

## **Institutional History of the Maryland Province**

**By SMR Curator Mary Beth Corrigan**

The Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus originated in 1634 as a small mission in the fledgling colony of Maryland, founded to provide a sanctuary for Catholics seeking freedom both to worship and to own property without civil restraint. Granted extensive properties along the mouth of the lower Potomac River, the Jesuit missionaries evangelized among the Algonquian nations, even as they and other colonists engaged in battles, transformed their environment, and pushed the Algonquian out of the area by the early eighteenth century. The anti-Catholicism during the English and Glorious Revolutions led to the exclusion of Catholics from politics and restrictions on Jesuit property holding.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the Jesuits had established six community Houses to evangelize among the planter-merchants, indentured servants, yeoman farmers, and enslaved and free Blacks throughout the region. These Houses were also manor houses located on large landed estates acquired by land warrant, purchase, or donation. The Jesuits operated most of this property as tobacco plantations and exploited enslaved men, women, and children to serve as their primary labor force; the Jesuits also sought to convert their enslaved property to Catholicism. The Jesuits leased the remainder of the land to white tenant farmers.

The 1740s were a turning point for the Maryland Mission, which was part of the British Province and reported to the Vicar Apostolic in London. By this time, Maryland-born residents were becoming members of the Society, seeking their education at the British academies located in Belgium, the College of Bruges and College of Liège. The Mission also began to attract German clerics who wanted to minister to the German farmers and laborers who emigrated to western Maryland and Pennsylvania. These German missionaries established Houses in Pennsylvania, where Catholics were more tolerated and where they constituted a significant minority. Two of these Houses were established on landed estates, which the Jesuits leased to white farmers; the Philadelphia House was the first urban community established by the Jesuits. In 1765, the Jesuits established a House in Frederick to minister to migrants from Southern Maryland, including those enslaved by the Jesuits, as well as German and Irish immigrants.

The Suppression of the Society of Jesus by Pope Clement XIV in 1773 altered the opportunities presented by the American Revolution and the formation of a republic based on the separation of church and state. The former Jesuits remained committed to the communities and plantations established during the colonial period and formed the Select (or Representative) Body of Clergy to advance their common interests with the hope of the Society's eventual restoration. Unlike the former members of other Provinces, the Maryland community was able to retain their property. The Corporation of Roman Catholic Clergymen in 1786 (chartered by the state of Maryland in 1792) took ownership of the landed estates and human property acquired by missionaries in the colonial period. The Select Body also recommended that Pope Pius VI name former Jesuit John Carroll as Bishop of Baltimore; Pope Pius VI did so on November 6, 1789.

The Most Reverend John Carroll was subsequently consecrated in Dorset, England, on August 15, 1790. The former Jesuits also established Georgetown College in 1789. These institutional successes did not necessarily enable them to maintain control over their Houses and help them build churches. Clerics from other orders, particularly members of the Society of St. Sulpice (known as the Sulpicians), assisted them.

After Pope Pius VII recognized the Society of Jesus in Russia, the former Jesuits organized and began to petition for the establishment of a Jesuit mission in the United States. In 1805, six former Jesuits renewed their vows and nine candidates entered the Mission of the American Federation, which in turn assumed direction of Georgetown College. By the time of the restoration of the Society in 1814, the Mission had become a breeding ground for the leadership of the Catholic Church as it solidified in New York, Philadelphia, and Kentucky.

There were tensions between the newly-restored Society and the Archdiocese of Baltimore, however. The Sulpicians claimed ownership of the Bohemia House and plantation in Cecil County, Maryland, which they had managed during the Suppression. Between 1817 and 1823, Archbishop Ambrose Maréchal, a French Sulpician, claimed that the Archdiocese of Baltimore owned the White Marsh House and plantation in Prince George's County. Sulpician claims to both plantations included the enslaved people who worked on them. The Jesuits successfully defended themselves against these claims, but in doing so agreed to make regular payments for the support of the Archdiocese.

The expansion of the United States into the Mississippi region prompted Superior General Tadeusz Brzozowski to send the Irish-born Peter Kenney, S.J., in 1819 to report on the operations of the Mission of the American Federation and help prepare for the establishment of a full-fledged Province. During the year-long visit, Kenney identified six novices to study in Rome to prepare for leadership positions in a new Province. He also reported on the economic viability of the landed estates and their enslaved labor force. In 1823, a group of Belgian emigrés - all of whom had entered the Society in Maryland - founded the Missouri Mission to resume the work of French missionaries who had previously evangelized among the Native Americans. Superior General Jan Roothan sent Kenney for a second visit between 1830 and 1833 and named him Superior of the Mission. Following Kenney's visit, in 1833, the Jesuit Curia established the Maryland Province and named the House in Frederick County, Maryland as the location of its novitiate. The Jesuit Curia also separated the Missouri Mission, establishing it as a Vice-Province in 1833.

