On the 250th Anniversary of the Founding of the United States of America

A Survey History of Catholicism, 17th to Mid-19th Centuries

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The following is a survey of Catholicism and the role that individual Catholics have played in the formation of the United States. It will focus on the District of Columbia and the role of the Carroll family members, Catholic connections to President George Washington, and then followed by shorter sections covering Illinois history and the Spanish settlements on the West Coast. I hope to show how Catholicism played a small but integral role in our nation's founding and expansion. As a postscript, I briefly address the issue of slavery and the Catholic Church. As you read, I invite you to dig deeper into this history and then, in particular, to take public pride in our One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church; for God's Providence has given us this nation, with an ethos of religious liberty that allows us to freely choose the good and the moral, and to avoid vice.

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Founding of the City of Washington: District of Columbia

In 1790, Congress passed the Residence Act, which provided for the establishment of a permanent ten-mile-square district (64,000 acres) within which a 6,000-acre portion was called the City of Washington or the Federal City. It was created by parts ceded by both Maryland (just over two-thirds, or 68–69 square miles) and Virginia (Virginia's less-than-one-third portion, or 31 square miles, was retroceded in 1847). This ten-mile area had two established cities, Georgetown in Maryland and Alexandria in Virginia. The whole area would later become known as the District of Columbia. It did not become the seat of Congress, the Supreme Court, and the presidency until 1800. In 1801, Congress passed the Organic Act, placing the new District of Columbia under federal control. This new district was not a frontier wilderness, but a swath of

cultivated farmlands and orchards, which had been worked for generations, initially by a majority of indentured servants in the 1600s and then a majority of enslaved Africans into the 1700s.* This fairly flat lowland, apart from a forested hill, was all to be elaborately laid out into a new federal city by the famous French-born city planner and American architect, Pierre Charles L'Enfant. However, in 1792 he was fired by President Washington's planning commission for being obstinate, and the proverbial "last straw" came when L'Enfant tore down a large brick manor house in the middle of the night, albeit it was still under construction.

This new house was just a few blocks from L'Enfant's future building site for the Capitol, and was in the way of one of the many diagonal or "sunburst" streets that would become New Jersey Avenue SE. The problem for L'Enfant was that the home belonged to one Daniel Carroll of Duddington (1764–1849), who was well known to President George Washington. For it was on Daniel Carroll's large inherited estate that the new Capitol would be situated. Specifically, it was upon that forested hilltop, known locally as Jenkins Hill, that L'Enfant named Capitol Hill.

Colonial Maryland and Catholic Roots

Born in Maryland, Daniel Carroll of Duddington came from a long line of Irish Catholics named Carroll. These Catholics settled in the new colony named after Henrietta Maria of France, a devout Catholic, and wife of the Protestant but Catholic-friendly King Charles I of England, Scotland, and Ireland. And so, the name Maryland (*Terra Mariae*) has a dual meaning, in that it was also dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Maryland was founded in 1634 and was initially set up as a refuge or haven for Catholics fleeing the persecution under Anglican England, but not exclusively for Catholics. These first Catholic settlers arrived in Maryland aboard two ships, the *Ark* and the *Dove*, in a Jesuit-supported endeavor backed by Catholic Cecilius (Cecil) Calvert—the Second Lord Baltimore. The First Lord Baltimore was George Calvert (1579/80–1632), who was a convert to Catholicism in 1624. He, however, died before the Charter was sealed, and so King Charles I gave it to his son, Cecil Calvert. He became the Second Lord of Baltimore (Ireland) and held the Charter to Maryland. Cecil Calvert's younger brother, Leonard Calvert (1606–1647), was onboard and was the first colonial governor of Maryland. They landed on St. Clement's Island in the middle of the Potomac River on March 25, 1634—Feast of the Annunciation. The island was named for St. Clement, who was the fourth Bishop of Rome/Pope. Fr. Andrew White, S.J., and Fr. John Altham, S.J., offered the first Catholic field Mass of thanksgiving on that island. Two days later, the new colony's Governor, Leonard Calvert, purchased land from the local Indigenous inhabitants for a city to be named St. Mary's City and a future county of St. Mary's—the Mother County of Maryland. The two priests bought a wigwam and used it as the first chapel in Maryland. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://stpeterclaverchurch.org/history)

There is a Catholic parish church south of St. Mary's City called St. Peter Claver in St. Inigoes, Maryland, that has on its grounds a museum dedicated to Jesuit colonial history and, in particular, the historical use of indentured servants (European, African, or Indigenous) in the 1600s and then enslaved labor from the late 1600s into the 1700s. The parish website notes that although the Jesuits had slaves, research shows that they were never referred to as such but as "servants" and "household," and that they were taught the Catholic Faith, baptized, attended Mass, albeit with segregated seating, and were otherwise educated. Fr. White, S.J., would go on

to build the first chapel of St. Ignatius in 1641 at Chapel Point, Charles County, Maryland. This became the oldest continuous parish in the original thirteen colonies—St. Ignatius at St. Thomas Manor. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.visitstmarysmd.com/directory/st-ignatius-church/)

These colonial Catholics set up the colony's capital at St. Mary's City at the southern tip of the Maryland peninsula. The Jesuits had plantations in the Port Tobacco area, one of which was named St. Thomas Manor and St. Ignatius Jesuit Complex. Curiously, there is a signer of the U.S. Constitution whose name is connected through his grandfather to the Jesuit plantation, but is himself identified as an Anglican/Episcopalian. His name is Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer (1723–1790) and has the same name as his grandfather (1672–1730). It is highly plausible from context and connection that the grandfather was a Catholic, but at some point, his grandson, the signer, became an Anglican, perhaps due to Anglicanism becoming the colony's official religion; but it could have resulted from the 1704 colonial law "Act to Prevent the Growth of Popery in this Province."

This law imposed severe fines on Catholic priests for saying Mass and on parents educating their children in Catholicism or even having them baptized as Catholics. This law effectively closed all Catholic churches until after the Revolutionary War. In response, the Jesuits would build surreptitious structures called "Mass houses." One such Mass house was in the form of a tobacco barn. The first such house in Baltimore was called "St. Peter's Mass House" (1770), and afterwards would become a pro-cathedral. (cf. *America's First Cathedral: The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*; Baltimore, Maryland. Mary-Cabrini Durkin, 2007, p.11.) [In 2009, Catholics Beth and Fred McCoy led a grassroots effort to reconstruct a copy of the original brick chapel from 1667 known as The Brick Chapel in historical St. Mary's City. Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.cathstan.org/local/rebuilt-brick-chapel-in-st-marys-city-with-its-new-interior-features-highlights-maryland-as-a-birthplace-of-religious-freedom]

Because of these colonial penal laws, Catholics would attend underground, clandestine, or semi-private chapels in Catholic gentry homes or Jesuit manors. Eventually, churches such as St. Francis Xavier Church at Newtowne/Newtown Neck in St. Mary's County, Maryland, started appearing as a meeting hall (secret church) ca. 1731. This was a Jesuit mission and 700-acre plantation from the 1640s with a chapel that was built in 1662. They also used enslaved laborers. The first eight colonial Maryland governors were appointed by the Lords Baltimore, and the first several were probably Catholic. The second governor of the State of Maryland was Thomas Sim Lee (1745–1819), and he served one-year terms from 1779 to 1782 and then again from 1792 to 1794. He was a convert to Catholicism after marrying Mary Digges—who was from a prominent Catholic gentry family. Mary Digges Lee, as First Lady of Maryland, was instrumental in organizing relief for the Continental Army, for which General Washington thanked her for her patriotic efforts. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://x.com/ewtnnewsnightly/status/2073187533517725720)

