

Saint Thomas' Episcopal Parish, Croom, Prince George's County, Maryland was created out of the northern portion of St. Paul's Episcopal Parish (1692) in 1850. The records of St. Thomas' Parish prior to its independence are included with the records of St. Paul's Parish, Baden, Maryland. St. Thomas' Parish was formally recognized by the Diocese of Maryland in 1851 and the new parish's boundaries were defined at that time. The parish was bounded on the north by Queen Anne's Episcopal Parish, on the south by St. Paul's Episcopal Parish, on the west by King George's Episcopal Parish, also known as St. John's, and on the east by the Patuxent River. The new St. Thomas' Parish encompassed the area near the county seat of Upper Marlboro that was served by Trinity Episcopal Church, an independent congregation founded by Bishop Claggett in the 19th century.

The first rector of the newly created parish was James A. McKenney. McKenney was instrumental in the creation of the parish and later helped establish a parish chapel, the Church of the Atonement (1874), in Cheltenham, Maryland. Over the course of its history, St. Thomas' Parish has included four congregations: St. Thomas' Church, Croom, Church of the Atonement, Cheltenham, St. Simons Mission, Croom, and The Chapel of the Incarnation, Brandywine, all in Prince George's County, Maryland.

Saint Thomas' Church, located in Croom, was built between 1743-1745 in accordance with a 1732 act of the Maryland Assembly. The original church building was a simple, yet well designed, English Georgian "auditory" church. Daniel Page, who also owned the land surrounding the church site, built the church under contract with the vestry of St. Paul's Parish. Known as Page's Chapel until 1850, the St. Thomas' congregation descended from the original St. Paul's congregation located in Charles Town at Mt. Calvert. The longest serving rector during the colonial period, 1728-1775, was John Eversfield. Page's Chapel was also the home church of Bishop Thomas John Claggett, the first Episcopal bishop to be consecrated on American soil. St. Thomas Church maintains an active cemetery. The church was "Victorianized" in the 1850s and 1860s and a bell tower in memory of Bishop Claggett was added in 1888. The church was renovated in the 1950s to incorporate Victorian and Colonial elements within a harmonious design. The parish register has recorded approximately 875 graves. The graves date back to the mid-1740's. St. Thomas' Church is a Prince George's County Historic Site and is also on The National Register of Historic Places.

In April 1874, the Church of the Atonement was opened in Cheltenham to serve the southern portion of the parish. Bishop Pinkney of Maryland consecrated the Church of the Atonement in 1875 during the rectorate of Samuel R. Gordon who has been the parish's longest serving rector to date. It is thought that Baltimore philanthropist Enoch Pratt donated the land and cost of building the church. The Church of the Atonement was built in the "Carpenter Gothic" style and in the late 1880s a bell tower was added to the building in memory of Rev. Gordon. In addition to ministering to the surrounding community, Atonement provided spiritual guidance to the boys at the nearby House of Reformation, later known as Boys Village. When the Chapel of the Incarnation was opened in 1916, the congregation at the Church of the Atonement declined and soon the church fell into disuse. In the late 1940's, the church was deconsecrated and demolished. Graves in the cemetery date from the mid-1870s to the present time. An active cemetery is maintained at the site.

In 1896, St. Simon's Mission was established in Croom as an African-American parochial mission by the Misses Susie, Kate and Elizabeth Willes as a Sunday school during the rectorate of their brother, Reverend Francis P. Willes. Seeing a tremendous need for general education, technical training and religious instruction among the African-American people of the area, many of whom were parishioners of Saint Thomas Parish, the Willes started a school at the rectory. The school became an enormous success. One aspect of this work, the religious instruction, so blossomed that a worshipping community developed at the school. The two Sunday School classrooms were moved across St. Thomas' Church road and the mission chapel was established on land purchased by Miss Susan Willes.

The mission soon became too much work for one priest who was also serving two other churches. The people petitioned the Bishop of Washington to send an African-American priest to serve the mission. The Rev. August E. Jensen arrived in June 1902. It became an independent mission in 1902 under the auspices of the Diocese of Washington.

Although Rev. Jensen was greeted with phenomenal success, one sorrow marked his first year in Croom; his young daughter died from whooping cough. This raised the question whether the new mission should have its own cemetery. The decision was affirmative, so Eloise Constance Catherine Jensen became the first of scores of people whose bodies were buried at St. Simon's Cemetery. The parish records contain the names of more than a hundred, but there are others not recorded in the Church Register.

In 1964, due to many factors, the congregation of St. Simon's was integrated with that of St. Thomas'. The buildings of St. Simon's Mission were demolished in the early 1970's. The cemetery was the first cemetery in Croom for African-Americans. An active cemetery remains at the site. The site of St. Simons's Mission is a Prince George's County Historical Resource Site.

In 1916 the cornerstone for the Chapel of the Incarnation was laid in the railroad town of Brandywine. The chapel had initially started out as a Sunday School but the women of the town decided that Brandywine needed its own Episcopal church. They began the task of fundraising and by 1916 they were able to buy property and begin building. The architect and builder was William J. Palmer of Washington, DC. Well known for his fanciful church designs, Palmer chose to design the chapel in the Spanish Mission style. The chapel is unique in that it is one of the few, and perhaps only, examples of this style in southern Maryland. The total cost of the chapel was \$3,000 and the building was paid for by 1923. Bishop Harding consecrated the chapel in October 1923. The Chapel became the unofficial town hall of Brandywine, many dances, crab feasts and fundraising events have been held there over the years. The local kindergarten met there for a few years in the mid-1960s. The Chapel is also home to the offices of Community Support Systems a non-profit community assistance organization. The Chapel maintains an active congregation. The Chapel of the Incarnation is a Prince George's County Historic Site and is also on The National Register of Historic Places.

Saint Thomas' Parish has been under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Washington since 1895 and prior to that time, the parish was under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Maryland.

[Franklin A. Robinson, Jr.](#), St. Thomas' Parish Historian, provided the historical information. For further information or to procure his services, please contact the Parish office at: (301) 627-8469.