

## History of the Catholic Church in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania

Prior to 1730, Father Joseph Greaton, an English priest from Bohemia Manor, Maryland, arrived in Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> In 1733, he celebrated Mass at St. Joseph Chapel in Philadelphia, which was the first public site of Catholic worship in Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> Catholics settled in Pennsylvania because of William Penn's "holy experiment".<sup>3</sup> He believed all religions should have a safe place to worship.<sup>4</sup> From 1693 to 1775, the colonies imposed harsh restriction on the Catholics under the Test Oath.<sup>5</sup> Virginia had harsher laws than Pennsylvania, and many Virginians tried to limit Catholicism in Maryland. Missionaries were deported or imprisoned, and Catholic property was destroyed.<sup>6</sup> Many Catholics hid their beliefs in Pennsylvania,<sup>7</sup> although it was a much better place according to a letter from Father Wappeler. He states, "Neither Lutherans, Calvinists, nor any other sects placed obstacles in my way when I rented a house to say holy mass and conduct meetings. Now I have purchased two properties with the intention of building a rectory and a Catholic chapel out of stone."<sup>8</sup>

In Lancaster, Mass was often held in private homes due to prejudice, a lack of funds, and a limited number of Catholics.<sup>9</sup> A 1757 census measured the Catholic population in the province because the Pennsylvania authorities worried about the Catholic minority.<sup>10</sup> There were 108 German men, 94 German women, 22 Irish men, and 27 Irish women. In the whole territory under Father farmer, including Lancaster, Berks, Dauphin, Chester, and Cumberland Counties, there were 208 Catholic men and 186 Catholic women.<sup>11</sup>

In 1741, St. Mary's was established.<sup>12</sup> However, on 26 February 1742, Thomas Penn wrote to Thomas Cookson expressing his distaste for the Catholics. Thomas Penn was the son of William Penn and proprietor of Pennsylvania at the time. He expressed he was "well pleased with [Cookson] having granted lots to the Lutheran and Calvinists for churches", but said he "[desired] no ground may be granted to any Roman Catholics" as he believed "these people should be discouraged as much as possible".<sup>13</sup>

Father Neale wrote to a Catholic convert in London, appealing for funds.<sup>14</sup> The above letter was written six months before Father Neale's land grants were finalized.<sup>15</sup> All the necessary money took a while to come through due to the death of Sir John James, the donor. Due to a lack of funds, Father Wappeler built a log chapel instead of a stone one, and named it St. Mary's.<sup>16</sup> At this time, priests often had to travel great distances to worship, and they would do so disguised as Quaker gentlemen, teachers, or physicians to avoid altercation.<sup>17</sup> There were missions in Lancaster, York, Cumberland, Berks, Northumberland, Dauphin, and Lebanon counties.<sup>18</sup> On December 15, 1760, arsonists burned down St. Mary's.<sup>19</sup> On 25 December 1760, an advertisement in the Pennsylvania Gazette claimed, "it is with great reason apprehended that the said chapel was willfully set on fire

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Peter Parish, 250 Years- A Journey of Faith (Elizabethtown, PA: Saint Peter Parish, 2002), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Edgar Musser, Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society (Lancaster: L. B. Herr and Son Inc.), 77.

<sup>7</sup> Saint Peter Parish, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ann DeLaurentis and Bernadine Hershey, Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Lancaster, PA "Old St. Mary's" 1741-1991 (Lancaster: St. Mary's Church, 1991), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Saint Peter Parish, 2.

<sup>10</sup> MacMaster, Richard K., Elizabethtown The First Three Centuries (Elizabethtown: Elizabethtown Historical Society, 1999), 33.

<sup>11</sup> Ann DeLaurentis and Bernadine Hershey, 30.

<sup>12</sup> "About Us," Historic St. Mary's, accessed 26 October 2017, stmaryslancaster.org/about.

<sup>13</sup> Ann DeLaurentis and Bernadine Hershey, 26.