Another such Catholic settler, who came in 1635, was an Englishman named Francis Pope (1609/10–1671/72). In 1663 he obtained a patent for a 400-acre tract called "Rome," and with a surname of Pope, he stood out among his Protestant neighbors. Perhaps he decided on that name

following the Maryland Toleration Act of 1649? This Toleration Act made Maryland, along with Rhode Island, among the earliest colonies to enjoy Christian religious freedom (note: Trinitarian Christians only). However, after 1649 the colony became increasingly less tolerant, as the founding Protestant population always outpaced the minority, which was, at most, no more than 10 percent Catholic. The Toleration Act was repealed in 1654 and later voted back in. However, there was a colony-wide Protestant revolution in 1689 (also called Coode's Rebellion, named after a former Anglican priest), which overturned any rights for Catholics and established Anglicanism as an official religion. (Accessed on August 31, 2026: https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/000200/000269/html/269bio.html)

These events paralleled those in England, where King Charles II formally and sacramentally converted to Catholicism the day before he died, though prior to that he had been a secret Catholic. After his death, his Catholic brother, James II, assumed the throne in 1685. James II himself had converted in 1669 and had married a Catholic, Mary of Modena, which meant that the throne of England going forward would be Catholic. Thus ensued the Glorious Revolution, and much of the court switched to William III and his wife, Mary, who were Protestant. It was at this time that Maryland's capital was moved from St. Mary's City (at the very tip of the southern Maryland peninsula) to more central Annapolis in 1694/1695, which itself has a Catholic connection. Originally called Providence and then named after Lord Baltimore's wife and called Arundelton (Anne Arundel's Town), it was finally named after the English princess Anne, whose father was the Catholic King James II, but who was raised Protestant and later became Queen Anne—hence Annapolis, City of Anne.

In any event, Francis Pope's "Rome" house would have been located in the center of his 400 acres. If so, that would make it somewhere in modern-day Washington, D.C., between 4th and 6th Streets NE and between Constitution Avenue NE and F Street NE. This would place it approximately near today's Stanton Park—just off Capitol Hill. There was a creek that ran through Francis Pope's property, and he renamed the creek after the famous Roman river, the "Tiber." Its earlier name was Goose Creek, and it started over three miles north at what is today the Soldiers' Home off North Capitol Street NW. It was the second largest creek after Rock Creek in D.C. Its watershed was between one-half and two-thirds of the D.C. area.

That creek, called the Tiber, still flows through D.C. to this day—although underground. Tiber Creek flows under Constitution Avenue and passes near the Washington Monument and empties into the Tidal Basin. This is where the Jefferson Memorial is on the opposite side and is ringed by cherry trees. Historically, the Tiber emptied directly into the Potomac. Today, there is a small monument called Jefferson's Pier, just off the Washington Monument, that marks the site where the Tiber Creek entered the Potomac. Not far from there is a stone building at 17th Street NW and Constitution Avenue, called the Lockkeeper's House (1837). (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://nationalmall.org/content/lockkeepers-house) This was a toll house for the bifurcated Tiber Creek's northern portion of the Washington City Canal and the mouth of the Tiber Creek. (The southern portion of the Tiber's Washington City Canal was near Capitol Hill and flowed into the Anacostia River.) (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.otmdc.com/post/the-creek-that-flows-beneath-the-city)

L'Enfant had plans for the Tiber Creek. It was to be channeled into a grand canal that would receive boats from the Potomac River. Unfortunately, the canal functioned poorly and sat as an open sewer for decades, until it was put underground into huge masonry tunnels for rainfall and storm drainage and was covered over to make way for the National Mall in 1871. In Georgetown, at 3051 M Street NW, stands the oldest house in the D.C. area, the Old Stone House. It was built in 1765 and is a visitor's center with historic colonial-era furnishings. It was sometimes claimed to be either President Washington's headquarters while he was surveying the new district in 1791, or Suter's Tavern itself, but now it is known that Suter's Tavern was elsewhere near 31st Street and K Street NW and was torn down in 1907. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/old-stone-house and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Stone_House_(Washington,_D.C.)) (1791 map of the District before being laid out, accessed August 18, 2026: https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3851p.tr000096/)

The Carroll Family and Catholic Roots

To compensate Daniel Carroll of Duddington for the loss of his home, Washington's planning commission reimbursed him, and Carroll proceeded to build a grand house located on what is now called Duddington Place SE. This is near where his first house would have been. The Carroll grand manor had a brick wall around its four acres, and stood until 1886, when it was purchased and subdivided into row housing. For seventy years, the street was called Heckman Street, named after the developer, but in 1960 it was renamed in honor of Daniel Carroll of Duddington. The first parish in the D.C. area was in Georgetown, Most Holy Trinity, in 1787, and the church was completed in 1794. The second parish, but the first in the city proper, was St. Patrick's (1794). It was near the White House and was a wooden chapel, which ministered to the construction workers and Irish stonemasons for the White House and the Capitol buildings.

There was also another Catholic chapel that developed through the manor house of a James Barry, who built it in 1806 and called it St. Mary's or (James) Barry's Chapel, and it seems to have been a part or wing of his house (P St., NE Corner of Half St., SW). It was a mission of St. Patrick's, and it was in an area of the City of Washington nicknamed "the island." This area was originally platted in 1770 and called Carrollsburg(h). Carrollsburg was a "paper city" platted by the father of Daniel Carroll, Charles Carroll of Duddington. The planned city was never fully developed, though some homes were eventually built there. (Accessed August 18, 2026: https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:q524ng16w) In 1820, the Carroll estate donated land for a Catholic church, St. Peter's, on Capitol Hill, which was built in 1821, and the nearby St. Mary's Chapel was razed. St. Mary's Chapel's cornerstone was found later on and incorporated into the new church, St. Dominic's, located at 630 E Street SW, which is administered by the Dominican Order to this day. (St. Mary's/Barry Chapel, cf. *St. Dominic's Parish, Washington, D.C.: A Sesquicentennial Celebration 1852–2002*, by Mary E. Moran, Prosperity Press.)

