



Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

Richard Coale and Catharine McSherry Coale

Richard Coale, the original benefactor of St. Peter's, was born in 1760, in northeastern Anne Arundel County (now Columbia, Maryland in Howard County), the son of a third generation William Coale.

In 1783 John Young, the owner of a 633 acres of land known as "Duke's Woods" renamed the land "Liberty Town", some say due to the fervor that followed the Revolutionary War victory, and then laid out the town into 246 lots for sale. Richard, who had recently settled in Liberty, purchased one such lot on the corner of Main and Walnut streets, building a house soon after, which would become known as "Coale Mansion".

Local histories relate that Mr. Coale befriended Mr. Young, who had no family, and as a result, Mr. Young transferred much of his land holdings to Richard Coale, which included large portions of Liberty Town. St. Peter's would be a beneficiary of a portion of this land in the years which followed.



Figure 1 Richard Coale, Sr.

Richard Coale married Catharine ("Kitty") McSherry of McSherrystown Pennsylvania, in 1786. According to descendants of the family, they lived in the Coale Mansion the remainder of their life, establishing a room in their home for visiting priests to celebrate mass from 1786 until 1823, when the 1st Church was built. Many of their children died at or near birth. The young children were first buried at the Conewago Chapel (also known as Conewago Chapel Basilica Cemetery) in Hanover, Pennsylvania, 30 miles north east of Liberty, as Liberty did

not have a

Catholic cemetery at that time.

Three sons and two daughters of the Coale's are known to have survived childhood – James McSherry, Richard Jr., William, Sarah and Anna Matilda. According to descendants of the

Coale family, the boys attended Mount St. Mary's in Emmitsburg. Sarah, who would prove instrumental to St. Peter's in the years to come, boarded at a girl's Catholic school founded by Elizabeth Ann Seton and her new religious order, Sisters of Charity (known today as the Daughters of Charity).

Catharine died in 1815 at age 49. According to the inscription on her tombstone in St. Peter's cemetery, she was originally buried at the Conewago Chapel in Hanover, Pennsylvania and reinterred in St. Peter's cemetery in October 1860.

In 1821, Richard earmarked a parcel of his land for the 1st church to be built. According to diary entries of Fr. John McElroy, S. J.¹ and Baltimore Archbishop Ambrose Marechal² (who would consecrate the 1st church two years later), Mr. Coale also financed the building of the 1st church.

Richard died in 1834 at 73 years of age. Both Richard and his wife Catharine are now buried in St. Peter's cemetery in land originally owned by Richard and designated by him for use by St. Peter's as the Parish cemetery.

¹ 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.

² "Diary of Archbishop Marechal, 1818-1825", (*Philadelphia*) *American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia*, XI, 1900, p. 440.