

# A New Old Railing for St. Thomas' Church

Franklin A. Robinson, Jr., St. Thomas' Parish Historian  
From the *Marlton Community Advocate*, September 2010

In 1888 a brick bell tower was added on the west side of St. Thomas' in memory of Bishop Thomas John Claggett, the first Episcopal bishop consecrated on American soil, and first Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. Architect Thomas Buckler Ghequier of Baltimore designed the tower in the Gothic Revival style in conformance with plans to 'Gothicize' the entire church. Messrs. W. Whittington, E.J. Selby and John Wilson were the contractors. Funds had been gathered from parishioners and congregations throughout the United States. The bell was given in memory of William D. Bowie. The cost was \$675, \$350 of which was raised by the congregation with \$200 given by other congregations, and the remaining cost being made up from further donations.

*The Baltimore Sun* ran an article describing the tower's dedication in July 1888.

"The tower of St. Thomas Parish Church, near Croome, Prince George's County, Md., the Rev. Thomas J. Packard, rector, was dedicated yesterday in the presence of a large congregation...

At the service yesterday morning the clergy present were the Revs. Thomas J. Packard, rector; John H. Elliott, S.T.D. of Ascension parish, Washington, D.C.; William C. Butler of Queen Anne's Parish; J.J. Page, of Holy Trinity parish; James B. Avirett, of Trinity Church, Upper Marlborough, Prince George's county, and Alexander Y. Hundley, of St. John's parish, Prince George's and Charles Country [sic]. ...

Prior to the administration of the holy communion, the Rev. Dr. John H. Elliott preached a sermon, his theme being the struggle for the episcopate before the revolution...

Congregation and clergymen lunched under the trees, and at three o'clock another service was held, and the Rev. Thos. O. Tongue preached the sermon." *The Baltimore Sun*, 19 July 1888

The tower's Gothic Revival railing was three lancet arches on each side of the tower's belfry mimicking the opening of the belfry and the lancet-arched windows below. Over the years the railing deteriorated and was eventually replaced in the 20th century by the more common and familiar square picket railing. While functional, the railing's style was totally out of keeping with the tower's intended and original design. During the renovation of the church in the 1950s the railing was removed altogether. In 1954 a square picket railing was restored to the tower but it was not historically accurate.

The county's Historic Property Grant Program made it possible for St. Thomas' Parish to restore the railing and therefore the bell tower to its original appearance. A grant was applied for in 2008 and awarded in 2009. Crolet and Son were contracted to restore the railing to the original Gothic Revival style using vintage photographs and drawings. Crolet and Son also did the work of removing the old railing and installing the new one. All this was accomplished in the spring of 2010 and once again St. Thomas' took on its pleasing appearance of blended Victorian and Colonial elements.