The Grayson County (Va.) Historical Society has uploaded a 1911 paper by Margaret Brent Downing called "The Development of the Catholic Church in the District of Columbia." She read this paper before the Columbia Historical Society. Margaret Brent Downing said that the earliest liturgical presence in the D.C. area would have been the chapel in the large Notley

Young manor, prior to the foundation of Georgetown Academy. In fact, she said that having a wing dedicated as a chapel would have been standard in other Catholic gentry homes too. She maintained that, due to the severe penal laws against Catholics, the various Catholic gentry families kept Catholicism alive in Maryland—viz., the Carrolls, Youngs, Brents, Fenwicks, Neales, Digges, and Morgans. Because Catholics could not build churches, these private chapels maintained the Faith through generations of persecution. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.newrivernotes.com/catholic-church-district-of-columbia/)

President George Washington came to know of Daniel Carroll of Duddington through his uncle, who was also named Daniel Carroll (but was known as "of Rock Creek"). This elder Daniel (1730–1796) was Jesuit-trained at St. Omer's (Bruges, Flanders, in modern-day Belgium—as were many of the boys from Catholic gentry families), and his ancestral property was 1,800 acres in Forest Glen, Maryland, which is just a few miles north of the northern tip of the D.C. boundary. He would have been a contemporary of President Washington. In 1783, Congress was temporarily driven out of Philadelphia (cf. the Pennsylvania Mutiny), which gave rise to the need for a separate, secure location for Congress. Later, Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek, as the first Catholic congressional representative from Maryland in 1789, voted for the formation of an independent area or federal city. (Accessed August 17, 2026: cf. Residence Act, https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/founding-fathers-maryland) He promoted the new Constitution and spoke for ratification. He too was a Founding Father, for he signed both the Articles of Confederation (1781) and the U.S. Constitution (1787) in Philadelphia, making him one of only five men to have signed both documents. The U.S. Constitution had a second Catholic signer, Thomas Fitzsimons (also spelled FitzSimons or Fitzsimmons) of Philadelphia.

It was this Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek that President Washington would then task, with two others (the former governor of Maryland, Thomas Johnson, and Dr. David Stuart), to act as land agents to negotiate land acquisition for the new federal district. As an aside, Thomas Johnson was the one who nominated George Washington as head of the Continental Army (June 15, 1775) and who later suggested that the new federal district should be named in his honor, "City of Washington." In late March 1791, nineteen Maryland landowners, some Catholic and some not, came together at a Georgetown tavern called Suter's. There they signed their compacts with the planning commission; on March 30, President Washington announced a proclamation setting the boundaries of the ten-mile-square district (64,000 acres), whose boundary was marked by milestones along its edges. (cf. 1932, Senate Document 332, 71st Congress, 3rd session, accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.boundarystones.org/articles/caemmerer_1932.pdf) The landowners' sales agreement dealt with the smaller 6,000 acres, which at first was called the City of Washington and then the Federal City. These land sales would either become federal-use property, which was then ceded to the City of Washington in perpetuity, or they became lots for sale. Alternate lots were owned by either the landowners themselves for future private real estate or by the federal government. (Here is a detailed map of the "City of Washington," MDCCC/1800, accessed August 17, 2026: https://tile.loc.gov/image-services/iiif/service:gmd:gmd385:g3850:g3850:ct004353/full/pct:100/0/default.jpg)

What we know about the nineteen landowners is that at least four of them were Catholic, with Daniel Carroll of Duddington as the largest landowner. We know that Daniel Carroll of Duddington had 1,428 acres, with one large tract of 500 acres that was called "New Troy." This

tract went on to become Capitol Hill. (Accessed August 21, 2026: https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-36-02-0343) His uncle, mentioned above, was Notley Young (1736/8–1802). He had married Eleanor Digges and, after her death, Mary Carroll—sister to Fr. John Carroll. A Fr. Thomas Digges, S.J. (1711–1804/5), is on record as saying the first Mass in the City of Washington at the Notley Young chapel. So, Notley Young was brother-in-law to Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek. He owned 800 acres of land, 400 of which today are where the Jefferson Memorial and the southern part of the National Mall now stand. He was also one of the largest slaveowners (approximately 245). Notley Young had two cousins who were also part of the nineteen, the brothers William (dates not found) and Abraham Young (?–1797). Each brother ended up selling 600 acres of land. A fifth landowner was more than likely a Catholic, and his name was Overton Carr (1752–1804). He was one of the smaller landowners, who held property between Daniel Carroll's and Notley Young's.

The records of the City of Washington Commissioners in the National Archives have not been digitized, but we know from other sources that the acreage sold from these five Catholics would roughly total 1,428 + 400 + 600 + 600 + 200 (estimated) = 3,228 acres, which out of 6,000 acres is 53.8 percent. Whatever the exact total is, it is a large percentage that came from Catholic families. Finally, Notley Young had a son who became a Jesuit priest (Fr. Notley Young Jr., S.J.), and a daughter, Mary, who married Robert Brent, who was from a prominent Catholic family; he became the first mayor of the City of Washington. He was appointed mayor by President Thomas Jefferson in 1802, and he served until 1812. I assume that the author Margaret Brent Downing, mentioned above, is a descendant.

Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek and Daniel Carroll of Duddington had a most famous cousin (and a more distant cousin, respectively) named Charles Carroll of Carrollton (1737–1832), the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence. His line of the Carroll family established a Catholic presence in Annapolis, Maryland, when it became its capital in 1694. The Carrolls maintained a private chapel there during the 17th to 19th centuries and finally built a church in 1823. Because of his religion, Charles Carroll of Carrollton was barred from public office and could not vote in Maryland during his early years. He advocated for democracy as the firm foundation of a nation. For this, he served in the Second Maryland Convention in 1775—the first Catholic since 1715 to do so. In 1776, he aided in drafting Maryland's first state constitution and declaration of rights, which in turn worked to provide religious liberties. He was elected as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress on July 4th and arrived in Philadelphia on July 18th, 1776.

The colonies voted for independence on July 2nd. They debated the final wording of the Declaration from July 3rd to the 4th. On July 4th, only John Hancock (as President of the Continental Congress) and Charles Thomson (as secretary) signed the Declaration; 200 copies were then printed, known as the Dunlap Broadside (after the printer), and Congress ordered the Declaration to be "fairly engrossed," or elegantly copied out, on parchment. It was on August 2nd that 50 of the 56 delegates signed the Declaration—the rest signed over the next several months. This is the one with John Hancock's famous signature.

There is an apocryphal story going around that Charles Carroll at first signed only his first and last name on the Declaration, and that, after some fellow delegates ribbed his anonymity, he

returned and signed "of Carrollton." Now, there were other "Charles Carrolls" in Maryland, for example, Charles Carroll—the Barrister. This Charles Carroll joined in the "Annapolis Tea Party" burning of the ship *Peggy Stewart* on October 19, 1774. However, there were no eyewitness accounts of him doing this, and Charles Carroll of Carrollton had already started to sign his name that way after his father gave him Carrollton Manor in 1765. He also wrote his name this way to distinguish himself from his father, Charles Carroll of Annapolis. The earliest source for this story is an anonymous article from 1827—51 years after the signing. (Pax, cf. Joseph Gurn's *Charles Carroll of Carrollton*: 1737–1832; New York, Kennedy & Sons, 1932, pp. 83–84. As found on page 113 of Fr. Charles P. Connor's *Charles Carroll of Carrollton, American Revolutionary*, EWTN Publishing, Irondale, AL, 2024.)

