



# Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

## Calvary Group/Titanic Memorial



Life-size Crucifixion Group erected by St. Peter's Church, Libertytown, Md. FIRST MEMORIAL FOR TITANIC DEAD. Made by Daprato Statuary Company, Chicago and New York.

Figure 1 FIRST MEMORIAL TO THE TITANIC DEAD postcard c.1912

Located adjacent to the church where we worship each week, is St. Peter's cemetery, an integral part of the history of our parish. In addition to being the final resting place for many who attended at St. Peter's before us, memorials in the cemetery tell a story about the spirit of our forbearers.

Early burials are located in the St. Peter's section of the cemetery, the section closest to Route 75. Some stones can be deciphered; while others, particularly the marble stones, are worn and largely illegible. But, they stand as a literal reminder of our links to the past. In this section is a monument to the Calvary Group, often noted as the first memorial to the Titanic, which was blessed by Fr. Samuel Kavanagh to the memory of the Titanic dead on April 19, 1912 - four days after the tragedy.

RMS Titanic was built in the shipyards of Belfast, (Northern) Ireland, to be the largest and safest ship that ever steamed across the Atlantic. The construction of the multi-chambered hull made it unsinkable in the eyes of its architect. Its maiden voyage began in Southampton, England, on the morning of April 10, 1912. It stopped in Cherbourg, France, and Cobh (then-called Queenstown), Ireland, to take on passengers. An estimated total of 2,224 passengers and crew then

began a journey to New York. The journey began well, but late on the evening of April 14, Titanic brushed against an iceberg. The hull opened to admit seawater. A few hours later, in the small hours of April 15, 1912, Titanic sank. Only 710 passengers survived.

The story of Titanic is the stuff of movies and legends. It includes a newly ordained Jesuit who received a ticket from Cherbourg to Cobh as a graduation gift. Kind first-class passengers offered to pay his passage to New York, but in Cobh he received a telegram from his uncle to disembark. He did. Molly Brown, a wealthy woman from Colorado, boarded a lifeboat, took an oar, and lived to be renamed "Unsinkable." John Jacob Astor and Benjamin Guggenheim among many other men insisted women and children leave in the lifeboats. They remained on board. Also refusing the lifeboats were three Catholic priests. The best known of these is Father Thomas Byles. He assisted third class passengers to the upper decks to board lifeboats, encouraged passengers to pray the rosary, and offered general absolution to all as the ship was sinking. His cause for beatification has been introduced.

Headlines around the world broke the news a few hours later. In the following weeks, more information became available. Investigations revealed that the unsinkable ship had fewer lifeboat seats than passengers. The boats themselves were designed to transfer passengers from one vessel to another not to drift for days or even hours. The newly hired crew had not been trained to man them. A distress signal was sent to other vessels in the area. At the time, distress signals were not standardized into the familiar SOS. Not all who received the call understood. The crew of Carpathia did receive the message and arrived within 90 minutes to scoop 710 survivors from the water. As many bodies as could be found were recovered and carried to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to be identified and buried. Many more were left in the Atlantic.

News of the disaster would have stunned the residents of Libertytown, Maryland. In 1912 the population of the town was 1,300 compared to the loss of 1,400 aboard Titanic. It would have filled their thoughts and entered their prayers as they completed plans to dedicate a new statue of Calvary at the entrance to St. Peter's Cemetery on April 19. The statue would have been ordered months earlier and already been installed, when Father Samuel Kavanagh was moved to dedicate it to the memory of those who died when Titanic sank. While some were buried in Halifax, the remains of many more sank into the sea. Their bodies were not blessed, their graves not consecrated.

Were any members of the congregation connected to passengers or crew on Titanic? In a 2012 article in the Frederick News Post, Father Jason Worley recounts an undocumented story that Father Kavanagh had known someone on Titanic. Parishioner Frank Joy recalled that his grandmother, Emma Trundle, sent a photograph of the memorial to Vincent Astor, son of Titanic victim John Jacob Astor IV. The Astor family secretary wrote in reply that "He appreciates very much your kindness in sending it to him."

Father Kavanagh, assisted by Father Francis Klauder of Annapolis, dedicated the monument on Sunday, April 19, 1912, the second Sunday after Easter. The monument is approximately twelve-feet tall and includes life-sized figures of Jesus, Mary, and St. John the Evangelist. It was made by the Daprato Company of Chicago and rests on a brownstone base measuring four feet by eight feet. The monument was rededicated one hundred years later, in 2012 by then-pastor Father Jason Worley.



*Figure 2 Pastor Jason Worley, Deacon John Martin, Knights of Columbus Council 13290 and parishioners of St. Peter's hold a re-dedication of the Memorial to the Titanic Dead, April 15, 2012.*