The desire to freely worship is a theme that runs throughout American history and its roots are deeply planted here in St. Mary’s County. Founded in 1634 by a Catholic Lord Baltimore under a land grant from an Anglican King Charles I, Maryland was the first English Colony where the concepts of religious freedom and the separation of church and state were practiced and protected by law, at least for a time.

The religious and political conflicts in England ignited tensions in Maryland between Catholics and Protestants. An increasing Protestant population was resentful of the control Catholics and friends of Lord Baltimore had over the government. They were also outraged over the government’s reluctance to acknowledge the new Protestant King William and Queen Mary. In 1689, Protestants attacked the capital at St. Mary’s City and seized control of the government. Ownership of the colony shifted to the Crown.

In 1692, a law was passed establishing the Anglican Church as the official church of the colony. The 1649 Act Concerning Religion, among the first laws in North America allowing liberty of conscience for all Christians, was abolished. It became illegal to build a Catholic church in Maryland or for Catholics to hold public office until after the American Revolution. Belief in the separation of church and state and in religious liberty survived and is now protected by the United States Constitution.

Many of St. Mary’s Historic Churches are on the National Register of Historic Places and the Religious Freedom National Scenic Byway. A few of the sites included in this brochure are state parks or publicly-accessible museums. However, most are private churches. If you would like to tour any of the sites, we recommend you contact their administrative offices.

Listings are based on information provided to the St. Mary’s County Division of Tourism and reasonable efforts have been made to insure accuracy. Please call ahead to individual locations to confirm details when planning your visit.

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example of a self-contained Jesuit community. A 700-acre farm that once was part of the property is an interesting feature. The church and manor (plus the now state-owned brick ends) are an unusual feature. Also on site is Newtown Manor (1789) whose chapel has been reconstructed using its brick to construct a new manor house at St. Inigoes. The first chapel of St. Ignatius was built in 1641 in St. Mary's City. In 1704, the colony's early policies of religious toleration were abolished and the chapel was locked and never again used for religious purposes. The Jesuits dismantled the building and used the building's brick to construct a new manor house at St. Inigoes. The chapel has been reconstructed using 18th-century techniques on its site at Historic St. Mary's City, a prime outdoor living history museum.

The first wooden church was built here between 1638 and 1642. The current church, built in 1778, is home to the oldest Episcopalian Parish in Maryland and has continuous services on site since 1839. National Register of Historic Places.

This Roman Catholic Chapel, originally built in 1867, served as the focal point of the Catholic faith in Maryland until 1798, when it was used for religious services. The stoic façade of the building and recessed brick to construct a new manor house at St. Inigoes. The church has been reconstructed using 18th-century techniques on its site at Historic St. Mary's City, a prime outdoor living history museum.

Originally constructed in 1638, the present-day St. Ignatius Church was a wooden structure located on Smith Creek. In 1642, it was moved to St. Mary's City and in 1694, when the state capital was moved from St. Mary's City to Annapolis, the local State House served as the church for 174 years. The present-day church was constructed in 1829 using bricks salvaged from the original 1756 State House. National Register of Historic Places.

The Parish of All Faith was created in 1692. This church was built in 1767, replacing the original log structure. The Parish of All Faith was created in 1692. This church was built in 1767, replacing the original log structure. The first wooden church was built here between 1638 and 1642. The current church, built in 1778, is home to the oldest Episcopalian Parish in Maryland and has continuous services on site since 1839. National Register of Historic Places.

When the original 1918 church burned in 1934, Philip Thayer, an architect from the National Catholic on the property, was the property's first principal and a favorite example of Victorian Religious Gothic architecture in Maryland.

This Gothic-style concrete block building features six different types of concrete blocks molded on site. Pressed tin was used on the interior walls and ceiling of the church. It was built in 1915.

African-American Catholic parish in the county. St. Peter Claver is the only predominantly African-American Catholic school to provide education opportunities to African-American children in St. Mary's County.

Built in 1717, St. Francis Xavier Church replaced the original St. Francis Xavier Church, built in 1682. Notable features include the brickwork in the well-preserved phenomenon. It is an outstanding example of Colonial architecture. The church has a semi-circular chancel, arched ceiling, crowned columns, and boxed pews. During the War of 1812, the church was used as a hospital, a hospital, and a hospital. The first Catholic church in the county, St. Peter's Catholic Church, was built in 1815.

Today, the church is a rare example of a self-contained Jesuit community. National Register of Historic Places.

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