

# **The Dutch Church of St. Thomas**

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A church that has been in existence for more than 300 years must, by necessity, have a notable history. Even more notable is the fact that. Despite disasters both man made and natural, the St. Thomas Reformed Church (formerly known as the Reformed Dutch Church) never disbanded. Who were these people and the ministers who served them? When and why did they switch from the Dutch Reformed to the St. Thomas Reformed Church in America? What held this congregation together?

The Rev. E.T. Corwin, in his Manual of the Reformed Dutch Church in America, puts the founding date as 1660. Research so far has not found any specific references to confirm this date. The *St. Thomas Tidende* printed a Historical Sketch in its February 21, 1917 edition that puts the organization date of the church in 1688 by the members of the Dutch West India Company. History books record that the Dutch claimed St. Thomas in 1657. In Corwin's list from the Holland Documents is a reference dated April 4, 1644 of a preacher at St. John by the name of John William Scotus. According to the various histories of the islands, neither St. John nor St. Thomas was settled at this time. Only St. Croix dates its beginnings under the English and the Dutch in 1625. The *Curacao Papers* from the *New Netherland Documents* indicate that the Dutch were on St. Croix in 1643 and 1644. With this information it appears that Scotus may have been on St. Croix rather than St. John and therefore the first Dutch Reformed church in these islands. The *Calendar of References to Churches of America* compiled by Corwin includes many references to the West Indies in general in the early 1600's. These references were not translated into English nor were they brought to America.

The church building on St. John was destroyed in a hurricane in 1793 and not rebuilt. A plaque is all that is left of the church. This was transported to the St. Thomas church where it hangs today. When membership in the church on St. Croix dwindled and the church disbanded in 1792, the communion silver was entrusted to the St. Thomas Church. The church building was conveyed to the Lutheran Church in Christiansted. Although occupied by the Lutherans, the building is still known today as the "Dutch Church." The sexton's dwelling belonging to the church was conveyed to

the government and funds derived from the transaction along with funds left in the treasury were to be used for the indigent on St. Croix. In 1833, the Elders, Deacons and the pastor, Anson Dubois, of the St. Thomas requested in a long letter to the Danish government that the money might be better used as a scholarship fund for educating young men for the Christian ministry. Preference, of course, to be given to applicants from St. Croix or other of the Danish Islands. The request was denied. Of interest in the reply to the Danish government, Pastor Dubois end with "When the way opens in providence for the formation of a Reformed Dutch Church in St. Croix we shall feel encouraged to address government a second time in relation to these funds." Any remaining funds have long since been disposed of. The communion silver was returned to St. Croix upon its reorganization in 1992.

A number of references to St. Thomas in Corwin's list of Holland Documents for the late 1600s were not a part of the documents that were translated and included in the Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York. The translations and availability of those papers would shed much light on those formative years.

Records do not indicate that the congregation had a building of its own in the beginning but shared a room in Fort Christian with the Lutheran congregation until 1679. The Lutherans held services in the morning and the Dutch Reformed in the afternoon. (John Knox, *A Historical Account of St. Thomas W.I.*) The Danish government recognized only the Lutheran Church (state church) and the Reformed Dutch Church. According to Kay Larsen in her book *Dansk Vestindien 1666-1917*, on October 16, Pieter Jansen, a Dutchman from Curacao had a fight with Governor Iversen "outside the Reformed Dutch Church." This may have been the building designated on a chart as a Reformed Dutch Church located in the savannah east of the fort near the seashore. As late as 1850, old tombstones were to be found in the neighborhood. (Knox)

The first named pastor to supply the church was Oliandus, arriving in 1685 and departing in 1688. According to Knox he was a Colonist in 1678 and therefore entitled to an estate, receiving the deed in 1688. According to *The 1688 Census of the Danish West Indies* translated by Gary T. Horlacher, edited and annotated by David W. Knight, Oliandus was not included as a landowner. This would indicate that he did leave in 1688.

