



Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

Monsignor Don Luigi Sartori



Figure 1 Fr. Don Luigi Sartori, undated Photo, courtesy of 'A Century of Growth Or, the History of the Church in Western Maryland', 1900

The Reverend Monsignor Don Luigi Sartori was born in 1843 in the Tyrol region of Italy. His was possibly the shortest pastorate at St. Peter's in Libertytown, but that is not to say that there was not something dramatic about his overall priestly career. To begin with, he was a cousin of Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarro, more commonly known today as Saint Pope Pius X (1903-1914).

He emigrated to the U. S. and entered the seminary. He was ordained a priest in 1875 in Wheeling, West Virginia.

He was attached to the Archdiocese of Baltimore and was assigned to a two-parish circuit in western Maryland, St. Patrick's in Cumberland and St. Patrick's at Fifteen Mile Creek in Allegany County, in 1879.

After this short assignment, he was assigned to another two-parish circuit which he led for many years, St. Francis de Sales in Abingdon and St. Stephen's in Kingsville/Upper Falls/Bradshaw (1880-97). This was

the longest pastorate in the first 100 years of St. Stephens. The 1880 US Census shows him living in Upper Falls. On May 19, 1889, the cornerstone of the present St. Stephen's Church was laid and on June 15, 1890, a solemn dedication for the completed Church was held. He also built a rectory.

St. Francis de Sales originally opened its doors in 1866 as St. Joseph's Mission. On March 27, 1887 (Passion Sunday), Fr. Sartori performed the dedication of St. Francis de Sales, 20 years later.

In 1886 at a construction encampment in Baltimore, several Italians were arguing. Two of the Italians began fighting. Carmi Salman was stabbed by Donati Sorocca, suffering fatal wounds to the lung and heart. Sorocca changed his clothes, said goodbye to his compatriots, and fled the scene. A grand jury was empaneled to review the case and returned an indictment against Sorocca. Fr. Sartori was requested to serve as the interpreter for the Italian witnesses who

testified about the events of the night. A review of the Baltimore Sun from that day to the present yields no further reference to these individuals with respect to arrest or trial, leading to the assumption that Sorocca made good his getaway.

According to the Baltimore Sun, once Cardinal Gibbons concluded that the parishes of St. Francis de Sales and St. Stephen's should no longer share a pastor; Fr. Sartori concluded that "he would be more useful elsewhere, where he had more work to perform." In the fall of 1897, Fr. Sartori was assigned to yet another two parish circuit - St. Peter's in Liberty and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Mechanicstown (now Thurmont). (Those two parishes were still being served by a single pastor ever since 1882, when diocesan priests replaced the Jesuits.) He was pastor for perhaps the shortest time of any priest in our history – 9 months, but he made a significant difference to the parishioners during his tenure. During that 9 month period, he suggested to Cardinal Gibbons that Thurmont was closer to Mount St. Mary's and it would therefore be closer for Our Lady of Mount Carmel to be a mission church of St. Anthony's Parish (now Mount St. Mary's), rather than St. Peter's. The Cardinal agreed – which was wonderful news for the parishioners of St. Peter's, who would no longer share a pastor for the first time in their 75 year history.

Fr. Sartori left St. Peter's in August 1898 for St. Joseph's in Midlands MD where he remained until 1904, and the US Census for 1900 shows him to be living there. St. Joseph's was founded in June 1891 and the cornerstone for the original church was laid on June 28. The first Mass celebrated in the church was Midnight Mass, Christmas 1891. Fr. Sartori became the first pastor of the church when he arrived in 1898. The current church was built in 1965-67.

In January 1904 he resigned and requested to return to Italy, though remaining a priest under the authority of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. On March 19, 1907 he was elevated to monsignor and appointed a member of the Papal household of his cousin, however, he continued corresponding with Cardinal Gibbons as late as 1921, when he wrote to express happiness over hearing that the Cardinal had recovered from a recent illnessⁱ.

He was living in Grigno, Austria, on the border with northern Italy, where he started an orphanage for boys and built a villa for himself (aptly named the Villa Sartori). At the beginning of the First World War in 1914, the Italian Army occupied Grigno and took over the Villa Sartori for its own purposes. He was removed to Solero, Alessandria, in Italy. As a naturalized US citizen, he wrote to friends in the States to try to find a copy of his naturalization papers so that he could be placed under the auspices of the US Government and the embassy in Rome. It is not known how this effort fared. When he was finally allowed to return to his home in Grigno, he remained there the rest of his life, and died there on July 13, 1933, at the age of 89, still a priest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

ⁱ 140b2, Msgr. Don Luigi Sartori to Cardinal Gibbons, 28 February 1921, Card. Gibbons Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Associated Archives at St. Mary's Seminary & University, Baltimore, MD.