



# Key Moments in St. Peter's History

*A series of historical highlights from the first 200 years of St. Peter – Libertytown.*

## A Church Hall by Any Other Name .....



*Figure 1 View of Sappington Hall from behind the Cross on the Patio  
January 2023*

St. Peter's Hall, the Church Hall, the Parish Hall, the Town Opera House, the Play House, the Old Hall and most recently, Sappington Hall. Over years, Sappington Hall has been known by a variety of names and has occupied two different locations on the grounds of St. Peter's; but its role in our Parish and in Libertytown, has remained largely the same.

Our first hall was originally the stone church built 200 years ago, which was repurposed in 1871 as a church hall for "Sunday School and other Church purposes", after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Church (1871-2004) was built.

Like all buildings, repairs are needed from time to time. In 1889, the local paper announced that the hall would be put in "thorough repair" and kept solely "for the uses of St. Peter's Church". Parishioners stepped up and the papers reported that [young] Edith Clemson painted then Pastor Eugene Gwynn's likeness, which was auctioned for the "snug sum of \$200", the proceeds going for the benefit of needed repairs to the hall. In 1895, Notre Dame Academy was holding commencement exercises in the hall and charging 25 cents admission to attend the ceremonies.

A few year later, a Thanksgiving Bazaar and Oyster Supper was held by the ladies of St. Peter's (sounds very similar to our Ladies Club and today's Christmas in the Country dinners!) in the Church Hall over three days, on November 24-26, 1898.

Around 1905, the Church Hall was declared unsafe and was torn down, but local residents who were interviewed in the 1920's, reported that Fr. Kavanagh arranged for the stones from that building to be used in the foundation of the building we now call Sappington Hall. Similar to the Libertytown Fire Department's Hall, which was used by different groups (including St. Peter's, prior to the building of the Parish Center) Sappington Hall, was described in the local paper as "a town hall owned by the Catholic Church [which] is a center of recreational entertainment for the community". To introduce this new

building to Libertytown, the ladies of St. Peter's gave a "public reception and free ball" in the new "opera house" as it was called, in January of 1906.

Local newspapers during that time routinely reported on the many moving picture shows, plays and dances being held in the our Opera House by various groups in Libertytown, but in 1914, Pastor Kavanagh, took a hard line when he banned modern dance steps, including the Tango, the Bunny Hug and the Turkey Trot. Prior to this ban, the paper reported that dances were held each holiday and at special times in between, with the exception of the Lenten season. John J. Hitselberger, parishioner and manager of the Opera House, assured Frederick's *Daily News* reporter that "... so far he has had no difficulties carrying out Fr. Kavanagh's wishes and he doesn't contemplate that he will have any trouble."

Apparently building on land which we didn't own, was not a cause for concern. It was 13 years, after St. Peter's built the Hall, that James M. Sappington, deeded the "land on which St. Peter's Hall stands" to Cardinal Gibbons. The building AND the land now both belonged to the Archdiocese. But we still had to wait for electricity, which didn't arrive for another 2 years!

The Church Hall was used for educational and enrichment purposes from early years. In 1922, Fr. Kavanagh was instrumental in arranging for Libertytown's first "chautaugua" experience – which was held in the Church Hall. Modeled after New York's Chautaugua Lake Sunday School Assembly, it featured educational, entertaining and inspirational topics in the afternoons and evenings over a 4 day period. And in 1927, when Notre Dame Academy opened its school to black children, classes were temporarily held in the Hall.

St. Peter's Hall continued to be the site of Chicken, Ham and Oyster Suppers in the 1940's. Then in the early 1960's, during Fr. Flahavan's pastorate, the Hall was modernized with a "gold brick" fundraising program, to put a brick façade on the building. Other renovations made while Fr. Flahavan was here included installation of a new heating system and an entirely new kitchen.

Most recently and in the memory of many current parishioners, the Hall was one of the beneficiaries of the Heritage of Hope Campaign. It was in 2002, with some of those funds, that the "Old Hall" (we now had the Parish Center, so there was a need to differentiate between the two buildings) received a facelift, inside and out – and a new name – Sappington Hall. The naming of the building in honor of the Sappington family, reflects the legacy which this family has in the 200 year history of our Parish – from our founding in 1823, when their Coale ancestors donated land and built our original stone chapel, to land donations for the 2<sup>nd</sup> church and rectory in 1869, Notre Dame Academy in 1892, land for the Grotto in 1914, land for the Hall in 1918 and land for the adjacent parking lot in 1953 - to name just a few of the family's more generous gifts.

In May 2006 – 17 years ago this Spring, Msgr. Dietzenbach blessed five statues and reliefs sculpted by Timothy Schmalz. Three are located on or near Sappington Hall - the *Stone Corpus*, on the patio outside the Hall, *Christ Washing Peter's Feet* relief on the outside wall of the Hall facing Rt. 75, and to the right of the main entrance to the Hall, the *Holy Family* relief - this last relief in appreciation of Fr. John A. Dietzenbach.

Sappington Hall continues to serve the needs of St. Peter's – and the local community; with Knight's sponsored bingo, Ladies Club bake sales, Red Cross blood drives, freezer storage in the basement for Our Daily Bread casseroles, community and ministry meetings, and youth group gatherings - just to name a few.