

## **The Role of All Saints Parish in African American History**

By Dr. Larry Hunt

Let me say from the start that I am not a historian. I am a sociologist by training and that means I am not concerned with precise dates of particular events but the operation of more general social processes. Although I shall use some specific dates as markers for important periods in All Saints Parish history, my ultimate goal is to generate a narrative or story about what everyday life was like for whites and blacks alike in the history of the Parish.

Let me also say at the outset, it is difficult to look on the past with fresh eyes. The fact that slavery was central to the building of All Saints Parish should not take away from our appreciation of the beauty of the brick church as a sacred place where people have a chance to connect to something larger than themselves. I feel that knowing the past in both its glorious and inglorious features can only add to the sacredness of this place.

So, the fact that some of the most honored people in the history of this Parish were slave owners, traders in human cargo, and lived a life of comparative ease that rested on the ownership and exploitation of other human beings is not a pretty picture. But it is one that must and will be painted.

To take the most obvious case, Thomas Claggett was the 13<sup>th</sup> rector of All Saints and no doubt its most famous personage. He is named on the State of Maryland historic marker of All Saints and a least 6 other similar markers around the State -- lots of churches seem to want to claim him. He was the first Episcopal Bishop to be consecrated on American soil, was Chaplin of the United States Senate, and was buried in the National Cathedral in Washington. Few other people from Calvert County can claim such fame.

Claggett was a brilliant, educated, influential religious leader who grew up in a family where slavery was a normal part of daily life.

His father was the Reverend Samuel Claggett who himself owned a large number of slaves. Samuel Claggett died when Thomas was 13 and, as specified in his will, Thomas inherited two slaves, Clem and Henry, as well as a large number of acres in Croom in Prince George's county almost directly across the Patuxent River from

All Saints Parish. And, along with the large acreage came a large number of slaves, but they, unlike Clem and Henry, remain forever nameless.

So we today have a number of questions that need answers. How did slavery become so central to everyday life in All Saints Parish? What role did the plantation system of tobacco production play in the life of the Parish? How and why did whites become so convinced that it was justified to enslave other human beings? What role, both direct and indirect, did unnamed slaves play in building the brick church that stands today? These are the kinds of questions my research is attempting to answer.

## TWO PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

- A) Because some Christian traditions prohibited exploitative practices relative to fellow believers, even extracting interest from a coreligionist was prohibited (hence the central presence of Jews in European banking systems at that time), the dominant justification of European merchants in their exploitation of Africans was that they were non-Christian heathens, however, that rationale began to erode as missionaries started doing their thing, that is, working to convert Africans to the beliefs and values of Christianity. This conflict between the goals of merchants and missionaries was eventually resolved by the shift from religion to race as a key social boundary, a marker of why some people behaved differently from others, making them legitimate objects of discrimination. Phrased differently, after conversion began occurring in areas colonized by Europeans, the terms of group demarcation began to shift from religion to race as a criterion for legitimating subordination of another set of human beings.
  
- B) Race as a social concept was an invention of a powerful planter class and their political representatives. Social ideologies about race as a biological fact were socially constructed/invented to stabilize a labor system that was immensely profitable to plantation owners, a small group that owned large amounts of land. They had to convince themselves and others that it was within the realm of Christian justice to enslave other human beings according to the color of their skin, by claiming the social arrangements

from which they profited were natural, moral, and reflected God's will. Their torturous reasoning can be traced in the laws they enacted that helped create the social inequities that continue to afflict us to this day.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Who and how many people lived in All Saints parish at various time periods?

I am working on the basic demography of the Parish in several time periods; (1) before the parishes were created in the Maryland colony, and (2) from the log church in 1693 until 1755 when the first somewhat reliable census of the colony was conducted and (3) from 1756 to the building of the brick church in 1774 and 1776 and the end of the colony of Maryland and the disestablishment of the Anglican church.

From 1632 to 1640, the population of the Maryland colony as a whole increased to a total of from 400-500 people of whom only about 3 percent were non-whites, that is, people of African descent and or Native American Indians.

In 1692 when the Parish system was created, the best estimate for the colony population as a whole was 25,000, with about 11 percent of that population non-white. By this time, the Native American population has shrunk dramatically, so an estimate that about 10 percent of the colony was of African descent is a good guess. Of that 10 percent, as we shall see, not all were slaves but either what was called "free persons of color" or indentured servants with a chance for eventual freedom.