The translation provides some interesting information regarding the makeup of the people of St. Thomas and the Dutch Church. Of the 175 free adults listed, 105 claimed Reformed as their religion, with only 27 listed as Lutheran and 19 Catholic. Nationalities included 73 Dutch, 29 English, 21 Danish, 19 French and the balance a mixture of seven other countries. Although the origins of most of the people were European, the birthplaces listed in the census taken in 1691 were mainly the islands of the Caribbean. Occupations in addition to planters included a teacher, cotton ginner, innkeeper, carpenter, tailor, bricklayer, fisherman and a lathe turner.

In 1701 Pierre Labat noted the existence of the church with a regular appointed minister but questioned the existence of the building. The Danish government put out an

ordinance in 1707 forbidding all denominations other than the Lutheran and the Dutch to hold worship in building consecrated as houses of worship. (Knox)

Domini Johannes Borm was called in 1736 after the death on St. Thomas of Rev. Arnoldus Von Drummen. Shortly after the Borm's arrived Mrs. Borm passed away. Pastor Borm caused much controversy during his stay. Oldendorp in *A Caribbean Mission*, details the problems caused by Pastor Borm regarding marriages and baptisms, particularly of the slaves, performed by anyone other than legally ordained ministers as recognized by the local government. This was the period in which the Moravian Church became established, its mission to bring the Christian faith to the slaves.

Pastor Borm brought his concern to the Classis in Amsterdam regarding the Moravian mission. This concern was also passed on the churches in New York as documented in the Acts of Classis of Amsterdam in *the Ecclesiastical Records of New York*.

Borm's pastorate ended upon his death in 1743. Knox noted that he married his "sweetheart" on his deathbed. One hundred forty three members were received during his time.

The year 1744 began with the arrival of Johannes Paldamus. Church records prior to this date were destroyed. In a Historical Sketch printed in the *St. Thomas Tidende*, February 21, 1917, it was reported that these records were destroyed in a fire. Knox stated that of the 142 communicants, 89 were white and 14 colored lived on St. Thomas and 39 were dismissed with most of these going to St. Croix to help colonize the island. Rev. Paldamus started a new registry with the names of the above 142 communicants. The old church building was abandoned possibly due to the fire that destroyed the records as noted above. A new building was erected at Snegle Gad, No. 7, Queen's Quarter.

It was during this time that the actions of a certain Peter DeWindt are recorded in the Ecclesiastical Records. The son of a prominent member of the St. Thomas church, his attempts to perform as an ordained minister in New York churches is well documented in the various letters in the *Acts of the Classis of Amsterdam*. It appears that he did not officially serve the congregation on St. John or St. Thomas but his zeal took him to Holland and to New York. His mother, Catherine DeWindt, upon her deathbed in 1759, bequeathed Estate Catherineberg to the church. This was reported to the Consistory in Amsterdam as recorded by Cole, Corwin and Knox.

Shortly after his arrival in 1784, Pastor Francis M. Verboom purchased this estate from the church for \$38,000, \$30,000 to be used for the ministry of the church and \$8000 for the support of the poor. Despite being described as an immoral person who did much harm to the church, his pastorate lasted 28 years with 310 members having been received. Pastor Verboom retired to Holland in 1812 a wealthy man, having sold the town lots of Catherineberg for \$100,000 (Corwin and Knox)

The 1800s started off with fires that destroyed the building twice. The first time in 1804, along with many other houses. Despite not being insured the congregation undertook rebuilding immediately. Fire struck again, destroying this building in 1806. As many of the people in the congregation suffered losses from these fires so close together no attempt was made to rebuild. Arrangements were made with the Lutheran Church to use their building for services until Rev. Verboom left in 1812. (Knox)

Knox reports that because of the actions of Rev. Verboom and the loss of their church building the congregation became scattered and disheartened. This situation lasted for 15 years. Despite this adversity the church did not disband and in 1827, application was made to the Reformed Church in the United States for a pastor. Language was an additional reason for the request to the United States.

