

4.2 - Records of the Houses - Bohemia and St. Joseph's Church

Background on the Houses of the Eastern Shore

The Jesuits considered their Eastern Shore Houses of Bohemia and St. Joseph's Church strategically and economically significant. In 1704, Thomas Mansell, S.J., established the Bohemia House, taking its name from a nearby plantation in Cecil County, Maryland called Bohemia Manor (founded by the Bohemian merchant Augustine Herman in the seventeenth century). From 1706 until 1732, Mansell and his successor, Peter Attwood, S.J., acquired more than 1,300 acres of land and established a plantation of the Jesuits' own at Bohemia. The residence and church were at its center, and the plantation was dependent upon the labor of enslaved individuals.

In part because of its proximity to Philadelphia, the Jesuits selected Bohemia as the site for a preparatory school for Maryland Catholics, who would otherwise travel to Europe to begin their formal education. Initially led by Thomas Poulton, S.J., the preparatory school opened in approximately 1745, but was short-lived because of legal restrictions on Catholic education.

In 1793, during the Suppression of the Jesuits, the Corporation of Roman Catholic Clergymen transferred Bohemia to another order, the Sulpicians, who used the earnings from tobacco and cash crops to support St. Mary's Seminary in Emmittsburg. In 1817, after their restoration, the Jesuits re-established a community at Bohemia.

St. Joseph's Church was established in 1765. In 1764, Joseph Mosley, S.J. moved to Bohemia in to identify a new site for another residence on the Eastern Shore. One year later, he established a residence and church near Easton and named it St. Joseph's Church (Tuckahoe; later re-named Cordova, Md.) Fellow missionaries stationed in Maryland supported Mosley by sending him cash donations and transferring the ownership of enslaved people to him.

The Jesuits' ownership of the estates that supported these residences were fraught with difficulties. Their title to Bohemia especially was challenged several times, but most notably by Archbishop Ambrose Maréchal who argued that the Archdiocese of Baltimore owned its plantation. During his visits to Maryland, between 1818 and 1820 and then again between 1830 and 1833, Peter Kenney, S.J., reported on the rebelliousness of the enslaved people there. Subsequently the Jesuits rented out lands to tenant farmers which the Archdiocese of Wilmington purchased when it assumed control over the Bohemia House in 1898.

Bibliography

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