

Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

Fathers John Henry Conway and Eugene Summers Gwynn

We begin the new year remembering the first two diocesan priests to serve as pastors after St. Peter's ceased to be a Jesuit mission. Fr. John Henry Conway was the first to take over from the Jesuits and served St. Peter's as pastor from 1882 to 1885. Fr. Eugene Summers Gwynn followed Fr. Conway, taking over as pastor on his birthday on Jan. 1, 1886.

St. Peter's at the time shared a priest with Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Mechanicstown (now known as Thurmont). In about the spring of 1884 Father Conway moved his residence from Mechanicstown to Walnut Street in Libertytown, renting the residence of Mr. Peter Eves (previously owned by Mr. George Beard, and before that, by members of the Sweadner family. It still stands today at 9008 Walnut Street.)

John Henry Conway was born in Ireland about 1833. He emigrated to the United States, arriving in Baltimore. He worked in the tea business near Baltimore's Belair Market. After the death of his wife, he discerned a call to become a priest. He attended Mt. St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg and was ordained in 1881. The 1880 Federal Census lists him as a seminarian residing in Emmitsburg.

His first assignment was to Mt. St. Mary's College, and a year later to the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, from which he also served St. Peter's. In 1885 he was transferred to St. Augustine's Church in Elkridge. In 1893 his health began to deteriorate. He travelled to Los Angeles, but without improvement, he decided to return home. He had a further problem in Chicago and was taken to hospital, where he was anointed. On recovering, he continued his journey home. He died a week after his return, on October 27, 1893. He was buried in Bonnie Brae Cemetery (now known as New Cathedral Cemetery) in Baltimore on October 30. He was considered a conscientious priest and devoted to his vocation.

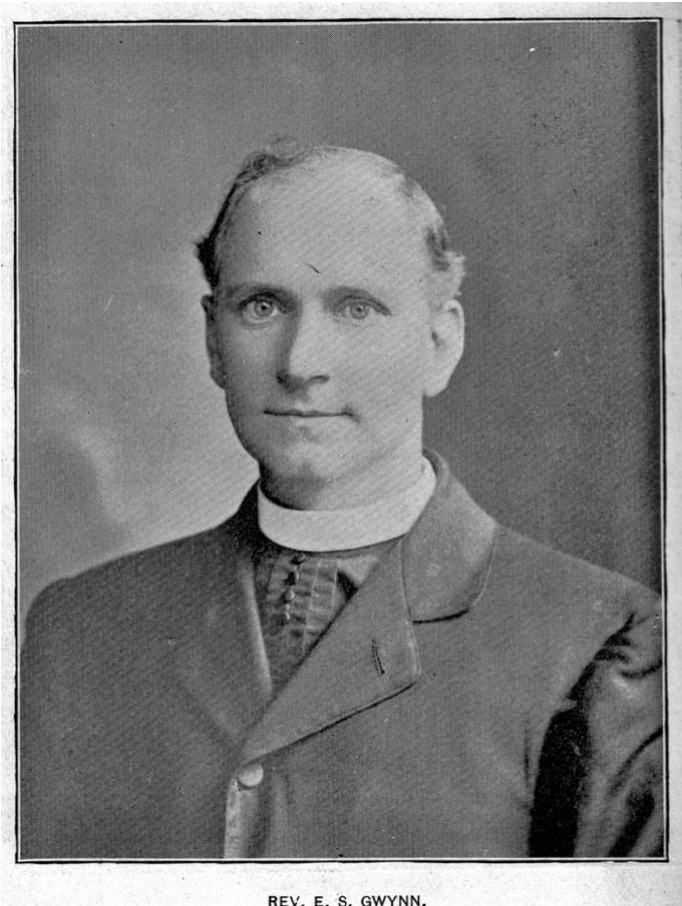
Fr. Eugene Summers Gwynn followed Fr. Conway as pastor of St. Peter's and served here from 1885 to 1889. Early on, he expressed concerns to Archbishop James Gibbons about the lack of some necessities to accomplish his new role. By February of 1886, however, he would write just months before Gibbons was named the second American Cardinal, "I am happy to inform your Grace that things are growing brighter. [Befo]re long I will have my buggy paid for + a horse too. The people at Liberty will give me a horse in March."ⁱ Not only were his parishioners fond of him, he reported to the Archbishop that area Protestants were, too. "Why I know not," he wrote. "They attend services at my church very often. I hope they may profit by their visits there."ⁱⁱ His primary accomplishment was the construction of the rectory, which is said to have been built with support from Miss Sallie Sappington. In December 1887,

ⁱ 80N10, Eugene Gwynn to James Gibbons, 23 February 1886, Cardinal Gibbons Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Associated Archives at St. Mary's Seminary & University, Baltimore, MD.

ⁱⁱ *ibid*

once the rectory was completed, he moved his residence from Mechanicstown (Thurmont) to Libertytown. It would not be the last time he would be the first pastor in a new rectory.

Fr. Gwynn was born on January 1, 1857, in TB (also noted as T. B.), Prince Georges County, MD. TB was a small 19th Century village just north of the modern-day interchange of MD Route 5 and US Route 301.



REV. E. S. GWYNN.

Fig. 1 Photo courtesy *The Catholic Red Book*, Baltimore, MD, 1902

served the parish for 24 years. He was buried on September 22 at New Cathedral Cemetery, Baltimore, MD. *The True Voice*, a national Catholic newspaper of that time, eulogized him as being “known for his untiring labors in parish work and for his great zeal.”

After completing his studies at St. Charles College, he was ordained in December 1885 and assigned to St. Peter’s, and after that to St. Martin’s at Fulton Ave. and Fayette St., Baltimore. He remained there about nine years. No doubt one of the highlights of his life was a seven-week trip to Europe accompanying Rev. William A. Reardon, the Chancellor of the Archdiocese, during which, while in Rome, he assisted at a Mass said by Pope Leo XIII.

From St. Martin’s he was then assigned to St. Edward the Confessor Church, in Poplar Grove, where in 1902 he laid the cornerstone for St. Cecelia’s, a mission of St. Edward’s. When the new church was built, Fr. Gwynn said the first Mass, and became the first pastor of St. Cecelia’s. For years he lived in the church basement, until a rectory could be built. Two additional buildings were purchased at that time to be used as a convent and a school. In 1915 the school opened with 50 students taught by the Sisters of Mercy. Fr. Gwynn began a fund for a new school, which opened in 1922.

On September 18, 1926, Fr. Gwynn died at St. Cecelia’s after a six-week illness, having