A new era of growth began with the arrival in 1828 of Abraham Labagh. Services were held in English for the first time. A Sunday School was begun but did not survive. Knox reported that Rev. Labagh was not only well liked by the congregation but also by the whole community. In his thirteen years as pastor, 155 members were received. Knox described his ministry as having “laid the basis, and partially built up a state of evangelical piety, such as had never before existed in the island.” A devastating hurricane struck the island in 1837. The only effect upon the church noted so far was a partial loss of \$7000, part of which was attributed to a depreciation of the Smith’s Bat Estate property (Knox)

The arrival of Philip M. Brett in 1842 continued this growth. Knox described him as being a “faithful and energetic minister of the gospel.” Although his stay lasted only three years it was very fruitful. The Sunday School previously abandoned was reorganized as a church school serving 500 children or more. Not only attended by the children of the church but also from the other churches on island.

Worship continued to be held in the Lutheran Church. But with the growth of the congregation this became an inconvenience and opened the way for a new building. The following presents the feelings of the minister and congregation:

**“We the undersigned the Pastor and wardens of the Reformed Dutch Church at St. Thomas convinced that many of our fellow citizens labor under great inconvenience from the want of sufficient accommodation in the House of God and that many (especially of the poorer classes) are entirely precluded from worshipping their Maker from this same cause. We therefore earnestly desire to remove these difficulties by the erection of a new church edifice.**

**Finding it impossible however to withdraw the Funds of the church for this purpose, we look to the well-known Benevolence of our fellow citizens to aid us in this desirable undertaking. (Note: the following was lined out– and as an inducement to contribute we would offer the lease of pews free of tax or rent for 10 years to every subscriber on one hundred dollars.)”**

**Philip M. Brett**  
**St. Thomas 13<sup>th</sup> June 1843**

A list of names follows on the document but is not very readable. The success of this petition was proven by the laying of the cornerstone of the present building on September 18, 1844. The building was made possible by the raising of \$6000 by subscription and \$11,000 of the Church's capital, which was called in. (Knox)

In the *Specifications of Contract for the Erection of the R.D. Church*, the wardens specified the size of the building, materials to be used, paint, windows and the pews. It stated in article 12 that "The ground floor of the Church is to contain one hundred and thirty pews, 90 to hold five persons each and 40 to hold four each. The gallery will contain 38 pews without the organ loft, which is to be partitioned off on both sides and entered by doors." Article 18 specified that "The work must be finished and the building placed at the disposal of the wardens within nine months from the signing of this contract." Considering the size, materials available and that it was to include everything "that is requisite to a Church except the furniture" this would seem to be an insurmountable task. Nevertheless, the building was consecrated on February 1846.

Under the heading **THE NEW REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH**, *The Times* newspaper of St. Thomas reported on February 4, 1846:

**"The members of the Reformed Dutch Congregation will hail with pleasure the announcement that their new place of worship will be opened for dedication on the ensuing Sabbath. Under the Grace of Almighty God, their exertions are about to be crowned with success – the reward of their liberality is not far distant. They will once more have a temple of their own! Where at their own seasons, they can offer up their supplication and their thanksgiving, without incommodating another congregation (the Lutheran) whose consideration and disinterestedness in according to them so cheerfully, and for so long a period, the use of their church is deserving of highest eulogiums that could be pronounced, breathing as it does so clearly the true spirit of Christianity, of all pure religion, "do into others as you would be done by."**

Rev. Brett did not remain to see his mission fulfilled, departing in 1845 following the death of his wife. That he earned the respect and love of the congregation in his short stay was evidenced by the number of letters he received after his departure and the request that he print a volume of his sermons at their expense. The dedication of the church was performed by Rev. John P. Knox. The following is an excerpt from the *St. Thomas Tidende* February 21, 1917 edition"

**"February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1846, Sabbath. This day our new Church Edifice was dedicated to the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, The Rev. P. Knox officiating assisted by Rev. Tolderlund of the Lutheran Church. Sermon from the text Psalm xiviii, 12 & 1 v. Singing by a volunteer choir**

**led by Mr. Brandt. The audience numbered at least 1,200 souls, whilst many stood without. The occasion was one of joy and gratitude.”**

Rev. Labaugh gave a pipe organ to the church on the occasion of the dedication of the new building. An imposing instrument with its many pipes graced the balcony for 111 years.