<sup>14</sup> Saint Peter Parish, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ann DeLaurentis and Bernadine Hershey, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>17</sup> Saint Peter Parish, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ann DeLaurentis and Bernadine Hershey, 30.

by some ill-minded person”.<sup>20</sup> This happened because many people in Lancaster had suspicions of French Jesuit missionaries being spies, as this was common during the French Indian War.<sup>21</sup> Within 2 years, the stone church Father William Wappeler had originally planned was built in its place.<sup>22</sup> Today, Saint Mary’s “stands as a symbol of the vitality and dedication of Catholic life in Lancaster.”<sup>23</sup> It is the fourth oldest Catholic Church in the original thirteen colonies.<sup>24</sup>

Catholics in Elizabethtown traveled to St. Mary’s for Sunday Mass.<sup>25</sup> Mass in Elizabethtown was also held in the home of Henry Eckenroth.<sup>26</sup> In the 1760s, Eckenroth constructed a log building on his property for the use of the Catholic community.<sup>27</sup> It became known as the Chapel of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>28</sup> Shortly after, in 1799, St. Peter’s was built.<sup>29</sup> The church was founded by Father Farmer, a trustee for the University of Pennsylvania, and the first Pennsylvania Catholic to hold office.<sup>30</sup>

The earliest schools in Elizabethtown were made of log and supported by the churches in town.<sup>31</sup> In 1795 the deed for St. Peter’s property stated “erecting a school” as one of the intentions of the new owners.<sup>32</sup> The first school associated with the catholic church was functioning as early as 1796, and stood near the stone church on Cherry Alley in present day Elizabethtown.<sup>33</sup> Possibly the school’s first teacher, though arguably its most notable at the time, was Terah Jones.<sup>34</sup> Jones was born in Ireland but moved to Pennsylvania some time before 1797, he never owned property, and kept financial records while he worked as a clerk for St. Peter’s from 1808-1810.<sup>35</sup> In 1812 he was commissioned as Second Lieutenant in the United States Army which caused him to stop teaching at the school.<sup>36</sup>

St. Peter’s was originally under the St. Mary’s mission, but was placed under St. Patrick’s Church in Harrisburg in 1832.<sup>37</sup> In 1840, St. Peter’s became a parish of its own, where Father Francis X Marshall was its first pastor.<sup>38</sup>

Over time, St. Peter’s established 4 missions. The first was Saint Laurence Mission at Colebrook, also known as Irishtown.<sup>39</sup> St. Laurence remained in existence until 1862.<sup>40</sup> Bishop John Neumann, who would later be ordained as a saint, visited St. Peter’s to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation.<sup>41</sup> Under Father Jules C. Foin, a bell tower named Ave Maria was installed in 1879.<sup>42</sup>

A reverend from St. Peter’s Roman Catholic Church, Reverend Bernard Keenan, advocated for the establishment of public schools in Elizabethtown.<sup>43</sup> In 1882, the construction of the parochial school was completed under the establishment of Reverend Foin.<sup>44</sup> The school opened the next year, 1883, and was staffed by the Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Francis, known today as the Sisters of Saint Francis of Philadelphia.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Paul Benowitz, Historic Elizabethtown Pennsylvania: A Walking Tour (Elizabethtown, PA: Elizabethtown College, 2015), 60.

<sup>22</sup> Ann DeLaurentis and Bernadine Hershey, 31.

<sup>23</sup> "About Us," Historic St. Mary's, accessed 26 October 2017, stmaryslancaster.org/about.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Saint Peter Parish, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Paul Benowitz, Historic Elizabethtown Pennsylvania: A Walking Tour (Elizabethtown, PA: Elizabethtown College, 2015), 60.

<sup>27</sup> Rev Steven W. Fauser, Saint Peter's Catholic Church (Elizabethtown, PA: Saint Peter's Catholic Church), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>29</sup> Jean-Paul Benowitz, 60.

<sup>30</sup> Saint Peter Parish, 250 Years- A Journey of Faith (Elizabethtown, PA: Saint Peter Parish, 2002),5.

<sup>31</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, 53.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 54, 57.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>43</sup> Jean-Paul Benowitz, Historic Elizabethtown Pennsylvania: A Walking Tour, (2015), 60.

<sup>44</sup> Saint Peter Parish, 11.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

This school remained open until 1889, when it closed with the departure of Father Foin from the parish.<sup>46</sup> The building is still standing today.<sup>47</sup>

In 1899, many renovations were made to St. Peter's, such as new pews, a new wooden altar, a furnace, and electric lights.<sup>48</sup> One could argue these changes were made to attract new members and keep up with the college, the new Brethren influence in town. These renovations continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>49</sup> The church saw an increase in numbers, and established the Holy Name Society and Council of Catholic Women.<sup>50</sup>

Years later in 1952, Father Cletus Hauck was appointed to the parish by Bishop George Leech.<sup>51</sup> Father Hauck served as a pastor of St. Peter's for seven years, during which he "worked and prayed" for the reopening of a parish school.<sup>52</sup> Preliminarily, he took a survey of the parish and found there were 162 catholic children from ages five to twelve in the parish itself, and during this time there were more catholic families moving to the area; he then used this information as an argument to reopen the parish school.<sup>53</sup> In 1956 the Church of the Brethren and its parsonage, which were located next to St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church, were purchased for the use of the school and its convent.<sup>54</sup> Father Hauck then began working with Superintendent of Schools, Monsignor Robert Maher, who helped acquire the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in West Chester as teachers.<sup>55</sup>

