

THE HISTORY OF TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

History

Dr. Thomas Staughton Savage — First Rector

According to church archival records, Trinity Episcopal Church has been served by 23 Rectors during its past 150 years. Congregants have been blessed through the years with faith serving clergy, and with their helpmates, have given unsparingly of themselves to further the work and duties of the parish.

Early church historians have stated that there were Episcopal missionary efforts that date to 1846 in Pass Christian when Rev. James S. Green held services in his home. This effort was followed by Rev. William M. Giles who was successful in raising some funds for the construction of a church. In 1849, following the first baptism at the Pass by visiting Rev. J.A. Massey of Mobile, a Vestry of seven men was organized and a call was made for a Rector. At the time of the call, Rev. Thomas Savage was in Alabama recovering from the rigors of Africa.

Having its roots in 1849, and the appointment acceptance by Dr. Thomas Staughton Savage, the church's early growth was greatly benefitted his leadership.

In the 1851 edition of *Spirit of Missions*, an Episcopal publication, Dr. Savage stated that the Gulf Coast was “formerly one of the most reckless and dissipated regions in the whole Southern country . . . (however) the character of the population has changed. Schools of a high character have succeeded the Church, and now a population, respectable for wealth, refinement and intelligence, has sprung up. Pass Christian is now the favorite *watering-hole* on the Gulf.”



Although having remained in Pass Christian for nearly 20 years, Dr. Savage had relinquished his rector-ship to Rev. George W. Sill in 1861. He and his family had remained in Pass Christian until 1867.

Although not reported as a pastor or priest with Trinity Church, another Episcopal clergyman was reported living in Pass Christian as is recorded in the 1850 Census. R.G. Hayes, age 40, was staying in the Emmons Boarding House.

Between 1880 and 1900, the roster of attending Rectors was listed as A.J. Tardy, Dr. D.S. Lewis, Henry C. Mayer, John A. Harris, Nelson Ayers, Thomas Burry, and Louis Tucker. During this period, there was continuing discussion regarding the need for a Rectory which resulted in acquisition of adjoining property in the late 1890s and the construction of a suitable residence that was first occupied by Rev. Louis Tucker.

The earliest vestry records date from 1888, showing that during the last decade of the 19th Century, Church affairs had prospered during the leadership of vestrymen, such as Hiern, Heaslip, Brandt, Thornton, Robertson, Wilkinson, Sutter, and Brogan.

As was universally practiced in churches of the day, during Trinity's early period, pew rentals were standard and were not suspended in Pass Christian until 1918.

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During the first quarter century of the 1900s, Trinity Church was blessed with the leadership of Rev. Dr. Nowell Logan. He died at the age of 86, after having served, both, as Trinity's Rector, and as Dean of all the Gulf Coast Episcopal churches, excepting the Parish of Biloxi.

The rector's position was filled by Rev. A. Basil Perry, followed by Rev. Horace N. Aldrich, and in 1931, by Rev. Girault M. Jones who guided the church through the end of the Great Depression and by 1935, had brought about gains in church congregants, building renovations, and the construction of the Grace Morton Parker Memorial Parish House.

Rev. Charles S. Liles succeeded for a short period that was followed by Rev. Warwick Aiken in 1936, during which time Trinity's 90th Anniversary was celebrated with raising of funds for a new organ. In the summer of 1943, Mr. and Mrs. I.T. Rhea donated the park property that fronts the church and which faces the beach, later dedicated as Rhea Memorial Park.

Rev. H. McDonald Morse was instituted as Rector at the same time that Trinity Church was celebrating its 125th Anniversary on October 27, 1974. Having completed a decade of building the Faith Community, Rev. Morse concluded his services in February 1984, and moved to Zurich, Switzerland for further religious studies.

Rev. Bronson H. Bryant, a native of Florida, had been in ministry for 27 years before conducting his first services at Trinity Episcopal Church on January 20, 1985.

The Rev. Christopher G. Colby, was appointed Rector in 1997, and has been faithfully rendering solace and spiritual joy to his community.