In 1838, the Jesuits sold more than 272 enslaved people - most of the men, women, and children owned by the Province - to two Louisiana planters and slave traders, Jesse Batey of Maringouin, Louisiana and former Louisiana governor Henry Johnson. The profits from the sale enabled the Province to solidify its economic standing, lay the foundation for its expansion into the Northeast, and fund Georgetown College.

Prior to 1838, the subject of slaveholding had generated debate for some time among the Maryland Jesuits. As early as 1813, the Corporation of Roman Catholic Clergymen and Provincial Consultors had considered whether or not to sell the enslaved people who labored on the six Jesuit plantations in Maryland, and they decided to authorize the sale of smaller groups of enslaved people. Arguments in favor of selling enslaved property centered on the economic benefits of transitioning to tenant farming, the problems posed by enslaved people's resistance, and other perceived transgressions on the part of enslaved people. In 1836, when he authorized the sale of the Jesuits' human property, Superior General Jan Roothan did take into account some of the long-standing concerns among members of the Province. As a result, his authorization of the sale came with the following conditions: married couples would be kept together, with a strong preference that children also be kept with their parents; enslaved people would remain Catholic; and the funds from the sale would be invested in real estate and other capital expenditures that would support Jesuit missions in Pennsylvania and New York.

Maryland Provincial Thomas Mulledy, who executed the sale between June and December 1838, ignored these conditions. Mulledy immediately applied \$15,000 of the down payment received from Johnson and Batey to discharge the debts of Georgetown College. The payments on the mortgages continued through June 1862; the money enabled the Province to settle outstanding claims by the Baltimore Archdiocese and establish missions and colleges in Northeastern cities as envisioned by Roothan. The sale also broke families apart and ignored the spiritual lives of the enslaved.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Maryland Province had shifted its resources to serve Irish and German Catholic immigrants who were transforming the urban centers of the Northeast. The Province established preparatory schools, churches, and colleges in Massachusetts, including the College of Holy Cross in Worcester, founded in 1843. Priests also established the Mission of Boston in 1847 at St. Mary's Church, Boston, and began planning for Boston College which opened in 1863. The Province deepened its institutions in city centers: in Washington, D.C., resuming the operations of Washington Seminary in 1848; in Philadelphia, establishing St. Joseph's College in 1851; and in Baltimore, founding Loyola College in 1852. In 1869, the Province responded to the growing numbers of American-born members and established a scholasticate to educate members who began their formation at the novitiate at Frederick, Maryland.

In 1879, the Maryland Province merged with the New York Mission to form the Maryland-New York Province. This merger transferred the administration of several New York institutions, including St. John's College (later re-named Fordham University), St. Francis Xavier College, and the missions that helped assimilate European immigrants in New York. In addition, the Jesuit Curia assigned missions outside the United States to the Maryland-New York Province, including Jamaica (between 1893 and 1926) and the Philippines (between 1928 and 1943). In 1903, as the Province began to attract the children of immigrants to membership, it moved the novitiate from Frederick, Maryland to St. Andrew-on-the-Hudson in Poughkeepsie, New York. In 1891, the Province also began planning a monthly magazine on matters of faith; in 1909, this

publication became *America Magazine*, headquartered in New York City. New England became a separate Vice-Province in 1921 and then a Province in 1926. In 1943, the Maryland-New York Province separated to form two distinct provinces, the New York Province and the Maryland Province.

The Houses of Southern Maryland ministered to a population that consisted largely of the descendants of the Catholic gentry, independent white farmers, and enslaved and free Blacks that had populated the region since the colonial period. After emancipation, the Jesuits leased their lands to Black farmers, who often struggled to reimburse the Jesuits for the supplies advanced as the planting season began. Black people constituted a large portion of the church membership. Whereas churches had previously included Black and white parishioners, these groups now joined and supported separate sodalities intended to meet the distinct needs of each community, holding separate rites such as May Crownings, and sponsoring separate special events. In 1904, Black parishioners who objected to their treatment within their parish formed St. Peter Claver Church in Ridge, St. Mary's County. They also pressed for their own secondary school, leading in 1924 to the foundation of the Cardinal Gibbons Institute, also located in Ridge.

Beginning in the 1930s, the Jesuits began to withdraw from their manor houses throughout the region. The most notable of these - St. Inigoes in St. Mary's City, where Father White had landed in 1634 - had become a dilapidated estate and was sold to the United States Navy in 1942. In 1955, Patrick Cardinal O'Boyle of the Archdiocese of Washington began the divisive process of desegregation throughout the Catholic communities of Southern Maryland. During the 1960s, the Jesuits transferred most of their Southern Maryland Houses and churches to the Archdiocese of Washington. In 1973, the Province sold all but 23 acres of land around St. Thomas Manor in St. Mary's County. The church that served as its seat, St. Ignatius Church, is the only colonial mission still administered by the Jesuits, and it remains the oldest mission continuously operated by the Jesuits worldwide.

In July 2020, the Maryland Province became part of USA Eastern Province of the Society of Jesus..