



Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

Bunke Memorial Crèche

William Bunke was born on September 18, 1891¹ and his younger brother, Richard was born on December 28, 1895. According to descendants of William's brother, shortly after Richard's birth, the brothers tragically lost their parents and were placed in a Baltimore orphanage. By 1900, at age 9, the 1900 census shows William living and working on the Edward Hobbs farm outside the town of Liberty. When William was 16, Charles Smith, a Catholic, married Edward's daughter Juliette and in the 1910 census was living with his wife on the Hobb's farm. As a result, William was introduced to Catholicism and in 1915, 8 years after meeting Charles, was baptized by Fr. Kavanagh, Pastor of St. Peter's, into the Catholic faith at age 24².

William was called to serve during WWI and on July 25, 1917, two months before his 26th birthday, he joined Company A of the 115th Infantry at the Frederick City Armory. After a training period in Alabama from late 1917 to early 1918, Bunke and other members of his company left for France from Hoboken, New Jersey on June 15, 1918. Before leaving for overseas, Bunke drafted a will that divided his property three ways. One third to his brother, one third to Rev. Samuel Kavanagh, and one third to Cardinal James Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, to be used to benefit the needs of St. Peter's Church. This act seems to reflect his deep connection to St. Peter's during his young life.

William served four months in the Argonne region of France. During that time he wrote letters to home and to his friends, including his pastor, Fr. Kavanagh. In a letter dated September 10, 1918 to Fr. Kavanagh, William mentions the "trench" warfare experience and also talked about going to Mass and confession in the local French Catholic churches, where the language was a

¹ William Bunke Baptismal Certificate, December 19, 1915, St. Peter's Baptismal Records, Archives of Archdiocese of Baltimore, Associated Archives at St. Mary's Seminary & University, Baltimore, Md.

² Ibid.one

BODY OF HERO SENT BACK HOME

Telegram Reaches Liberty Of Arrival In New York Of Wm. Bunke's Body.

Libertytown, October 8.—Mr. and Mrs. Charles Smith, of Libertytown, have received a telegram announcing that Private William Bunke's body arrived at Hoboken, N. J., October 6. They have directed the Cemeterial Division to turn over the body to Father Kavanaugh, of St. Peter's church, Libertytown. Father Kavanaugh met the body at Hoboken and escorted it to Libertytown.



PRIVATE WM. BUNKE.

Figure 1 courtesy, October 11, 1921 edition of *Frederick Post*,
Frederick, Maryland

bit of a challenge. This letter turned out to be one of the last letters William wrote. One month later, on October 20, 1918 - three weeks before the war ended, William Bunke was killed in action. He was 27 years old.

Originally buried in France, Bunke's remains were returned to the states three years later. At the direction of the Smith family, Fr. Kavanaugh met the body at Hoboken, New Jersey on October 6, 1921. Fr. Kavanaugh escorted the casket by train back to St. Peter's Church to lie in repose for a week. A requiem Mass was celebrated that Sunday morning. According to a *Frederick Post* article from October 17, 1921, approximately 1,000 people attended Bunke's funeral the previous day. It was quite an impressive service. The sermon was delivered by Rev. Walter Drumm, S. J., brother of Brigadier General Hugh Drumm, who was on the staff of General John Pershing. A special musical performance was given by Mrs. James Sappington, Bunke's friend from Libertytown. He received a full military burial including a 21-gun salute and taps played by a solo trumpeter.

William Bunke's love of Christmas, (his First Holy Communion was on Christmas Day in 1915³) may explain the construction of a grotto and nativity crèche in his memory - built by the parishioners and residents of Libertytown, before knowing whether he would ever be brought home for burial. The selection of St. Joan of Arc watching over the crèche, is very apropos, as she fought and died for her native France; where William died, fighting for his country.

³ Ibid.



Figure 2 Bunke Memorial Crèche and William Bunke's grave, November 1994

The Nativity scene inside the grotto on the south edge of our cemetery has been on display for over 100 years. Sebastian Grabenstein, who joined the Parish in 1948, took an interest in the grotto and asked to help with the maintenance. Until just a few years ago, Mr. Grabenstein, who turned 106 in 2022, was part of a group of volunteers who repaired and replaced the Nativity figures as needed.

William Bunke was reportedly the only soldier from Libertytown who died in WWI. He was also the only soldier from St. Peter's to give his life in the "Great War". So now you know why the Bunke Memorial is not only about Christmas but also about honoring our boys who gave so much for us and our country during WWI.