



All Saints in Sunderland, Maryland, a historic Anglican/Episcopal church, was one of the original thirty Anglican parishes created in 1692 to encompass the Province of Maryland. When the Church of England was established as the state religion of Maryland in 1692, the General Assembly, sitting in the old State House at St. Mary's, divided what was then a much larger Calvert County into 4 parishes, and authorized the construction of a church in each one. At the same time, the Assembly addressed the problem of paying for construction and supporting the parishes by levying a tax of 40 pounds of tobacco a year on each taxable person.

All Saints Parish is one of the two original parishes in what is now Calvert County. It served the northern half of the county, while Christ Church Parish served the southern half. The first All Saints Church, a small log structure, was erected in 1693; it became the worship center for more than 200 families living in northern Calvert County. From 1693 until 1840, when Smithville United Methodist Church was built in Dunkirk, All Saints was the only church of any denomination in northern Calvert County. As population increased and denominational diversity began to take hold, other, largely African-American congregations, such as Mt. Hope United Methodist in Sunderland, and St. Edmunds United Methodist Church in Chesapeake Beach, became important religious centers. But, for nearly 150 years All Saints was the "mother church" for all persons living in northern Calvert County, white and black alike, making the reexamination of its history an important task.

The original log church was replaced by the current brick church building constructed proximate to the original site—today, the junction of the Solomons Island Road (MD Route 2) and Southern Maryland Boulevard (MD Route 4). In early 1774 the Maryland Assembly passed a law authorizing the construction of a new building for All Saints "to promote and advance religion and render the attendance of public worship more safe and agreeable." The new church was built over a three year period (1774-1777) and paid for by a tobacco tax of 200,000 pounds collected by the All Saints' Vestry.

An impressively large brick structure for the colonial period, the church building is a two-story Georgian structure of Flemish bond brick with random glazed headers. As one of the finest old buildings in the state of Maryland, its brick walls are an excellent example of round-arch paneling. The two rows of side windows, in typical colonial style

are the original clear glass with small panes. A dramatic feature of the building is the two slave galleries on the second story, running the full length of the church on the north and south sides. We believe these may be the largest slave balconies still in existence of any colonial era church in Maryland.

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Late last year (2011) a group of parishioners began the task of researching the role of slavery and the African American community in the Anglican Church and more specifically in the history of All Saints. We know that All Saints has large slave galleries, that the church was built at a time when slave labor was frequently used to build structures, and that All Saints' parishioners were mostly tobacco farmers, but we didn't know much more. Quickly it became evident that the written history of our Church and of most of the Maryland diocese is missing important elements. There is little mention or recognition of the role slaves and their experience played in our past. Our research is turning up many stories and facts, some known but forgotten, and some not known by earlier historians.

For example, we have learned that there were tensions within the Parish between English-trained clergy and the wealthy tobacco farmers concerning the conversion of slaves to Christianity, and the rights of slaves to education. The clergy favored conversion and education, while tobacco farmers wanted to maintain the status quo of ownership and slave status. These struggles, with the clergy being partially successful, are demonstrated in the very design of our current church building. The large slave balconies point to a historic duality in the life of the church; on the one hand, the attempt to segregate parishioners by race and status but also an attempt to include slaves in the life of the church. Parish records make it clear that both blacks and whites were parishioners who participated in the rituals of baptism, confirmation, and marriage performed within the church, albeit hardly on an equal basis.

All Saints "Project to Reconcile Our Past" was created to discover and reconnect to our history, particularly the role of African Americans free and slave in the life of the Parish. We want to recognize those who contributed to the foundations of our church but whose lives and efforts have never been honored. We do not seek to re-write history, rather we seek to discover and complete our story. Strongly supported by Bishop Eugene Sutton and the Maryland Episcopal diocese, we hope to advance the work of the Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, established by the diocese in 2008 to focus on racial reconciliation.

We are also working to make sure that All Saints is designated as a pilgrimage site by the Commission. We'd like to create educational materials and perhaps install interpretive panels with timelines showing the history of All Saints and the roles all members of the Parish played. Because our church is always open to the public, we would like to invite all persons to visit and perhaps sit in one of those large slave galleries or climb the incredibly small, windy stair cases leading to the balconies. We aim to make All Saints a Calvert County "must visit" site where school children and others can come, learn and experience an original colonial period place of worship. If we are able to locate living

members of an African American family that attended or built All Saints or have some other historic connection, we'd seek to record an oral history and make that available for all visitors.

All Saints has embarked on a journey that we believe will forever change our parish and hopefully build a more understanding community in Southern Maryland. All Saints will be celebrating its 325th year anniversary in five years; our goal is to have our project completed in time for a wonderful inclusive celebration. Thus, the real prize is the narrative, the evolution of All Saints as an educational resource for the County (and beyond), as a pilgrimage site for our Diocese as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Project, and what may be the most anticipated and broadly-supported anniversary celebration that either the county or diocese has seen. We hope that in our journey we can demonstrate that preserving the old brick church building is not only of cultural and historical importance to the African American community, but important to understanding the complete history of early colonial American life in Maryland.

Our journey to discover our past is hindered by the fact that many of Calvert County and All Saints' records from the 17th and 18th centuries, including baptismal and confirmation records, burned in fires. But we can document that:

- ! All Saints was the home parish of the Rev. Thomas Claggett (1769-1776 and 1786-1792) until he became the first Bishop of Maryland and the first Bishop ordained on American soil. Claggett was the last Rector to preach at the old log structure and the first in the new brick structure.
- ! While at All Saints the Rev. Claggett was a slave owner, as were most of the Anglican clergy during the colonial period. Slavery was central not only to the wealth gained by tobacco production but also in the daily lives of the clergy and their families.
- ! In 1724 Rev. James Williamson of All Saints reported that some "negroes" were baptized into the Anglican Church in the original All Saints' log structure.
- ! The baptismal font received by All Saints from England in 1735 was used to baptize some of the earliest slaves and it remains in use today.
- ! The 1790 census indicates that there were more than 4,300 slaves in Calvert County, more than half the entire population.
- ! Slavery was a pervasive part of parish life throughout the colonial and new republic period and slave ownership was far more common (acceptable) in the Church of England and the later Episcopal Church than in other denominations such as the Methodists and Quakers.
- ! In 1777, the first year pews were auctioned for All Saints' new church, approximately 75% or more of the pew owners had a direct personal or family connection with the slave ownership system.

In our attempt to learn more about the past, we will be reaching out to local African American Methodist and other churches that might have historic ties to All Saints. We want to know how the role or relationship of All Saints to the African American churches

evolved and changed. We will seek guidance from the broader African American community to help us determine the most appropriate way(s) to honor those whose stories have not been told.