After the Revolution, Charles Carroll of Carrollton served in the Maryland State Senate, and in 1789 was one of the two who became U.S. Senators from Maryland while also holding the office of state senator in Maryland. He held this dual role until a Maryland law made him choose between the two when it amended the state constitution. He left the U.S. Senate in 1792 and served in the Maryland Senate until 1800. He helped finance the Revolution with his considerable inherited estate, and, like other plantation owners, he "owned" over 300 enslaved laborers. Late in life, at 90 (1827), he joined the American Colonization Society, which sought to relocate freed and free Black Americans to the new colony of Liberia. Liberia became an independent state on July 26, 1847. This society was founded on December 21, 1816, by George Washington's nephew, Bushrod Washington (1762–1829). Bushrod Washington inherited Mount Vernon and was himself a slaveowner. While there is evidence that Charles Carroll of Carrollton did release a small number of slaves, he died without releasing the vast majority. It is hoped that Charles Carroll—and Notley Young as well—dealt with their enslaved people as the Jesuits reportedly did, as mentioned above. He fought for religious liberties and equality, and helped with the building of churches and with Georgetown Academy, later Georgetown College. He was the last of the signers of the Declaration of Independence to die. (For an in-depth analysis of Charles Carroll & slavery, see the article in *Maryland Historical Magazine: Journal of Maryland History and Culture*, Fall/Winter 2022, pp. 185–226, "Charles Carroll of Carrollton and the Enslaved Families at Doughoragan Manor in Post-revolutionary Maryland," by Mary Clement Jeske.) (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.mdhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/MdHM_117_2_Fall-Wtr_2022_FINAL.pdf)

Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek also had a brother, five years younger, who was a Catholic Jesuit priest by the name of John Carroll. Fr. John Carroll (1735–1815) was a suppressed Jesuit who served as a "secular" priest. He too went off, at the age of twelve, to study at St. Omer's, but became a Catholic priest with the Jesuit order, or, more properly, the Society of Jesus. He was serving in England before returning home, in 1774, to his mother in Rock Creek (today Forest Glen, Maryland). Margaret Brent Downing relates a story that when Fr. John Carroll returned home to Rock Creek/Forest Glen at the age of 40, his mother, Eleanor Darnell Carroll, did not recognize him, and they had to convince her of her son's identity.

At first, Fr. John Carroll would celebrate Mass in a room in his mother's house, but that quickly became too small. He went on to build, on two acres of Carroll property, a small wooden chapel that became one of the oldest U.S. parishes, in Rock Creek (Forest Glen). The names vary—Rock Creek Chapel, Carroll Chapel, or Carroll Mission—and then, in 1851, a new church,

St. John's Chapel, was built because the old mission chapel was beyond repair. Finally, it became St. John the Evangelist Church. When the cornerstone was laid for the 1893 new church of St. John's, Archbishop James Gibbons was there, and the speaker was a Fr. Thomas O'Gorman, who said of the Rock Creek Chapel that if Baltimore was the "Jerusalem" of the Catholic Faith in America, then the Rock Creek/Forest Glen St. John's chapel was America's "Bethlehem." (cf. *Saint John the Evangelist: The History of the Parish, 1774 to 1984*, Forest Glen/Silver Spring, Maryland, by Rev. Msgr. Francis Lauiola, Editor, 1984—limited, 136-page, in-house printing.)

Fr. John Carroll was invited to travel to Canada with Charles Carroll of Carrollton in March of 1776, along with Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Chase, as an authorized congressional committee to try to persuade the French Catholics of Canada to join the revolutionary cause. Due to an illness, Franklin had to end his part of the mission and return to Philadelphia. He was accompanied by Fr. John Carroll, who ministered to him in his sickness. They became friends afterward. In 1784, the Holy See established an Apostolic Prefecture for the United States, and Fr. John Carroll was given the post of Prefect Apostolic over approximately 24 priests (mostly former Jesuits) and 25,000 Catholics.

It seems that Benjamin Franklin, then living in France, may have played a role in this appointment, for on July 1, 1784, he wrote in his journal: "The Nuncio called and acquainted me that the Pope had, on my Recommendation, appointed Mr. John Carroll, Superior of the Catholic Clergy in America, with many of the Powers of a Bishop; and that probably he would be made a Bishop *in partibus* before the End of the Year." It is interesting that even though Pope Clement XIV suppressed the Jesuits in 1773, it did not prevent Fr. John Carroll from becoming both Prefect and later the first bishop of Baltimore, November 6, 1789—his consecration, however, took place in England on August 15, 1790. Franklin may have conflated the role of Prefect Apostolic and the role of bishop proper, since he wrote of it five years before Carroll had been consecrated bishop. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-42-02-0234)

General/President George Washington and Catholicism

On March 12 of 1790, President Washington wrote a letter in response to a congratulatory letter on the occasion of his April 30, 1789, inauguration. (The Archdiocese of Baltimore has the date of March 12, while the Mount Vernon official historical record has March 15.) The letter came from United States Catholics (date unknown) and was written on behalf of the Catholic clergy and on behalf of lay Catholics. It was signed by Fr. John Carroll, and also signed by Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Thomas Fitzsimons, a Philadelphia congressional delegate, and Dominick Lynch, a New York Irish merchant. It was simply titled "From United States Catholics." As mentioned above, Thomas Fitzsimons was the other Catholic signer of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. During the Constitutional Convention, according to his diary, George Washington attended Fitzsimons' St. Mary's Catholic Church in Philadelphia on May 27, 1787, for a "Romish Church—High Mass," having attended a Catholic vesper service there thirteen years earlier, on October 9, 1774, during the Continental Congress. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/mss/mgw/mgwd/wd05/wd05.pdf)

It is supposed that the letter from U.S. Catholics was written early in 1790, after Fr. Carroll was nominated bishop on November 6, 1789, and before his consecration in England on August 15, 1790. In that letter to the new President, they called for religious liberty to be made secure. President Washington wrote back in part, "America, under the smiles of a Divine Providence, the protection of a good government, and the cultivation of manners, morals, and piety, cannot fail of attaining an uncommon degree of eminence, in literature, commerce, agriculture, improvements at home and respectability abroad. As mankind become more liberal they will be more apt to allow that all those who conduct themselves as worthy members of the community are equally entitled to the protection of civil government. I hope ever to see America among the foremost nations in examples of justice and liberality. And I presume that your fellow-citizens will not forget the patriotic part which you took in the accomplishment of their Revolution, and the establishment of their government; or the important assistance which they received from a nation in which the Roman Catholic faith is professed." (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/letter-to-the-roman-catholics/)

President Washington may have also been referring to the patriotism of Catholics from Europe who greatly helped him and the American cause. Three in particular were the Frenchman Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834), and the two Polish nationals Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817) and Casimir Pulaski (1745–1779), the father of American cavalry. Lafayette was so close to Washington that Washington referred to him as "his adopted son." Lafayette was instrumental in obtaining financial support, matériel, and a French navy to help win the Revolution. Lafayette would have been baptized and raised Catholic. He may have been culturally Catholic with stronger Enlightenment views; his wife prayed for his full conversion. However, he did attend a Mass at the Baltimore Cathedral on October 10, 1824, and one source has Charles Carroll with him. Charles Carroll was the chairman of the ball being held in Lafayette's honor. His Polish co-patriot was Tadeusz Kościuszko. He came to the Continental Congress and offered his military expertise in fortifications. He is credited with playing an instrumental role in several battles, particularly through his design of the fortifications on the Hudson River at West Point. General Pulaski died from his wounds at the Battle of Savannah, October 11, 1779. Certain cities and states have local or statewide celebrations, as in Illinois, and President Barack Obama made him an honorary American citizen on November 6, 2009. At that final battle at Yorktown in 1781, when the Continental Army combined with the French fleet, it is estimated that Catholics made up 70 percent of the American/French forces against the British.