The Church Edifice

The first church building was a simple, one-room structure of Gothic design with lancet windows and a belfry. Although the building was not yet complete, a dozen souls made their presence known. As the congregation grew in numbers, the church was consecrated on July 31, 1851.

The nave of the building had been expanded with the addition of transepts on each side that transformed the structure into the shape of a cross.

In 1890, a recessed chancel was added to further elaborate the altar. Then the installation of ornate windows was further emphasized by the addition of a vestibule.

The Rectory was built in 1898. The Parish House was built in 1935. The Educational Building was built in 1959.

Hurricane Camille

Through the years, the church structure was considered one of the finest examples of Gothic style in the South — until the night of August 17, 1969 — when it was completely destroyed by Hurricane Camille.

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Rebuilding

In the ensuing days of shock and grief and suffering – from the chaos and ruins, a few items belonging to the church were recovered. Those were cleaned and repaired and took their place in the re-created structure. Among the items found was the Celtic cross from the central gable of the Educational Building. This simple cross of plain wood now hangs above the altar in the new church. —The Cross of Christ in which Old Trinity and New Trinity is one.



From the beginning, it was obvious that the re-creation of Trinity Church would be a job requiring an exceptionally able architect. Starting with only an ornamental wood carving, the Celtic Cross, a paneled cypress door, and the memories of the Congregants, Architect Fritz von Osthoff of the Blich Architectural firm, drafted and penned the likeness of the buildings in recreating a true rendering.

The outward appearance is much the same as the destroyed edifice. The interior is also the same design but more commodious with wider aisles and more space between the pews – and with enhanced lighting. A larger and well-appointed altar was replicated. — And a larger transept was constructed.

The Parish House consists of a beautifully appointed reception room, a large central hall equipped with folding doors, which when closed, provide eight class rooms, a functional kitchen, choir room, a library, offices for the rector and his secretary and restrooms.

On November 14, 1971, the re-created Trinity Episcopal Church was consecrated. It was built after the Gothic style as was the original architectural gem that was consecrated on July 31, 1851. The present church stands just westward from the original site as re-created after Camille's devastation.



Following the losses of Hurricane Camille, even though **Rev. Hardin** was always readily available, he too was suffering from the stresses of losses of friends and property — not only had he lost his church and home — but also his wife. The Church community redoubled their efforts, not only to benefit the church, but to salve the soul of their rector.

During the interim of church construction, the guilds of St. Monica, St. Cecilia and Martha, continued their activities in planning cake and rummage sales, white elephant sales, and sustaining their seasonal Silver Teas.



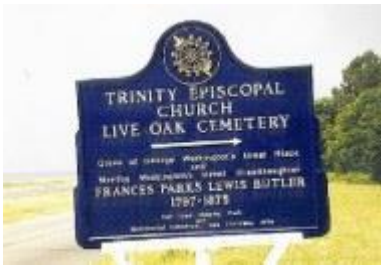
From its earliest days, the facilities available to Trinity Church have steadily grown. The most recent addition to the church facilities is an Education Building completed in the spring of 1993. Besides housing the Trinity Nursery and playground, it also provides church-school

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rooms, a crib room, a library, and a music room. The Vestry of Trinity Church has recently developed a new site plan, with prioritized and strategic goals to respond to the growing needs of the congregation and parish community.

Trinity Episcopal Church in Pass Christian continues as a landmark for many Christians living on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The architecturally beautiful church building stands cozily among ancient live oaks and lush lawns facing the Gulf of Mexico.

Pointing the Way



A Historic Marker was placed on Hwy. 90 in “Trinity Rhea Memorial Park” showing the way to the Frances Parke Lewis Butler burial plot in Live Oak Cemetery. It was presented in 1976 by the Daughters of the American Revolution Gulfport Chapter and the Pass Christian Bicentennial Committee. Both groups were interested in bringing recognition to the historic relevance of George Washington’s descendant.

An annual fundraiser at the park on Hwy 90 is Trinity’s Pumpkin Patch.

