

Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

Libertytown Tournaments and Picnics

St. Peter's hosted jousting tournaments from 1887 until 1953. Intended as fundraisers, the event at St. Peter's typically opened the tournament and picnic season in Frederick County. Most were often held on the first Wednesday in August at Pine Mountain Park one half-mile south of Libertytown. Jousting was followed by picnicking, carnival games, and dancing to live music.

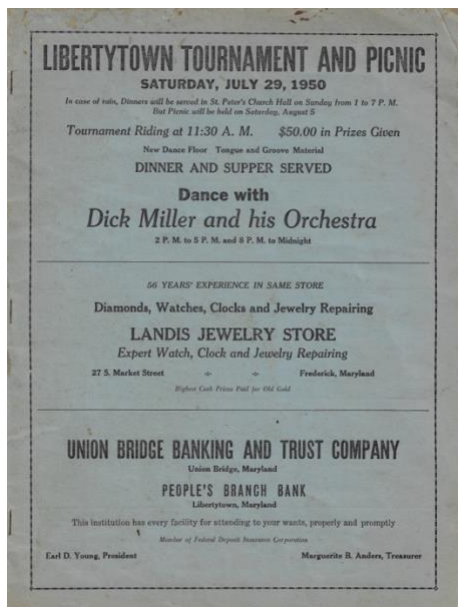


Figure 1 1950 Program

Ring jousting was a popular social and sporting event in Maryland from the end of the Civil War into the 1950s. Although less common today, jousting is still a sport in Maryland in the 21st century and as of 1962, when it was signed into law, the official state sport of Maryland. Ring jousting is an individual sport in which the participant rides a horse at full gallop down an 80-yard course while holding a lance and attempting to spear a ring measuring with an inside diameter of 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches down to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch mounted overhead at 20- and 30-yard intervals. A knight typically needs 9 seconds to complete the course. As the tournament progresses, knights compete to spear progressively smaller rings until only one participant remains. Early participants may have worn costumes reminiscent of medieval attire. Modern participants generally wear modern dress. Each participant chooses an assumed name such as the Knight or Maid of Liberty. In the early days, only men participated; the winning knight

crowned the queen of love and beauty. The woman crowned may have been his wife or sweetheart. In the 20th century, participants were split into amateur and professional classes. Women were participating as professionals by 1953 and perhaps earlier.

The earliest recorded tournament at St. Peter's was in the year 1887 while Fr. Henry Gwynn was pastor. The tournament was followed by a ball. Funds were raised to pay for the rectory built in that same year. His successor, Fr. William H. I. Reaney was a keen horseman, who rode in the tournaments and according to F. Lorraine Simpson Sr., local Libertytown resident, when Fr. Reaney was pastor, he recalled that Fr.

Reaney could lean from his saddle at full gallop and pick up a handkerchief from the ground. The next tournament for which records are available occurred in 1902 during the pastorate of Fr. Samuel J. Kavanagh. A tournament is recorded in 1906 as an annual event.

The next recorded tournament at St. Peter's for which details are known was in 1908. The event was reported in the Baltimore Sun as having 7,000 people attending from as far away as Baltimore, Hagerstown, and Washington, D.C. Attendees brought a picnic or purchased one from the ladies of the parish. The tournament was followed by dancing until nearly midnight. By 1909 local politicians attended the tournament. As early as 1915 a gubernatorial candidate attended. Politicians continued to attend as long as the event was held. They were occasionally asked to give the charge to the knights.



*Figure 2 Libertytown Tournament and Picnic
c. early 1900's and likely Fr. Kavanagh in center
Photo enhancement courtesy of Stephanie Suprock*

The tournaments continued each year through 1915. Carnival booths were added along with a merry-go-round. For many years the carousel was rented and hauled from Mount Airy to Libertytown for the tournament. In 1912, Fr. Kavanagh purchased the carousel for use by the parish. By the early 1930s, the carousel was considered unsafe and sold for scrap. As the buyers began to dismantle the wooden carousel horses, they saw high quality workmanship and decided to restore the horses and sell them as lawn ornaments to the residents of Libertytown.

Tournaments and picnics were intended as fund raisers for the parish. A budget for 1937, shows revenue of \$1,800, expenses of \$769, and a profit of \$1,030. The average annual wage in Maryland in 1937 was \$835. The single-day event raised more money than the average worker earned in a year. This would likely have made the event a significant source of revenue for the parish.

Tournaments were held in many years through the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. The final tournament was in 1953. By 1954 the event had moved to the parish grounds and become a four-day carnival beginning on a Wednesday evening and ending on Saturday.

*If you would like to see ring jousting for yourself, follow this link:
<http://marylandjousting.com/MJTAschedule.html>. Several events are within easy driving distance,
including the Frederick Fairgrounds on Tuesday, September 19, 2023.*