

Easter Duty Lists, c. 1808-1833
St. Mary's Seminary Chapel, Baltimore, MD
Transcribers' Notes

Background

The historic chapel of St. Mary's Seminary & University (est. 1791) was dedicated in 1808 and built on the original campus of the seminary in what is now the Seton Hill neighborhood of Baltimore City. The seminary was established by the Sulpician Fathers, an apostolic society of diocesan priests dedicated to the formation of priests for the Catholic Church, who arrived in this country from France in 1791. The seminary operated on this campus over the period 1791-1969, when the decision was made to centralize its program on a second campus that had been opened in the Roland Park neighborhood in 1929. Today, the chapel is part of St. Mary's Spiritual Center and Historic Site, which is owned and maintained by the Associated Sulpicians of the United States.

Over its history, the chapel served the seminary and college communities located on the campus, as well as the families in the surrounding neighborhood. It was also home to a special ministry that had been established for Baltimore's community of French-speaking Haitian refugees that was conducted over the period, 1796-1833. Members of this community were free and enslaved, white and of color. Although most of the early records for the chapel have been lost, the lists created for those individuals who performed their Easter duties* at the chapel over the period 1808-1833 have survived. (The surviving lists are for the years: 1809-1822, 1824, 1825, 1827, 1831, 1832, 1832-1833.) These lists have been transcribed and the names entered into a Centralized Name Index to provide people access to the records for the first time. A digitized version of the Easter Duty lists, 1808-1833, has also been made available.

The Easter Duty lists were created and maintained by Rev. Jean-Marie Tessier (1758-1840), a French-born Sulpician priest who served at the seminary, 1791-1840. In addition to his duties at the seminary, Rev. Tessier was in charge of the special ministry to Haitian refugees for the years 1796-1827. The names recorded in these lists reflect the diverse makeup of the different communities that worshipped at the chapel and how they changed over time.

In addition to listing the names of those individual who performed their Easter duties, the lists also record the names of those who were being prepared and/or received sacrament of communion and, in some cases, the sacrament of confirmation at St. Mary's Chapel. Sacraments performed at St. Mary's Chapel (ex., baptism and marriage) were recorded in the registers of St. Peter's pro-Cathedral (1770-1841) and its successor the Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1821-).

*: During this period in history, it was the practice for individuals to partake in the sacraments of confession and communion just once a year, usually at Easter. In time, this practice came to be known as performing one's Easter duty. In addition to recording the names of those who fulfilled their annual Easter duties, the names of those who received communion for the first time at Easter were also noted.

Transcribers' Notes for Centralized Name Index

The lists have been transcribed as recorded, organized by name, gender, ethnicity, year, and sacrament. A separate entry has been created for every name recorded on each list. When viewing the original records, please note that the list for 1818 is found before 1815.

Please note that the spelling of surnames in these records is not consistent. As a result, it is not unusual to find a surname listed under several different spellings (ex., Servary/Servari/Savary). Because of this, the decision was made to list the names as they appeared on each list instead of selecting one spelling to use consistently across all lists. Alternate spellings are listed under "Comments" unless the alternate spellings immediately follow one another. In a number of instances, an abbreviation was used in place of the full surname. In such cases, transcribers made an effort to identify the full surname, placing the added letters in brackets to indicate when an abbreviation was used (ex., Montp. for Montp[ensier]).

In instances where an entire or partial name was crossed out, the decision was made to create an entry for the name, unless it was obvious that the name had been mistakenly entered in the wrong column and appears elsewhere on the list.

Despite our best efforts some of the names may be spelled or identified incorrectly due to difficulties in reading the handwriting. Distinguishing between what was a first, middle, or surname also presented challenges and may be incorrect in some case. Dashes were used to indicate indecipherable letters.

Column headings: Column headings were not consistent and sometimes are missing from the lists. The transcribers maintained the French wording rather than translate headings into English. To assist researchers, a rough translation of the column headings has been provided below.

Confessions pascales – Easter confessions
Premiere communion – First communion
1ère Communion – First communion
la iere Communions – First communion
Communions pascales – Easter communion
Messieurs – white men
Les Dames/Dames – white women
Les Dames Amer/Americain – white American women
Dames franc – white French women
Hommes blanc – white men
Hommes de Couleur – men of color
Femme de – wife of
Femmes de Couleur – women of color
Filles de Couleur – young women/girls of color
Suite des Filles de Couleur – young women/girls of color, continued
Personnes de Couleur – Persons of Color
Les Preparants – individuals being prepared to receive the sacrament of First Communion

Notations: Notations and abbreviations were inconsistent and, at times, unclear. Unfortunately, a key has not survived to explain them. Listed below are the identifications made and used by the transcribers.*

Entries with an “N” written after the name was used to denote Negro/Black

Entries with an “M” written after the name was used to denote Mulatto

Negre/Negresse libre – Free black man or woman

Mulatre libre – Free mulatto

Negre/Negresse de – Enslaved black person of

Fille – girl or daughter

Fils – son

Femme – wife

Mere - mother

De - of

M^{de} – Madame (Mrs.)