Eighty-nine children from grades one through eight were registered to attend Saint Peter's Parochial School on 18 May 1958.<sup>56</sup> Building plans were completed in August, and a new school bus was purchased to transport children from parish and mission areas including the "present day boundaries" of Mary, Mother of God, Mount Joy and Saint Richard, Manheim.<sup>57</sup> On 3 September 1958, the school opened and the day began with a Mass of Thanksgiving, observed by both parents and students.<sup>58</sup> On 8 October of the same year, the school cafeteria opened with a program providing one hot lunch for twenty-five cents a day.<sup>59</sup>

In the 1960s, many changes made by the Second Vatican Council were put in place. The Wooden Altar of Sacrifice was placed in the sanctuary to enable the priest to celebrate Mass facing the congregation. Lecterns and hymnal boards were installed, and the communion rail was removed.<sup>60</sup> The Second Vatican Council also allowed Catholics to pray with other Christian denominations, encouraged friendships with other non-Christian faiths, and allowed languages other than Latin to be used.<sup>61</sup> Because of this, the Parish Council and liturgy team were organized. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) program replaced catechism classes for public school students.<sup>62</sup> During this time, Bishop Scott wrote a school report, praising the parish for their school. In this report, it is stated of the 143 grade school children in the parish, 106 of them were attending the parish school.<sup>63</sup>

In the 1970s, the Odd Fellows property between the Church and Market Street was purchased.<sup>64</sup> Previously, in the 1870s, a small strip of land was purchased to allow a way into the church; this was known as

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<sup>46</sup> Saint Peter Parish, 12.

<sup>47</sup> MacMaster, 161.

<sup>48</sup> Rev Steven W. Fauser, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>54</sup> Rev Steven W. Fauser, 5.

<sup>55</sup> Saint Peter Parish, 15.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>60</sup> Rev Steven W. Fauser, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Jordan G. Teicher, "Why is Vatican II So Important?" National Public Radio, October 10, 2012, accessed October 26, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2012/10/10/162573716/why-is-vatican-ii-so-important>.

<sup>62</sup> Rev Steven W. Fauser, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Saint Peter Parish, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Rev Steven W. Fauser, 6.

“the Avenue”, and the building on the property was demolished in the early 1980s.<sup>65</sup> In 1978, the “Looking to the Future” program was established to provide for and guide on-going renovation and improvement.<sup>66</sup>

In the 1980s, Father Salvatore Zangari was pastor at Saint Peter’s and was assigned to the duties of Catholic chaplain at Elizabethtown College.<sup>67</sup> Under Father Zangari, the convent of St. Peter’s school was converted into a school annex with apartments on the top floor.<sup>68</sup> The schools staffing transferred from the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to the Daughters of Mercy in 1985.<sup>69</sup> And in 1986, the school program expanded to include four- and five-year-old Kindergarten programs, under principal Sister Mary Helen Scicchitano, D.M..<sup>70</sup> Father McNeil was named pastor in 1986.<sup>71</sup> Under him, the parish organized Vacation Bible School in cooperation with Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church.<sup>72</sup> In 1998, they broke ground for the new St. Peter’s Church at 1840 Marshall Drive, paying homage to the year they acquired Parish status, and the parish’s first resident pastor.<sup>73</sup>

From 1988-1990, Sister Irene Fortier increased the religious education program to include not only the children and youth attending the parish school, but those attending public schools as well.<sup>74</sup> In 1992 the school was restructured, enabling students to complete Pre-Kindergarten through “early grades” at Saint Peter’s, and then continue their parochial education through grade eight in Middletown at Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary parochial school, “a parish originally established by St. Peter’s.”<sup>75</sup> Saint Peter’s has since closed, holding its last class in 2012.<sup>76</sup> From 1958 to 2012, Saint Peter’s Parochial School served three generations of catholic families.<sup>77</sup> As a result of this closure, most students and some faculty transferred to Seven Sorrows to continue the parochial tradition.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>68</sup> Fauser, 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>71</sup> Rev Steven W. Fauser, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>74</sup> Fauser, 8.

<sup>75</sup> Fauser, 8.; Benowitz, 60.

<sup>76</sup> Fauser, 12.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 12.