President Washington was an Anglican. He held himself passionately to being in control of his emotions and comportment, and to including everyone equally. He developed this personal manner and character from his youth, through a book he hand-copied into his schoolbook, called *Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*. It put forth 110 maxims on self-control and other elements of gentlemanly and moral behavior. While popular among Protestant colonial schoolchildren, the book itself was based on a Catholic French Jesuit work from the 17th century. So, while Washington did not have a formal education, he did have a very indirect Jesuit "education," insofar as he mastered this book.

One of General Washington's aides-de-camp was a Catholic Irishman, Lt. Col. John Fitzgerald, who held a fundraiser on St. Patrick's Day at his home in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1788. It was to benefit the building of a Catholic church to be named St. Mary's (1795), and Washington was in

attendance and contributed to this effort. He also contributed to the building of a Catholic church in Baltimore. Washington owned two devotional paintings, one of St. John the Apostle and the other of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which hung in the mansion's dining room. All of the above is well documented, but there is one tradition that holds that on his deathbed (December 14, 1799), Washington called for a Catholic priest.

Among the Maryland Jesuits, there is a tradition that a priest from St. Mary's Mission, which was across the Potomac from Mount Vernon, attended to the dying President Washington. A Fr. Leonard Neale, S.J., stayed nearly four hours, giving rise to speculation that Washington converted to Catholicism. While Washington did forbid the Protestant yearly anti-Catholic custom of November 5th, "Pope's Night," which paralleled the English "Guy Fawkes Day," or the "burning of the Guy," there is no sacramental record of Washington's conversion to Catholicism. However, Fr. Leonard Neale, S.J., apparently wrote of his visit, and this sealed letter was given to his superior, who then sent it on to Rome. Fr. Neale went on to become the fourth president of Georgetown College (March 30, 1799) and then the second Archbishop of Baltimore (1815–1817). Now that we have an American Pope, perhaps we could find that letter?

Archbishop John Carroll's final great honor happened when he was asked by Baltimore's town fathers to bless the cornerstone of the first architectural monument to President George Washington, in 1815. This first Washington Monument would be in Baltimore, completed in 1829, and would stand 178 feet 8 inches, with an interior stairway to a top platform. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://baltimore.org/what-to-do/the-story-behind-baltimores-washington-monument/) But due to his advanced age, Archbishop Carroll declined, and he would live just five months longer. This honor was all the more significant coming from a Protestant majority. Archbishop John Carroll was chosen because they knew of his friendship with President Washington, and they knew of his commitment to the United States—in that he always promoted good citizenship. Archbishop Carroll was not only a church leader, but he was a statesman.

As to the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C., anti-Catholicism was involved in the destruction of a gift from the Holy See/Vatican, Blessed Pope Pius IX, to America of a slab of marble intended for the Washington Monument with the inscription "Rome to America." During the night of March 5/6, 1854, four to nine men associated with the Know-Nothing Party (officially the "American Party") stole the three-foot-wide, eighteen-inch-tall, and ten-inch-thick memorial block from the holding grounds and then smashed it into pieces. They then threw the pieces into the Potomac River half a mile away. Pieces were recovered and taken to City Hall, but then were stolen again. News of the Pope's Stone had been circulating since its arrival in 1851, drawing out a great deal of anti-Catholic sentiment and calls for the rejection of such a gift. A replacement stone was mounted in the Monument at the 340-foot level with the inscription "*A Roma Americae*." (Accessed August 25, 2026: https://catholicjournal.us/2015/04/18/the-popes-stone/)

Pope Leo XIII, eighty years after Archbishop Carroll's death, wrote an encyclical on "Catholicism in America" on January 6, 1895—*Longinqua* in Latin. This is the first such encyclical addressed particularly to the Catholic hierarchy in America and not to the universal Church. Without going through the whole encyclical, Pope Leo XIII mentions the propitious design of "divine Providence" that not only brought President Washington together with the first

bishop, Archbishop John Carroll (though unnamed in the text), in deep friendship, but that they would help bring about a republic where Church and State can work together, or, as he states it, "ought to be conjoined in concord and amity." Pope Leo, however, notes that this is not an ideal model. He notes Washington's statesmanship and his deep commitment to morality, without which one cannot have good government. Leo XIII further posits that religion is morality's strongest aid.

Pope Leo XIII would go on to mention the establishment of the Catholic University in Washington, D.C. (1887), and the North American College in Rome (1859), and mentions upholding marriage in the face of a growing incidence of divorce. He announces an official Apostolic Delegation from the Holy See to the United States, reviving the exchange of diplomats that had existed from 1848 to 1867, when the U.S. had a mission to the Papal States. Pope Leo's announcement did not amount to full diplomatic relations, due to anti-Catholicism prevalent in the U.S. at that time. In fact, full diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the U.S. would not happen until President Ronald Reagan established them on January 10, 1984.

Finally, for our purposes here, Pope Leo XIII encourages the clergy to teach the obligations of good citizenship. He writes in paragraph 15, "As regards civil affairs, experience has shown how important it is that the citizens should be upright and virtuous. In a free State, unless justice be generally cultivated, unless the people be repeatedly and diligently urged to observe the precepts and laws of the Gospel, liberty itself may be pernicious. Let those, of the clergy, therefore, who are occupied with the instruction of the multitude, treat plainly this topic of the duties of citizens, so that all may understand and feel the necessity, in political life, of conscientiousness, self restraint, and integrity; for that cannot be lawful in public which is unlawful in private affairs." He further references other encyclicals on these matters of human liberty, civil government, and duties of good citizenship. He reminds priests to uphold the Third Council of Baltimore and promote the virtue of temperance, the sacraments, and the observance of just laws and the institutions of the Republic. Pope Leo XIII's encyclical is totally in the spirit of Archbishop John Carroll. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_06011895_longinqua.html)

One last Washington connection to Catholicism needs to be addressed, and that is the hoax or fictional story of General Washington having a vision of a "beautiful woman" speaking to him while at Valley Forge. This story has been thoroughly investigated, and its source is a pamphleteer who wrote other fictional tales. The pamphlet was written 100 years after the Valley Forge event. Some form of this story survives in a Catholic interpretation with the Virgin Mary as the "beautiful woman"; but again, there is no credence to be given to this tale.

Bishop John Carroll and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

In the same year as D.C. was founded, 1791, Bishop Carroll composed a prayer titled "Prayer for Our Government" (included at the end of this article). He had it read out at the end of Mass in every parish. Fr. John Carroll would go on to found Georgetown Academy (1789), and then he became the first Archbishop in 1808. Also in 1791, Bishop Carroll called for a diocesan synod of priests to discuss pastoral strategies. The Jesuit suppression was lifted in 1814. Archbishop Carroll turned over the administration of the former Academy, now college, to the Jesuits.

President James Madison granted Georgetown College's first charter to grant degrees on March 1, 1815, and it used the names Georgetown College and Georgetown University interchangeably. However, Georgetown's 1844 charter was changed in 1966 to Georgetown University—the first time in federal statute. In a 1792 pastoral letter, Bishop John Carroll placed the U.S. under the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He dedicated his cathedral to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and in May of 1846, the U.S. bishops voted to declare Mary, under the title of her Immaculate Conception, as Patroness of the United States. Blessed Pope Pius IX would later declare the dogma of the Immaculate Conception an infallible teaching in 1854.