The arrival of John P. Knox as pastor in 1847 continued an era of growth culminating in an unprecedented 711 members upon his departure in 1854. (Knox) The publication of his book, *A Historical Account of St. Thomas, W.I.* continues today to be an invaluable history of the island and the “Dutch Church.” He also published a small pamphlet entitled *Statistics of the Reformed Dutch Church, St. Thomas* in 1849 detailing its status. The church had two Elders and two Deacons with three officers not in active service and eight “helpers.” The Sabbath-School has 22 male teachers and 23 female teachers. Scholars numbered 138 boys, 159 girls. School was held from “3 1/2 to 5 o’clock P.M.” Worship services were held at 12 o’clock noon. He noted a Relief Society and a Missionary Society. Pews were rented annually. Destitute persons were provided for as Pensioners. There were 331 members in full communion, the earliest communicant listed from 1780 to the latest date of 1848. In his historical account of the island he described the congregation as having very few Dutch members, with the congregation consisting of Presbyterians from Scotland, Ireland, England and America, German Lutherans and Roman Catholic.

John P. Knox and his wife were credited with the encouragement and inspiration for the noted educator and scholar, Edward W. Blyden to pursue an education in the United States. Unable to achieve this in the United States he left for Africa, studying in Liberia. Born in St. Thomas in 1832 of slave parents, he was baptized in the Dutch church. His parents Romeo and Judith Blyden were members of the church with Romeo serving as a “helper.” The granddaughter of Rev. Knox, Edith Holden, wrote an exhaustive biography of Blyden published in 1966.

From the same *Historical Sketch* printed in the February 21, 1917 edition noted above, the following presents some interesting information, although contradictory in some respects:

**“This is a true copy from the Consistory of the Reformed Dutch Church, St. Thomas D.W.I/ extending from 1744 to July 20<sup>th</sup> 1876.**

**In 1843 the first Sunday school in St. Thomas was organized in the Reformed Dutch Church by Rev. Mr. Brett, who was the rector at that time.**

**In 1855 Rev. William O. Allan of Scotland became the Pastor; for 23 years he faithfully labored here. The Parochial School, which had Teachers from our Island, now had them from Scotland, and became very prosperous, some of the best people having received their education in this School.**

**In 1870 Mr. Allan organized Bethesda Day School in the lower part of our City for the poorer children, and while the former had been merged into the government System, the latter is still in existence and is now controlled by the Moravian Denomination.”**

Returning to 1852 and Rev. Knox, the following is an excerpt from a letter written by a Lutheran pastor, rev. Charles P. Krauth to a friend and was supplied by his great-great granddaughter who was passing through St. Thomas in 1998.

**St. Thomas, November 1852**

**Among all the surprises of your life, I am sure you cannot have had one so great as that I feel, when I tell you that though I have not been more than twenty-four hours in this city, I am actually a housekeeper and pastor of a church in it – not of a Lutheran church as you might imagine, but of the Dutch Reformed Church under the care of Rev. Dr. Knox. I have commenced at the end- now I will go back to the beginning. Dr. Knox’s wife and family have been in the United States since last spring. Mrs. Knox, who had recently been confined, wrote by the steamer of October to her husband that all had gone well, and that she was rapidly returning to health. The steamer Petrel, in which I came yesterday, brought a letter to Dr. Knox telling him that three days subsequent to his wife’s letter, after a sudden convulsion, she expired. She left six children, two of them infants: all of them were with her; Dr. Knox of course is obliged to return to the United States, to be gone at least until January-how much longer he knows not. It is highly important that his place should be filled. The letters I had brought had made me known to influential men here, and in the evening I was waited on by the officers of the church to beg me to fill his place. SO remarkable a call seemed to me to demand careful consideration, and though our luggage was already on the West End (Santa Cruz) schooner, I had it removed. This morning, feeling that I had all the facts before me, I entered into the arrangement. Part of it is that we are to occupy Dr. Knox’s house, one of the most elegant and beautifully situated in the whole place-high, airy, cool, commanding one of the most charming views of sea, city or mountain that the eye ever fell on. Instead of the confinement of a boardinghouse, we have possession of a commodious and elegant mansion, surrounded by the best houses and best society often place. My duties will be to preach once on each Sabbath, and lecture, if I am 3willing, on Wednesday night. The Dutch Reformed Church is very strong, wealthy, and influential, and the position is very desirable.”**

In 1866 disaster struck in the form of a cholera epidemic followed by a devastating hurricane, earthquake and tidal wave. The lucrative trading business the island had enjoyed for so long moved elsewhere. The church entered a period of slow decline, with membership dropping to only 75 in 1897 despite a succession of pastors.

