Moomaws have continued to manage the property to this day and it remains a place where the main purpose is to bring men, women and children closer to God.

Extracted from "The Cathedral Shrine of the Transfiguration and Shrine Mont by George J. Cleveland

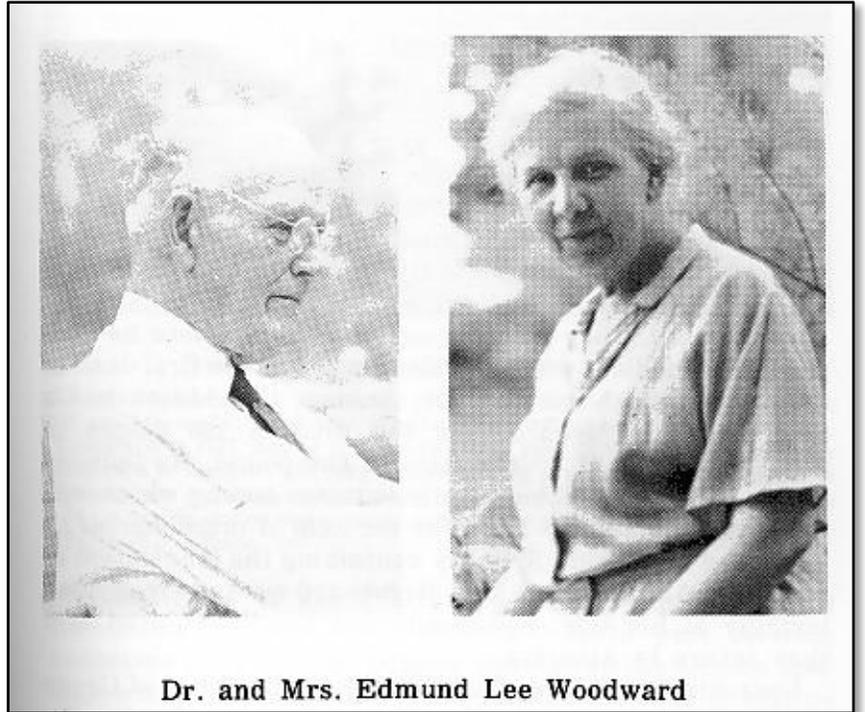
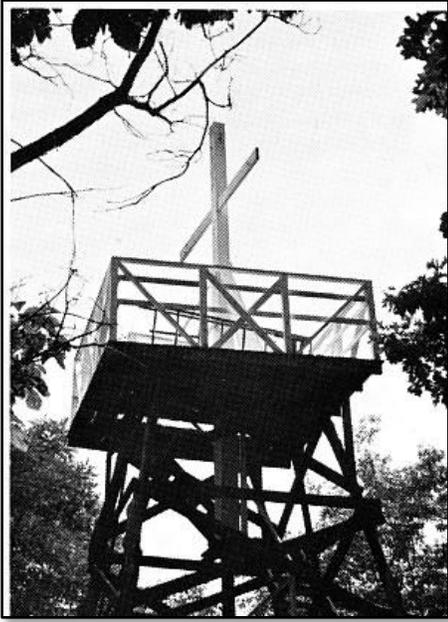


Tanglewood

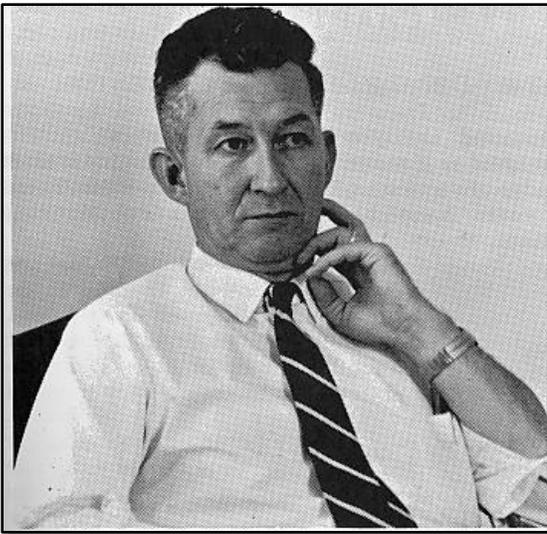


Shelter Chapel

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Dr. and Mrs. Edmund Lee Woodward



Wilmer Moomaw



Shrine Mont 2011