Bishop John Carroll ordained the first Catholic priest in the U.S., Fr. Stephen Badin, on May 25, 1793. Fr. Badin himself would become quite the frontier traveler and ended up providing land that would later become the University of Notre Dame in Indiana (1842), where there is a hall named in his honor. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Badin) As archbishop, Carroll would go on to defend religious freedom for Catholics and others for the growing United States, which would be in keeping with the Carroll family's Irish motto, "*In fide et in bello forte,"* "Strong in Faith and (in) War." But, when they came to America, they changed it to "*Ubicumque cum Libertate*," or "Anywhere, so long as there be Freedom." This tells us of the Carroll family's dedication both to the Catholic faith and to their vigilant patriotism. As archbishop, in 1810, Carroll called for the first meeting of diocesan bishops, anticipating today's United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Catholic religious sisters and nuns also started to arrive in the newly formed country with the Discalced Carmelite Nuns in Port Tobacco, Maryland (October 15, 1790—Feast Day of St. Teresa of Jesus/Ávila) and, at Georgetown, the Poor Clares (1799–1805), followed by years of loose, informal formation among committed women who would eventually form the Visitation Sisters, taking their first vows on December 26, 1816. At that time, up until 1808, the Diocese of Baltimore encompassed the whole of the original thirteen colonies and four new states and their territories, which means from the Canadian border of Maine to Florida, and then westward to the Mississippi River and beyond—viz., the Louisiana Purchase. It was in that year that Baltimore was made an archdiocese, with John Carroll as its first archbishop and St. Peter's in Baltimore as his pro-cathedral. Additionally, the dioceses of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Bardstown (Kentucky) were created to minister to the growing Catholic population. As to religious orders of men, the Augustinians were first in Philadelphia (1796), followed by the Franciscans (O.F.M.) in 1804, the Dominicans in 1805, and the continuation of the Jesuits in 1814.

Most famous among these early Catholics was Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774–1821). Born in New York City and baptized as an Episcopalian, she converted to Catholicism after her husband's death. In 1805, she was received into the Catholic Church at St. Peter's, the only Catholic church in New York City at that time. She received the sacrament of Confirmation from the only bishop in the U.S., Bishop John Carroll, in 1806. In that same year, 1806, he blessed the cornerstone of the new cathedral—later dedicated in 1821 as the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary by Archbishop Ambrose Maréchal. The new cathedral would take several more decades to be completed. It became a basilica in 1937, a co-cathedral in 1959 (with the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen), and a national shrine in 1993. As the first cathedral of the United States, it is thus considered the Mother Church for U.S. Catholics.

In 1809, Elizabeth Ann Seton founded a religious order in Emmitsburg, Maryland, called the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph (later renamed the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul). The Sisters provided free education to children and would be the model for the Catholic parochial school system. She was the first American-born saint, and here is a wonderful quote from Pope St. Paul VI, given at her canonization: "Elizabeth Ann Seton is a saint. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is an American. All of us say this with special joy, and with the intention of honoring the land and the nation from which she sprang forth as the first flower in the calendar of the saints. Elizabeth Ann Seton was wholly American! Rejoice for your glorious daughter. Be proud of her. And know how to preserve her fruitful heritage."—Pope Paul VI (September 14, 1975). (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://setonshrine.org/elizabeth-ann-seton/)

Outside the Thirteen Colonies

The earliest Catholic event is perhaps little known to most Catholics, but it happened in the future state of Florida with the Spanish founding of St. Augustine on September 8, 1565—Feast Day of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is 55 years before the Mayflower in 1620. It was in St. Augustine that the first recorded parish Mass on the continental U.S. was celebrated, and the first Thanksgiving dinner with the Indigenous people occurred—sometimes described as the first, and very Catholic, Thanksgiving. St. Augustine has been continuously inhabited since then. The first Marian shrine was built there in 1609 at the *Nombre de Dios* Mission, with the statue of Our Lady of the Milk and Happy Delivery, or in Spanish*, Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto*. The image is of Mary breastfeeding the baby Jesus, and it has been sought out ever since by couples seeking divine help in having children. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://catholicconnect.in/news/the-shrine-where-millions-have-whispered-their-prayers-the-remarkable-story-of-our-lady-of-la-leche)

Catholics should know this valuable bit of history. Also, little known to Catholics today is the early establishment of churches and French missions throughout the Great Lakes and down the Mississippi River and the Ohio River. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://infovaticana.com/en/2026/07/06/leo-xiv-closes-the-national-eucharistic-pilgrimage-and-recalls-the-catholic-roots-of-the-united-states/) Catholic priests traveling with French explorers in the 1600s founded fur-trading centers and religious missions, which they named after Catholic saints and themes. These missionaries produced saints such as the North American martyrs: St. Isaac Jogues, St. Jean de Brébeuf, et al., and St. Kateri Tekakwitha. One such fur-trading post and mission was named after St. Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus and chaste spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and is located near Niles, Michigan, today. The mission of St. Joseph lay at the crossroads of the Old Sauk Trail and the Grand River Trail, near the St. Joseph River. It was founded in the 1680s on land acquired for the Jesuits under French royal patronage. The French built a fort in 1691. Another such French fur-trading post and mission was named after a French king and saint, Louis IX; St. Louis was founded in 1764. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/visit-play/stlouis-history.cfm) The current Archdiocese of St. Louis is celebrating its bicentennial, for it was founded as a diocese on July 18, 1826, and then as an archdiocese in 1847.

An even older French mission on the eastern side of the Mississippi River was the Church of the Immaculate Conception, founded in 1675, which grew out of an earlier Immaculate Conception

mission (1673) established at Starved Rock (north-central Illinois) by Fr. Jacques Marquette, S.J. This mission would soon become the town of Kaskaskia—just south of St. Louis—which itself was named after the local tribe of Kaskaskia Indians, who were part of the Illini Confederation of 12 other tribes. Over time, these tribes merged into five main tribes. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/visit-play/stlouis-history.cfm) Fr. Jacques Marquette and Louis Jolliet "discovered" the Mississippi River on June 17, 1673, where the Wisconsin River meets the Mississippi River, just south of Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. Fr. Marquette called it the "River of the Immaculate Conception." Founded in 1703, the town of Kaskaskia would receive a gift of a large bell in 1741 from the French king, Louis XV. That bell would be used in the Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception. Kaskaskia would eventually become the capital of the Illinois Territory and, later, the first state capital of Illinois (1818); and, in its heyday, Kaskaskia had a population of 7,000, but today it has just 21.

After the French and Indian War (1754–1763), the British took up occupation in Kaskaskia. After the Revolutionary War began, their presence eventually caught the attention of the Colony of Virginia. At that time, colonies laid claim to territorial boundaries extending across the Appalachian Mountains west to the Mississippi River, and so they saw this as a threat to both Virginia and the nascent republic. After the Kentucky territory was annexed to Virginia, Governor Patrick Henry ordered then-Major George Rogers Clark, a member of the Kentucky County militia, to take 175 men and capture the British forts at Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes (1778). Newly commissioned as a lieutenant colonel of the Illinois Regiment of the Virginia State Forces, he arrived on July 4, 1778.

