

Membership List, Society of the Holy Family, 1843-1844

The Society of the Holy Family was established for the black Catholics of Baltimore in 1843. Membership numbered 270 and its weekly meetings were held in the parish hall of the Cathedral of the Assumption. Here members prayed together, received catechetical instruction, and sang hymns. A lending library for members was also established. The monthly dues collected paid for operating expenses and to provide charitable relief. The confraternity voted to disband in 1845 when it lost its meeting space.

The names recorded in the membership list reflect the diverse makeup of Baltimore's black Catholic community.

Easter Duty List, St. Mary's Seminary Chapel, 1810-1811

The historic chapel of St. Mary's Seminary & University (est. 1791) was built by the Sulpician Fathers and dedicated in 1808. The chapel was the spiritual center of the seminary and college the Fathers operated at the site. It also served as a parish church for the families in the surrounding neighborhood until 1858. French-speaking refugees of color from St. Domingue (now Haiti) were among those who worshipped in the lower chapel, or "chappelle basse." Out of this parish was borne the country's first African-American faith community and the first religious community for women of color, the Oblate Sisters of Providence (1829).

The Easter Duty List has the names of the men and women who received the sacraments of confession and communion at the seminary's chapel in 1810. Until the twentieth century, it was common for members of the laity to receive these sacraments only once a year. As most chose to do so at Easter time, this practice came to be known as performing one's Easter duties. The list is written in French, the language spoken by the Sulpician Fathers who came from France to serve in the United States. The surnames recorded also tell us that many of the people who performed their Easter duties were of French descent.

The names on the list have been divided according to sex and race. Below is a list of the terms and abbreviations used in the document:

Confessions Paschales – Easter confessions

Pour -ere Communion - Communion

Messieurs – white males

Hommes de couleur – males of color

Les dames – white females

Les femmes de couleur - females of color

M. – mulatto

N. - black

Marriage Records, St. Peter pro-Cathedral, 1791-1792

St. Peter's (1770-1841) was Baltimore City's first and only Catholic church when the diocese was established in 1789. It served as the pro-Cathedral until the Cathedral of the Assumption was dedicated in 1821. The earliest sacramental records for the church date back to 1782 and record the baptisms, marriages, and deaths that were performed in the community.

On this page one will find recorded the marriages performed over the period May 1791 - April 1792, including entries for Peter Johnson and Fannie Owings, a free couple of color, and Ned and Sarah, an enslaved couple.