

# Key Moments in St. Peter's History

*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.

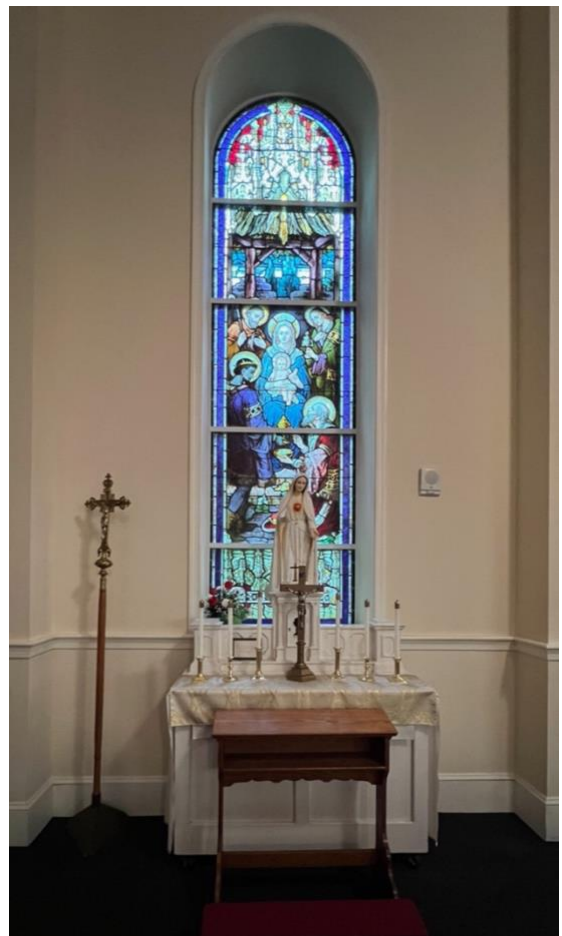
St. Peter's was consecrated on September 28, 1823, as recorded in the diaries of both Archbishop Maréchal and Fr. McElroy:

*"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, 1823<sup>i</sup>

*"On the 28<sup>th</sup> 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, 1823<sup>ii</sup>



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

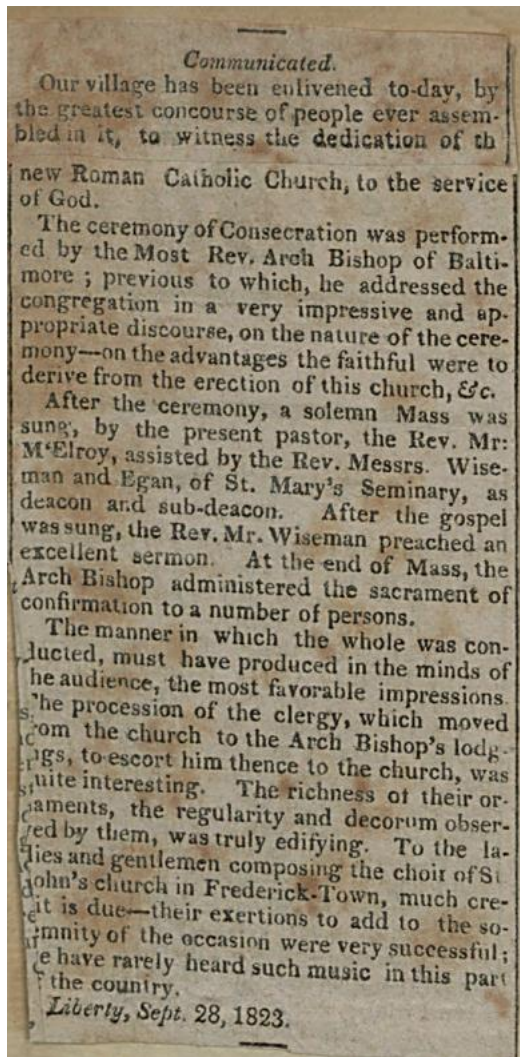


Figure 2 Newspaper account of the Consecration, clipping located in Fr. McElroy's diary

The following are Fr. McElroy's diary entries, of the days leading up to and following the consecration:

**September 26<sup>th</sup>** – departed in company with the A.B.[Arch Bishop] for Liberty.

**September 28<sup>th</sup>** – 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 acolyte 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 alution, the Arch B. gave Confirmation – the exercises closed by the Le Deum – there were present an immense concourse of people – in the evening we had vespers and a short explanation of the sign of the Cross.

**September 29<sup>th</sup>** – 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.<sup>iii</sup>

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 30<sup>th</sup>: "this day remained home with the Arch Bishop."<sup>iv</sup>

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

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> 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.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.