

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

Consecration of St. Peter's First Church

Jesuit records reflect that the building of St. Peter's first church was initially overseen by the Jesuit pastor of Frederick, Fr. Maleve. When Fr. Maleve died in October 1822, his successor, Fr. John McElroy, S.J. stepped in to see the completion of Liberty's Catholic church.

St. Peter's was consecrated on September 28, 1823, as recorded in the diaries of both Archbishop Maréchal and Fr. McElroy:

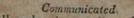
"I set out for Liberty town and got out at Mr. Coales's, an earnest and zealous man, and owner of all the land about the town. He built a fine stone chapel and intends to give land for a graveyard, and very likely, a presbytery, garden and pasture: great prospect for an ecclesiastical establishment.

- Arch Bishop Maréchal diary entry September 26, 1823ⁱ

"On the 28th I blessed the church. A great crowd from the neighborhood, and singers from Frederick and a fortepiano. Mass with the deacon and sub-deacon. I spoke twice, first on dedication of the church and secondly on confirmation. Confirmed twenty-one persons. Great joy for the Catholics." -Arch Bishop Maréchal diary entry September 28, 1823ⁱⁱ



Figure 1 Altar from original Chapel, now located in the Daily Mass Chapel of the Third Church pictured in 2023



Our village has been enlivened to-day, by the greatest concourse of people ever assembled in it, to witness the dedication of th

new Roman Catholic Church, to the service of God.

The ceremony of Consecration was performed by the Most Rev. Arch Bishop of Baltimore; previous to which, he addressed the congregation in a very impressive and appropriate discourse, on the nature of the ceremony-on the advantages the faithful were to derive from the erection of this church, &c.

After the ceremony, a solemn Mass was sung, by the present pastor, the Rev. Mr: M'Elroy, assisted by the Rev. Messrs. Wiseman and Egan, of St. Mary's Seminary, as deacon and sub-deacon. After the gospel was sung, the Rev. Mr. Wiseman preached an excellent sermon. At the end of Mass, the Arch Bishop administered the sacrament of confirmation to a number of persons.

The manner in which the whole was conlucted, must have produced in the minds of he audience, the most favorable impressions. "he procession of the clergy, which moved from the church to the Arch Bishop's lodgigs, to escort him thence to the church, was juite interesting. The richness of their oraments, the regularity and decorom obserred by them, was truly edifying. To the lalies and gentlemen composing the choir of Si ohn's church in Frederick-Town, much creit is due-their exertions to add to the sominity of the occasion were very successful; e have rarely heard such music in this part the country. Liberty, Sept. 28, 1823.

Figure 2 Newspaper account of the Consecration, clipping located in Fr. McElroy's diary The following are Fr. McElroy's diary entries, of the days leading up to and following the consecration:

September 26th – departed in company with the A.B.[Arch Bishop] for Liberty.

September 28th – Made arrangement this morning for the consecration of St. Peter's Ch. at Liberty – the following are the particulars of the ceremony – The R. R. Messrs. Wiseman and Egan from Mt. St. Mary's Seminary came to assist - I also had six boys with their albs and sashes with them we formed a procession -Mr. Egan in front with the Cross and on each side an acolite with candles followed by the remaining boys and Mr. Wiseman and *myself in the rear – in this manner we proceeded to the* Bishop's lodgings /Mr. Coale's residence, a block from the church] where he joined the procession and returned to the Church when the Veni Creator was sung by the Choir. The A. Bishop then addressed the Congregation on the nature of the ceremony and then after which he commenced the Benediction – this being done – Mass was commenced solemnly with Deacon & Sub - the Choir from Fredk: attending on the occasion – after the Gospel the Rev. Mr. Wiseman preached and after the last alelution, the Arch B. gave Confirmation – the exercises closed by the Le Deum – there were present an immense concourse of people - inthe evening we had vespers and a short explanation of the sign of the Cross.

September 29th – this day had Mass in the new church at 10 o'clock – a good number attended. I gave an instruction on the Feast of the Angels. The arch Bishop and myself returned [to Frederick] this evening.ⁱⁱⁱ

Even 200 years ago, ceremonies of this magnitude and the subsequent travel required a day to recover, as reflected in Fr. McElroy's diary entry of September 30th: "this day remained home with the Arch Bishop."^{iv}

ⁱ "Diary of Archbishop Maréchal, 1818-1825", (*Philadelphia*) American Catholic Historical Society of *Philadelphia*, XI, 1900, p. 449.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ 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. ^{iv} Ibid.