

## Facts about Black Catholic History in the Archdiocese of Baltimore

1. Aboard the **Ark** and **Dove**, boats from England which landed in Southern Maryland, it has been reported by historians that there were 100 Catholics, 2 priest and a servant Catholic Negro on board. This was in 1634. (Henry S. Spalding, Catholic Colonial Maryland, 1931, pg. #102)



Yet, **The Afro American Newspaper** reports that there were **two Blacks** aboard these ships. One, **John Price** from England, sometimes referred to as **Joyce**, and one from Barbados, **Matthias de Sousa**, (Catholic) who assisted in the rebuilding on one of the above ships as it was shipwrecked during its voyage. Both men were indentured servants.

Another report from Rev. John Gillard speaks of a Black man named **Hannibal**, a servant in the family of Leonard Calvert, who remained with the family until his death. This man, Hannibal, may have been Catholic since it was customary for servants to be instructed in the faith of the family he/she served.

2. By 1636 more Blacks must have come into the Catholic community. There is a report that a Jesuit traveled from Newton to Blackstone Island in southern Maryland to "offer Mass for the English and colored people."
3. In 1790 there was a congregation of Blacks that attended services in the basement of St. Mary's Seminary, Paca Street.
4. In 1801 a Fr. John Souge from Meldley's Neck, St. Mary's County, publicly spoke out against slavery and called for insurrection.
5. St. Francis Xavier Parish in East Baltimore was founded in 1863, becoming the first official Black Catholic parish in the United States. This faith community bought a historic Universalist Church for \$6,000. Fr. Michael O'Conner, S.J., helped to raise funds for this purchase. This church was once the site of Henry Clay's Nomination Address.
6. In 1843 the first Black Catholic Organization "The Holy Family Society" was founded, with a membership of 270 people. They met in the basement of St. Ignatius Church, in what was known as Calvert Hall. St. Ignatius Church is on Calvert Street in Baltimore City.
7. The Oblate Sisters of Providence were formed in 1829. It was and is the first African American Sisterhood in America and in the world. Both the foundress, Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange and founder, Rev. James Joubert, SS, were exiles from the French Colony of Saint Dominque. Mr. George Hoffman gave this religious order a home at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and St. Mary's Court.

8. The Oblate Sisters of Providence established the first institution for learning for Blacks in the United States at (Pennsylvania Avenue and St. Mary's Court) - St. Frances Academy. They took in orphans and assisted with the Underground Railroad.
9. The Oblate Sisters of Providence built a chapel on Richmond Street (in the area where the Fifth Regiment Armory stands today). This site held their Convent and Academy in 1836.
10. The Jenkins family assisted the Josephite Fathers and Brothers on establishing an orphanage for Black children during the Civil War in the vicinity of Hilton Street near Carlisle Avenue, (Walbrook section of Baltimore, which is in St. Cecilia's Parish).
11. St. Peter Claver Church in west Baltimore was once the largest Black Catholic community in the United States, organizing over 10,000 people to participate in their annual May Processions. Famous musicians and entertainers attended church at St. Peter Claver such as the Inkspots and Billie Holiday.
12. In 1894, the Fifth Black Catholic Congress was held in Baltimore at St. Peter Claver Parish. The president of this Congress, Dr. William Lofton addressed the Congress in these words..."We hope to hail the day when the American people, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and the laity shall rise up in their might and stamp out the prejudice which is today destroying the life blood of this country."
13. Fr. Charles Uncles, a Baltimorean, was the first Black Josephite priest and in fact was the first Black priest ordained in the United States. (Fr. Augustine Tolton was the first Black priest, ordained in Rome). Fr. Uncles was ordained in 1891. On June 17, 2002 a Housing Unit for Seniors was opened and named after Fr. Uncles. It's location is 608 Pennsylvania Avenue.
14. There was a Black Catholic Parish located in the Camden Yards section of Baltimore. This faith community, St. Monica's was named after the mother of St. Augustine, both of African descent. Fr John Dorsey, the second Black Josephite priest, served as pastor of this faith community.
15. William A. Williams, a Black man who once studied at Rome's Urban College from 1855-1862, was active at St. Francis Xavier Church. During the period from 1855 – 1863, Williams' published in Baltimore a journal called the Truth Communicator, directed to freedmen and called them to work towards the emancipation of slaves. Mr. Williams was a well known tutor and teacher of Black men and worked at the Enoch Pratt Library. (James Hennesey, S.J. American Catholics: pgs. 144-45). This Journal predates Daniel Rudd's newspaper.
16. The baptismal registers of St. Peter's Pro-cathedral and of the Cathedral of the Assumpta (downtown Baltimore) includes records of baptisms of Black people as far back as 1797, with the baptism of an eighteen year old women, Jeanne Antoinette Sanite. (Cyprian Davis, The History of Black Catholics in The United States, pg. #85).