In 1878 the sale of the school building behind the church to the government was the basis of a controversy dividing the congregation, culminating in a petition served in Rev. Allan and recorded in the Deed Office on St. Thomas, Book YY, page 11, No. 6. An excerpt from the minutes of a meeting of the Council of the Dutch Reformed Church dated February 23, 1978, follow:

**Mr. Stevens submitted a proposal from the School Board for the purchase of the RDC School Building, to be used as one of the Communal Schools about being established by the Government on the Compulsory System, for the sum of Two Thousand Five Hundred Dollars.**

**There being a mortgage on the School House and lot of Two Thousand Dollars in favor of the Rev. W.O. Allan, for money advanced by him for the extension and improvement of the School House, it was considered a favorable opportunity to dispose of the property to the Government for the purpose originally intended, therefore after mature deliberation it was RESOLVED to sell the Property to the Government for the use of a Communal School for the sum of \$2,500 with the understanding that the Vacant Lot in front of the building, now used as a playground, shall not be built upon..."**

It appears that this property was purchased at approximately the same time as the land upon which the present church building stands. From some of the recordings of the properties a building may have been present as the above excerpt indicates that the loan from Rev. Allan was for renovation. The controversy surrounding the title and the use of the land and building continued until recently. Many of the older members still hope for its return to the church.

In 1899 Rev. Arcularius began a three-year pastorate. Excerpts of a very lengthy letter written to a friend printed in the magazine *At Home and Abroad* presents a detailed description of the church and the island. Of the church he wrote:

**"The Reformed Church is a good-sized building, and, on a pinch, will hold nearly 900 persons, and possibly more. It has a gallery all around it, the choir being placed in the rear of the church facing the pulpit. The pulpit is mahogany, of which the people are very proud. The church is n easy one in which to speak and I find it very comfortable in that respect. My audience in the morning is excellent, being composed almost entirely of my own people. In the evening the church is crowded, many from the Lutheran and other churches being present, in addition to my own people."**

Of the "Sabbath-School" he noted that it was not very large but prospects were good for it to grow. There were very few books in the Sabbath School library. Statistics to the South Long Island Classis included an average of 100 members.

The Rev. Cornelius Brett, President of the Board of Mission visited the church in 1902 on the occasion of installing C.M. Perlee as the new pastor. Following this visit a brief history written by Re. Brett was printed in The Mission Field, which included a photograph of the interior of the church. Cornelius Brett was the only son of Philip M. Brett, pastor from 1842 to 1844.

The business condition of the island at the turn of the century was poor. Prospects of the sale of the islands to the United States were strong although no dates had been set. Membership and the finances of the church reflected the sad state of affairs and the possibilities of its doors being closed loomed once again. Continued aid from the Board of Domestic Missions was needed. In a letter to rev. C.J. Scudder dated May 16, 1905, Rev. Perlee noted that the sale of the islands would bring an increased presence of the U.S. Navy and prosperity with the improvement of the harbor facilities. He stated that "...although financially and from a business point of view, our Church does not stand out bright (still in proportion to the much larger congregation here it certainly does compare well in this respect) but in a spiritual point of view I venture to say that our Church is one of such long standing and existence exercises a great influence for good in this community as the Pastors if the other Churches have said, one of whom also said it would be a loss to our island if our church were closed." He noted that despite being small the congregation gave liberally when called upon. He closed the letter by saying "I most earnestly request the Committee and the Classis to give their attention to the spiritual state of our Church in equal terms with the financial condition of our Church, and they will, I have no doubt, see the admirability in behalf of the Master's work here to recommend us to the continued aid of the Board..." Rev. Perlee remained until 1911.

