



# Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

## **St. Peter's Church – the original stone chapel**

Richard Coale, Sr., a Catholic living in Liberty and in possession of considerable means, earmarked a portion of his land for a church, in or about 1821. Over the next two years, he constructed the original stone building, which would be consecrated in September 1823.

Jesuit records reflect that the building of St. Peter's 1st church was initially overseen by the Jesuit pastor of Frederick, Fr. Francis Maleve. When Fr. Maleve died in October 1822, his successor, Fr. John McElroy, S.J. stepped in to oversee the completion of Liberty's Catholic church, writing the following after visiting Liberty on November 12 and 13, 1822:

*"Went to Liberty town for the first time, lodged with Mr Cole a respectable and wealthy Cath: gentleman who has built a neat stone church at his own expense this last summer & intends finishing it next season. Said Mass in Mr Cole's house & had 15 commts [communicants]. Gave an Exhortation & returned same day"<sup>1</sup>.*

Like all construction projects, last minute instructions were needed, as reflected in McElroy's diary 10 days before the consecration:

*"Went to Liberty today in company with Fr. Levins and [the following day] said Mass at Mr. Cole's - returned after giving some direction about the Church."<sup>2</sup>*

While there are no known records of the size or capacity of the 1<sup>st</sup> church, Fr. McElroy provides some clues after a visit in April 1824:

*"Went to Liberty to day in company with Mr. Atwood – heard confession this evening in the Ch: for the first time – Low Sunday said Mass and preached this day in Liberty had 49 Commts [communicants] the greatest number which have appeared on any former occasion – distributed pictures to the 1<sup>st</sup> Communicants who approached today for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time – the Ch: was very much crowded - returned home same day ..."<sup>3</sup>*

Even after Liberty was graced with a church of its own, Fr. McElroy's records reflect that a priest only visited Liberty to say Mass on average, once a month. St. Peter's remained a mission of St. John's and wouldn't have a resident priest for many more years; however, the parish did receive visits from the

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<sup>1</sup> Archives of the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus, Box #10/Folder # 14, on deposit at the Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Georgetown University Library, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Archbishop of Baltimore every few years. Archbishop Marechal returned to St. Peter's in 1826, and confirmed 60 people<sup>4</sup>.

Only a very few photographs remain of the 1<sup>st</sup> church.



Figure 1 Original stone chapel c.1890



Figure 2 North side of chapel with cemetery in back c. 1904

When the 2nd Church was dedicated in 1871, the 1st Church became the church hall.



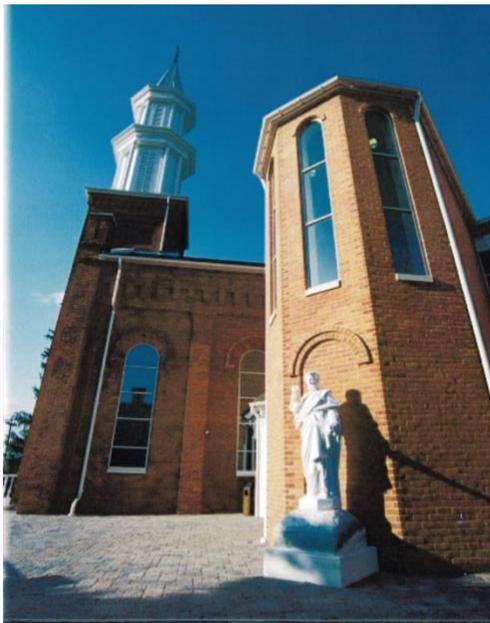
Figure 3 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Church, Rectory and the future Angel Hill c. 1890

<sup>4</sup> “Diary of Archbishop Marechal, 1818-1825”, (Philadelphia) American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, XI, 1900, p. 449.

Around 1906, when the “stone chapel turned church hall”, was finally dismantled for reasons of safety, a statue was erected to mark where the stone chapel had stood. The stones from the chapel became the foundation of a new hall, which continues to serve the Catholics in Liberty under the familiar name of Sappington Hall.



*Figure 4 East side of Campus, with St. Peter statue c. 2000*



*Figure 5 St. Peter statue Sept. 7, 2008*

The St. Peter statue, originally located on the site of the stone chapel, just outside the back of the 2<sup>nd</sup> church by the cemetery, was moved after a fire in 2004 destroyed the 2<sup>nd</sup> church.

This allowed the 3<sup>rd</sup> church to be constructed on the land which the 1<sup>st</sup> church, the 2<sup>nd</sup> church and the rectory had previously occupied.

The St. Peter statue currently stands on the patio of the 3<sup>rd</sup> church.