For 1692, the numbers for the All Saints Parish itself are more difficult to estimate. Working from the distribution of the colonial population by civil divisions called hundreds and the 30 parishes that were created, my best guess is that the population of Calvert county was about 2,400 with that total split fairly evenly between All Saints Parish and Christ Church Parish. So in 1692, there were probably about 1,200 people in All Saints Parish, and about 10 percent of those were of African descent.

It is important to note that not all of the 10 percent of African descent were slaves. Rather, through most of the early 1600s, some blacks were indentured servants and many were able to become what was called free persons of color.

Indentured Servants were under a contract with a landowner to work for a specified period of time, after which they became free persons, able to own land, conduct business, participate in the political system and otherwise pursue their own dreams, rather than the dreams of their former masters. In the 1670s, Indentured Servants, both black and white, outnumbered slaves by a margin of over 4 to 1. By the early 1700s, the slave/servant ratio reversed dramatically, with only 1 Indentured Servant to every 4 slaves!

## ALL SAINTS AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

Two general patterns describe the way white-controlled churches treated slaves-- inclusion and exclusion. Both dynamics were present, and both gave rise to features of the African American community.

Early inclusion: religious institutions such as All Saints made efforts to stabilize a social order that whites controlled by communicating a message that servants should obey their master. Slaves were expected to attend white-approved religious services, indeed, by law no religious meetings were to occur without a white minister present.

In 1692 a law passed by Maryland's General Assembly made the Church of England an established church, that is, an institution supported by taxes on the whole population of a Parish, without regard to a taxable person's religious beliefs. Phrased differently, All Saints was, by law, a religious monopoly in Northern Calvert County.

All Saints was a central institution for whites more so than blacks but it was nevertheless a place where people of African descent learned the patterns of a new religious tradition, Protestant Christianity. Most Africans who came to Maryland after 1700 were non-Christian, some were Muslims, others were believers in various tribal and ethnic religious traditions.

All Saints was the mother church of many other Protestant churches in the county by virtue of its being a religious monopoly for generations and generations. It was the most important church in northern Calvert County, for around 150 years. It was within the All Saints parish that literally hundreds of people of African descent learned some of the core religious values of the broader society and were included in church rituals, such as baptism, marriage, and burial at the end of life.

However, because of the dynamics of exclusion, as evidenced by the balconies set aside for slaves and poor whites, and the common practice of blacks having to wait in line to receive church sacraments only after the whites engaged in them; once blacks were free to form their own congregations, they did so. So, what I am suggesting is that African Americans learned the basics of Protestantism within Anglican churches such as All Saints and then took those elements and forged a new religious tradition more consistent with their needs and interests. Whether those early linkages to the Anglican tradition remain in our historical memory or not, depends on how closely we choose to examine the past.

My current research is focusing on the United Methodist churches that were formed by former slaves within All Saints Parish, one of them being a mile or so from where we are meeting today. The results of that research will be reported as part of the history of All Saints parish.

As we know, The Episcopalian tradition had little lasting hold on many African Americans. One can see some of the reasons for this by examining what has been called the first “Great Awakening” which started in England within the Anglican Church and spread to the colonies.

Reverend George Whitefield, an Anglican priest came to the colonies in 1739 and began preaching in ways that disturbed the Anglican establishment. His message was one that appealed to the disenfranchised, white and black alike. He advocated a direct and personal connection with God, not one mediated by an established church and defined by its rituals. It was a Calvinistic message of how the individual could stand in direct connection to God and could be imbued by the Holy Spirit directly, without priestly mediation.

That religious style was far more consistent with African traditions, where belief in a spirit world and a personal experience of being an embodiment of a higher spirit

was prevalent. It is not surprising that the “dry as dust” (Pardon me, Father Ken!) rituals of the high church Anglican tradition, largely one also without much music, did not have a hold on most people of African descent. Consequently, nearly by largely African-American United Methodist churches, such as Patuxent, Plum Point and Mt. Hope developed within All Saints Parish boundaries.

But, All Saints today is embarked on a project to reconcile its past. It is hoping to become a pilgrimage site where school children and others can come to learn the history of the Parish with a special emphasis on how slavery as an institution built the present brick structure.

In many ways our Nation has changed for the better. One no longer sees signs over drinking fountains saying “white or colored only” and many have come to lose touch with a sharply segregated past. As a corrective to that view, the balconies in this historic structure stand as a symbol of an inglorious past and can serve as a dramatic reminder that has important educational value. When people visit this place, they have a chance to climb the winding stairs up to the balconies and to imagine what it was like for a people, simultaneously included and excluded, to be part of this house of worship,