At Kaskaskia, George Rogers Clark took the British fort without resistance, but he encountered French Catholic settlers, under the care of Fr. Pierre Gibault (1737–1802), whom the British had propagandized with fear against the Virginia/Kentucky rebels. They were told that the rebels would not respect their Catholic religion and gave the impression that they would be slaughtered. Led by Fr. Gibault, the French settlers gathered in the Church of the Immaculate Conception for prayer, celebrated Mass, and prepared for death. Fr. Gibault then talked with Clark and found out the truth, that in fact, France was an ally of the new United States. When the settlers learned this, they rejoiced and rang the church bell in celebration, and did so every Fourth of July thereafter. The bell became known as the "Liberty Bell of the West" and was even taken on tour to various cities. A hairline crack appeared in 1948, and in 1993 the bell was retired to a protective brick building next to the church. Every year since then, a local family with historical ties gets to ring the new church bell on July 4th, where the State of Illinois hosts a yearly program of celebration.

With the help of Fr. Gibault, Lieutenant Colonel Clark was able to recruit Frenchmen to help him go on to attack the British forts at Cahokia and Fort Sackville, in Vincennes, Indiana. In fact, Fr. Gibault went ahead of Clark, and negotiated with the French settlers of Vincennes, which helped Clark immensely in taking Fort Sackville. Clark's leadership and his 200-mile march across the lower Illinois swampland to take the British fort (1779) were most impressive, and he was hailed as the "Conqueror of the Old Northwest." The new Virginia governor, Thomas Jefferson, later advanced his rank to brigadier general, and Fr. Pierre Gibault would become known as the "patriot priest of the Northwest." (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Rogers_Clark)

For his exploits, George Rogers Clark became famous, but he was later eclipsed by his younger brother, William. It was this Clark who went with Meriwether Lewis up the Missouri River in 1804, after stopping in Kaskaskia in November of 1803 for supplies. With the rise of steamboats or paddleboats on the Mississippi River, riverboat crews deforested the riverbanks of the Mississippi River, and when it flooded in 1881, the river carved out a new channel that put the town of Kaskaskia on the western side, thus making it the only Illinois town west of the Mississippi River.

From the Southwest and West Coast, we have the Spanish coming up from Mexico in the 1600s, and then the 21 Spanish missions in California—for example, San Juan Capistrano. This mission is in modern-day Orange County and is celebrating its 250th anniversary. It was founded in 1775 but failed, and then was reestablished on November 1, 1776, by Franciscan Catholic priest St. Junípero Serra. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://californiamissionsfoundation.org/the-california-missions) Every state has two historical people whose statues are displayed in the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall, and California has chosen St. Junípero Serra. And he is not alone, for there are other Catholics represented there as well. Although the statues have changed over time, these Catholics have had their statues displayed. Listed alphabetically by state, they are:

- Fr. Eusebius Kino, S.J. (Arizona)
- St. Fr. Junípero Serra, O.F.M. (California)
- St. Fr. Damien de Veuster, SS.CC. (aka "Fr. Damien of Molokai") (Hawaii)
- Gen. James Shields (Illinois)
- Edward Douglass White (Louisiana)
- Charles Carroll of Carrollton (Maryland)
- Patrick A. McCarran (Nevada)
- Dennis Chávez (New Mexico)
- John Burke (North Dakota)
- Dr. John McLoughlin (Oregon)
- Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart (Mother Mary Joseph Pariseau) (Washington)
- John Edward Kenna (West Virginia)
- Fr. Jacques Marquette, S.J. (Wisconsin)

Conclusion

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the death of Archbishop John Carroll (1915), then Cardinal Archbishop Gibbons said of him,

"The dominant idea in the mind of Bishop Carroll, who was as great a statesman as he was a churchman, an idea that has remained the inspiration of the Church, and has dictated all her policy of the last century … was absolute loyalty to the letter and the spirit of the Constitution of the U.S.

"Bishop Carroll did not wish to see the Church vegetate as a delicate exotic plant. He wished it to become a sturdy tree, deep-rooted in the soil, to grow with the growth and bloom with the development of the country, inured to its climate, braving its storms … His aim was that the

clergy and people should be thoroughly cast; that they should study its laws and political constitution, and be in harmony with its spirit. From this mutual accord of Church and State there could but follow beneficent effects for both." (cf. *Saint John the Evangelist: The History of the Parish 1774–1984*, p. 87, citation of Annabelle Melville's *John Carroll of Baltimore*, New York: Charles Scribner's & Sons, 1955, p. 287)

On this occasion of the 250th founding of our nation, we American Catholics have a lot to be proud of and to celebrate. However, I have not addressed in full the role anti-Catholicism has played in the formation of our country. The thirteen colonies were majority Protestant, with Catholics making up just one percent of the population, or 25,000 out of 2.5 million. These Catholics were mostly in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://thetablet.org/catholicism-in-america-1776-2026) Today, Catholicism in the U.S. is estimated at 20 percent, which is actually down from a high of 24 percent in 2007. Today, 28 percent of Congress identifies as Catholic, and the Supreme Court in recent years has ranged between 55 and 70 percent Catholic.

The first Catholic to sit on the Supreme Court, and its fifth Chief Justice, was Roger B. Taney (1777–1864), who wrote for the majority in the infamous *Dred Scott* decision (1857), upholding slavery and ruling that enslaved and free Black Americans could not be citizens. The first and only Catholic chaplain to the U.S. Senate was Annapolis native Fr. Charles Constantine Pise (1801–1866), in the 22nd Congress—1832–33. The first Catholic chaplain to the House of Representatives would be Fr. Daniel Coughlin, on March 23, 2000, after Fr. Timothy O'Brien's nomination was passed over in 1999, reportedly due to anti-Catholicism. The first Catholic nominee of a major political party was Alfred E. Smith, in 1928. And the first Catholic president was John F. Kennedy (1917–1963), who himself pledged, during his campaign for president, not to be influenced by the Pope or any Catholic authority, at the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, at the Rice Hotel, Houston, Texas, on September 12, 1960. He further said, however, that if there was a conflict, he would resign.

Nevertheless, anti-Catholicism is an extremely important theme in understanding America. It was the preeminent Harvard historian, Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr., who told the famous Catholic historian, Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, that "I regard the prejudice against your Church as the deepest bias in the history of the American people." (Quote from Msgr. John Tracy Ellis' *American Catholicism*, Second edition, 1969, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 151.) (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2000/03/25/anti-catholicism-last-acceptable-prejudice)

There is one last, intriguing, potential Catholic connection—not just to the United States of America, but to the whole Western Hemisphere. The early Florentine Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci (1454–1512) had his name lent to maps of these western lands as "America." Amerigo's Latin equivalent is *Americus/Emericus*, which is taken from Saint Emeric, or in Latin, *Sanctus Americus/Emericus*. Devotion to St. Emeric, the son of St. Stephen of Hungary, was prominent in Florence, Italy. And so, our Western Hemisphere and our nation are, again potentially, named—albeit indirectly—after a Catholic saint.