M^{lle} – Mademoiselle (Miss)

M - Monsieur (Mr.)

Sœur – Religious sister

Veuve/V^e/V – widow and abbreviations for widow

*: The abbreviation “Me” could not be identified, but it might have been an abbreviation for the name Marie.

Abbreviated Names: On occasion, first and last names were abbreviated. In instances where it is clear that a person’s name is spelled using a mix of abbreviations (ex., Rose, Rose F., Rose Fr., Rose Franc.), the names have been organized in centralized name list by first name.

Ex.

First Names

Ant – Antoine/Anthony

Ed^d – Edward

Fr or Fran – Francois/Francoise

M/M^e – Mary/Marie (as identified by transcribers)

Magd – Magdelaine

Marg – Margaret/Marguerite

Ve – Victorie/Victoire

Wm - William

Last names

Vol. – Volunbrun

Montp. – Montpensier

Accents: The use of French accent marks on words/names was inconsistent. The decision was made to transcribe the names without accents.

Titles: If a title was noted for the individual, ex., Monsieur or Madame, this information was noted in the Comments in English.

Delles - Mademoiselles

M - Monsieur (Mr.)

Mde – Madame (Mrs.)

Mlle – Mademoiselle (Miss)

Soeur – Sister – professed female religious (identified as a member of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, OSP, in comments)

V/V^e – Veuve (widow)

Explanation of Fields used in the Centralized Name Index

Last, First and Middles Names: Names have been transcribed and recorded to the best of our ability. In instances where a last or first and middle names were not recorded, the abbreviation “N/A” has been noted for “Not Available.” In instances when transcribers were unable to determine if the incomplete name recorded was a last or a first name, it was recorded in the Last Name column. If a name could only be partially transcribed, this partial transcription was noted. Dashes were used to indicate indecipherable letters. Please note that the spelling of names was not consistent and it is not uncommon to find the same individual listed under multiple spellings. Please check under different variations when searching the records. (Ex., La Combe, Lacombe; Goiran, Gouran, Goueran, Gouerran, Gouerrand.) In some cases, abbreviations were created for some of the names recorded. For consistency, first and last names were capitalized.

Year: This column indicates the dated list on which the individual’s name was recorded.

Role: The role of the individual was identified as Recipient (R), the person who received the sacrament; Sponsor (S), the person who helped to prepare the recipient for the sacrament; Aspirant (A), the person being prepared to receive the sacrament. In cases where the Recipient is receiving the sacrament for the first time, the abbreviation R-1 is used. The 1825 list also includes the names of those who received the sacrament of confirmation that year. Note of this is made in the Comments section.

Gender: Individuals were organized by gender, Men (M) or Women (F). In cases where the gender of the person is unknown, an “X” was used

Color: In most cases, the ethnicity of the individual was noted in the record. Individuals were separated into two general categories: white (W) and people of color (C). Within the classification of people of color, individuals were usually identified as either black (N) or mulatto (M). In instances where neither “N” nor “M” was indicated, the abbreviation of “C” was

used to denote that he or she was identified as a person of color. “X” is used in instances where ethnicity was not noted and could not be determined.

The following abbreviations were used in the dataset:

B – Black
C – Mixed descent or of color
W – White
X - Unknown

Status: In most cases, the legal status of the individual was not noted in the record. If such was the case, the field was left blank. In a number of instances, it was noted if a person was free with the word libre (French for free). It will be noted when this is the case. If a person was enslaved, this status was noted by writing that the enslaved person was “of” another individual. Ex., Marie Jeanne de Mr. Leyritz, was used to denote that Marie Jeanne was an enslaved person of Mr. Leyritz. Conversely, this designation also identified who was the person’s enslaver.

The following abbreviations are used to denote legal status:

EN – Enslaved
F - Free
HE - Enslaver

Comments: This column was used to note additional information noted in the record or to clarify an issue. For example, in instances when multiple people shared the same first or last name, Rev. Tessier assigned sequential numbers to each name to distinguish one from another. This number has been noted in the comments field.

Additional Notes

At the top of the list created for the years 1832-1833, Rev. Tessier wrote the following note:

Original French

Confessions pascales de 1832 et 1833

Ayant été obligé pour cause de maladie et de vieillesse d’entendre beaucoup moins de confessions, plusieurs de mes anciens pénitents se sont adressés à d’autres confesseurs. Voici les noms de quelques-unes de celles qui sont restées ou viennent à Pâques de 1832, et à celles de 1833.

English translation

Easter confessions for 1832 and 1833

Having been obliged due to illness and advanced age to hear far fewer confessions, many of my former penitents have turned to other confessors. The following are the names of those who have remained or come to Easter in 1832, and to those of 1833.