In October of 1916 another major hurricane passed directly over St. Thomas with sustained winds of 125 mph and gusts to 160 mph. Both the parsonage and the church suffered "some" damage.

On February 18, 1917, Rev. Leslie presided over the memorable service of farewell to the Danish governor, Henri Konow upon the transfer and sale of the island to the United States.

Following the purchase of the islands by the United States, the mission Board sent one of its secretaries, a Mr. Demarest, to make a study of the conditions of the church and the impact of the purchase on the church. A large number of Navy and Marine personnel were assigned to the island and did not have a chaplain. This presented the church an opportunity for a service to the island. A year later Bradley Folensbee was assigned Classical Missionary to the church by the South Classis of Long Island and began his pastorate immediately following graduation from the New Brunswick Seminary.

In 1918, Rev. and Mrs. Bradley Folensbee arrived on St. Thomas. They found the church to be without a missionary society, no midweek prayer meeting and no young people's society. With much diligence and faith in their mission the church grew

in numbers once again. In an article in *The Mission Field*, Rev. Folensbee reported that at, "last night's service there were 145 present, 30 Marines." The Folensbees left the church in 1923 and returned to the States. They found later that their stay in St. Thomas, described later in a letter dated March 8, 1949, to Dr. James M. Martin, Stated Clerk, was where they "...spent five of the happiest years of our life."

In 1938, the Rev. A. Leslie returned. He had served briefly from 1916 to 1918. But in 1939 ill health forced him to return to his home in Canada. At the regular 1941 Spring Classis Session of the South Classis of Long Island, it was reported that the Rev./ Bruno Bruns, a missionary of the foreign Board, was serving the church. He had just returned from Japan where he had been a missionary for a number of years. As Rev. Bruns was a member of the Classis Pleasant Prairie, the church was transferred to Pleasant Prairie in Iowa. It wasn't until 1947 that the church was transferred to the Classis of New York.

In 1943, Rev. Bruns made application to the Chaplain Corps of the United States Armed Forces for a commission as Chaplain. This was done with the approval of the Consistory and he was given a leave of absence to serve his country. The Consistory felt that it was their contribution to the war effort. The Rev. Bruns did not return to St. Thomas but continued his chaplaincy until 1953.

Despite being without a pastor, the church prepared a Centennial celebration that included concerts, services and a special program presented on February 8, 1944. The old pipe organ was reconditioned. Hugo Bornn, well known in the New York area as an organist and pianist, directed and played for this special occasion. A native son and former organist of the church, he gave many memorable concerts in the church and the community over the years.

Once again the congregation found itself without a pastor. Except for the dedication of the Consistory, the doors would have definitely and finally closed. As the secretary to the small but loyal body, D. Victor Bornn used his skills as a letter writer to solicit the support and aid of the Board of Domestic Missions as well as the Rev. Folensbee and the many friends and contacts that he and his brother, Roy Bornn, had made through the years.

His efforts were rewarded by the arrival in 1955 of Charles Ausherman who served as a summer student minister, returning again the following summer. A student of the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, he was well liked by the congregation and brought a renewed vitality to the church sparking a regeneration that continues today. This renewal gave the congregation the desire and drive to replace the old pipe organ with an Allen organ. The pipes were left in place providing an appropriate backdrop. The Rev. Donald Lam arrived in 1958 and the church has not been without a pastor since.

Calvin Hall was dedicated June 9, 1963, as the new Sunday school Annex. December of 1970 saw the first edition of the church newsletter published by Pastor Luben. The Outreach Committee set up an Alien Orientation Program to assist alien

construction workers who had been imported from other islands with very little guidance to help them adjust. One of the major problems was the inability of the children to be served by the local educational system. In 1972 the Caribbean Summer House Program was instituted to provide a reading program to help these children upgrade their reading skills. This program was the beginning of a very popular summer camp that continues today.

In 1971, the governing body of the church was expanded to include four “councilwomen.” These pioneers were Nina Corneiro, Betty Cooper, May Villa and Regina Bornn. The following year it became “legal” for women to be elected to the Consistory.

An After School Program was instituted in 1976 again in response to a need of the children. This was attended by about 25 children from various schools and churches.