With that said, it cannot be denied, at the very least, that our nation undoubtedly has Catholic roots, for the U.S. Capitol, and a good portion of D.C., sit on land that was once owned by Catholics. So, from sea to shining sea, from D.C. to Kaskaskia, to the Catholic missions in California and Hawaii, may this land be blessed by God. May we rededicate ourselves to our national profession as One Nation Under God, with a Revolutionary slogan (and, at times, an anti-Catholic slur), "For we have no king, but Jesus!" Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, pray for us. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://x.com/sachinettiyil/status/2073642727363768656)

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* *Post note:* In the early decades of the founding, colonies like Maryland had, as their source of labor, the use of white European indentured servants. It was the most dominant form of bound labor, with terms varying from three, five, or seven years to pay off passage debts. After Virginia, Maryland, in 1664, passed a law making African slavery hereditary. While the vast majority of the slave trade went to the Caribbean and South America, American tobacco plantation owners shifted from indentured servitude to African slavery in the late 1600s and into the 1700s.

Construction of the White House and the Capitol buildings used enslaved labor, as did the Jesuits at Georgetown College. The Jesuits and their Maryland plantations were part of this slave economy, despite the official Catholic Church's stance against slavery—e.g., Pope Paul III's papal bull *Sublimis Deus* (1537, accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.papalencyclicals.net/paul03/p3subli.htm). This bull addresses the evil of enslaving native or Indigenous peoples, but it also logically applies, at least in principle, to the then-nascent African slave trade. It acknowledges that all created people have the ability to think and learn and thus must be provided with human dignity and be presented with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (It seems that the Jesuits did do this at their plantations.) Then, in 1839, Pope Gregory XVI issued a powerful condemnation of the slave trade, *In Supremo Apostolatus*. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.papalencyclicals.net/greg16/g16sup.htm)

In 2015, Georgetown University, a Jesuit Catholic institution, initiated a working group to study and then acknowledge that it had used enslaved African labor. In 2017, Georgetown formally apologized for having sold 272 enslaved people in 1838 to pay off debts. At that time, they created a "Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation" program, a form of reparation for the descendants of the enslaved people who labored at the college and its Jesuit plantations. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://president.georgetown.edu/degioia/initiatives/slavery-legacies and https://www.georgetown.edu/news/georgetown-apologizes-for-1838-sale-of-272-slaves-dedicates-buildings/) Not to minimize his own use of enslaved labor, the writer of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, tried to include a line condemning slavery and the British slave trade. He identified slavery as a "cruel war against human nature itself" and "this execrable commerce," but it was struck out as being impolitic for the southern colonies. He once described slavery as "holding a wolf by the ears."

Others have called slavery "America's Original Sin," meaning, in one sense, that the slavery issue was there from the beginning as a moral complexity, as seen in this quote from a 1774

letter from Abigail Adams to her husband: “I wish most sincerely there was not a slave in the province. It always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to me—to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have. You know my mind upon this subject.” (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://eclectic-library.neocities.org/saidthat/2020/06/2020-06-01-Abigail-Adams-on-Slavery) However, as we saw during the Civil War, slavery became the central cause—namely, that it needed to be eradicated. Later, Pope Leo XIII taught that slavery was a “gloomy plague” and that it went against the Natural Law.

In May of 2026, Pope Leo XIV issued his first encyclical, called *Magnifica Humanitas*. In sections 173 to 179, following his predecessors, he condemns institutional slavery and asks pardon where there has been ecclesial or Church complicity. (Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html) He also condemns what are called new forms of slavery, e.g., economic exploitation, sex trafficking, and a type of data “colonialism” over an individual’s entire pattern-of-life analysis via AI. He also addresses digital addiction as a new type of slavery.

In my opinion, with the rise of AI, internet pornography will produce virtual prostitution with AI-generated avatars. Additionally, online gambling is only going to get worse once AI starts to analyze one’s whole pattern-of-life. One area he may have included, but did not, as a new form of slavery is the rise of in vitro fertilization (IVF). In IVF, the female egg is fertilized with the male sperm in a test tube or petri dish. These human zygotes are then either implanted, or culled for experimentation and then destroyed, or frozen as “snowflake babies.” The Catholic Church teaches that this too degrades human dignity and makes humans a commodity—thus, IVF constitutes grave matter and is morally sinful.

Prayer for Our Government by Bishop John Carroll (1791)

We pray, O almighty and eternal God, who through Jesus Christ has revealed thy glory to all nations, to preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church, being spread through the whole world, may continue with unchanging faith in the confession of your name.

We pray Thee, who alone are good and holy, to endow with heavenly knowledge, sincere zeal and sanctity of life, our chief bishop, the pope, the vicar of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the government of his Church; our own bishop, all other bishops, prelates and pastors of the Church; and especially those who are appointed to exercise among us the functions of the holy ministry, and conduct your people into the ways of salvation.

We pray O God of might, wisdom and justice, through whom authority is rightly administered, laws are enacted, and judgment decreed, assist with your Holy Spirit of counsel and fortitude the president of these United States, that his administration may be conducted in righteousness and be eminently useful to your people over whom he presides; by encouraging due respect for virtue and religion; by a faithful execution of the laws in justice and mercy; and by restraining vice and immorality.

Let the light of your divine wisdom direct the deliberations of Congress, and shine forth in all the proceedings and laws framed for our rule and government, so that they may tend to the preservation of peace, the promotion of national happiness, the increase of industry, sobriety and useful knowledge; and may perpetuate to us the blessing of equal liberty.

We pray for his excellency, the governor of this state, for the members of the assembly, for all judges, magistrates, and other officers who are appointed to guard our political welfare, that they may be enabled, by your powerful protection, to discharge the duties of their respective stations with honesty and ability.

We recommend likewise, to your unbounded mercy, all our brethren and fellow citizens throughout the United States, that they may be blessed in the knowledge and sanctified in the observance of your most holy law; that they may be preserved in union, and in that peace which the world cannot give; and after enjoying the blessings of this life, be admitted to those which are eternal.

Finally, we pray to you, O Lord of mercy, to remember the souls of your servants departed, who are gone before us with the sign of faith and repose in the sleep of peace; the souls of our parents, relatives and friends; of those who, when living, were members of this congregation, and particularly of such as are lately deceased; of all benefactors who, by their donations or legacies to this Church, witnessed their zeal for the decency of divine worship and proved their claim to our grateful and charitable remembrance. To these, O Lord, and to all that rest in Christ, grant, we beseech you, a place of refreshment, light and everlasting peace, through the same Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior. Amen.

(Accessed August 17, 2026: https://www.catholiccompany.com/blogs/magazine/prayer-for-america-by-john-carroll-first-u-s-bishop-6086)

Author's Note

This article started as a simple story about Daniel Carroll of Duddington and his D.C. Catholic connections to the Capitol Hill land ownership. I want to credit Dr. Robert L. Worden, Parish Archivist, St. Mary's, Annapolis, Maryland, for his depth of knowledge of Charles Carroll of Carrollton and his family relations. He also acts as an adviser to the Charles Carroll of Carrollton family home in Annapolis. I used the AI app called Perplexity to help with deep research and to fact-check my historical dates and grammar, and to a much lesser extent I also used Wikipedia. Perplexity offered to rewrite my article several times (while promising to keep my voice), and I refused, but I did follow Perplexity's suggestions for word choice and grammar. I want to advocate that there be some way to mandatorily acknowledge the use of AI in both writing and, especially, in artwork or videos. With AI's ability to produce "deep fakes," it is becoming very difficult to ascertain whether something is real or AI-generated, as there is the added problem of AI itself using copyrighted material. There should be a type of watermark on these products.

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