Hurricanes once again blazed their paths of destruction across the island, beginning with Hugo in 1989. Hurricane Marilyn devastated St. Thomas on 1995, less than two months following the arrival of the new pastor, Jeffrey Gargano and his family. Undaunted by the destruction the congregation held their regular service on the terrace of Blackbeard’s Castle the following Sunday. Later the Hebrew Congregation offered their building on Sunday Mornings until the church could be made safe again. What could have been a true disaster – presenting an insurmountable task of rebuilding has instead been a challenge that has brought the St. Thomas Reformed Church into the limelight. Volunteers from all parts of the country responded to the call of help in rebuilding the church and parsonage. Their presence, particularly in the early months following Marilyn, provided the congregation with not only physical labor in rebuilding, but also a spiritual restoration of their battered lives and renewed hope.

Although the doors were almost closed on more than one occasion, the RCA, the many friends and pastors have come to its rescue keeping their doors open. Today it continues its mission of serving not only the residents of the island but also the “snowbirds” who arrive each winter to enjoy the warmth of the climate as well as the warmth of the people. The Sunday school program, as in earlier times, proves to be popular. A Youth Program, lacking at the beginning of the century as noted by Rev, Folensbee is now undergoing a strong mission of involving the young people in the church program, a newly initiated Learning Center serves student from the church, other churches and schools with a much needed after school assistance program as in earlier times. This was made possible by the acquisition of property across the street from the church in 1997, which provides space for the church office, Sunday School classrooms and the Learning Center. With the new millennium came the opportunity to acquire the parking lot adjacent to the office.

From early in the history of the St. Thomas Reformed Church, education has been one of the major concerns of the congregation and its pastors. From the book *Night of the Silent Drums* by Isador Paiewonsky, there is a reference to an Isack Gronnewald,

an old Dutch Reformed minister residing in St. John in 1733 who also taught the planter's children to read. He also taught the slaves to read the Bible, despite its being against the law. Volume X, page 27 of *the Acts of the Classis of Amsterdam* listed him as of St. Thomas in 1716. This highlights the dedication and the commitment of all those who have served the church despite the hardships and personal tragedies so many have endured.

## List of Pastors

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 1685-1688    | Oliandus                                    |
| 1866-1733    | Supplied                                    |
| 1712         | Christian Strumphias                        |
| 1718         | Isaac Gronewald                             |
| 1733-1736    | Arnoldus Van Drummen                        |
| 1737-1744    | Johannes Borm                               |
| 1744-1752    | John Paldamus                               |
| 1752-1763    | John Monteneag                              |
| 1763-1784    | B.J. Scheers                                |
| 1784-1812    | Francis Verboom                             |
| 1827         | Church transferred to American jurisdiction |
| 1828-1841    | Abraham Labagh                              |
| 1842-1845    | Philip M. Brett                             |
| 1845-1854    | John P. Knox                                |
| 1954-1855    | Elisha Whittlesey                           |
| 1855-1874    | W.O. Allen                                  |
| 1882-1886    | Anson Du Boix                               |
| 1887-1890    | Andrew J. Hageman                           |
| 1890         | John C. Lowe (died shortly after arrival)   |
| 1890-1893    | Engelbert C. Oggel                          |
| 1894-1897    | James Foster                                |
| 1897-1899    | James C. Hume                               |
| 1899-1901    | Andrew M. Arcularius                        |
| 1902-1911    | Clarence M. Perlee                          |
| 1916-1918    | A.H. Leslie                                 |
| 1918-1923    | Bradley J. Folensbee                        |
| 1924-1925    | Philip Jonker                               |
| 1925-1928    | Albert Phaus                                |
| 1941-1943    | Bruno Bruns                                 |
| 1958-1963    | Donald A. Lam                               |
| 1967-1970    | Ronald D. Lokhorst                          |
| 1970-1974    | Herman E. Luben                             |
| 1974-1979    | Jack White                                  |
| 1981-1984    | William Hoffman                             |
| 1986-1994    | Martin Weitz                                |
| 1995-present | Jeffrey Gargano                             |

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Berrelov for Island.

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