

Timeline of Significant Dates

July 10, 1640: William Bretton receives a 750 acre manor grant from Lord Baltimore. Bretton, whom Bretton Bay was named, called his manor the “Manor of Little Brittain” later known as the Manor of Little Bretton. Another grant of 100 acres was added some years later and was known as “Brettons Outlets”.

November 10, 1661: William Bretton and his wife Temperance, gave an acre and a half of ground of the Manor of Little Bretton at Newtown, for a church to be built and a cemetery to be established. This was a convenient site for all Catholics living around St. Clement’s Island and Bretton’s Bays. Among the organizers were Robert Cole, Luke Gardiner, William Evans, and James Thompson. Families like the Coles supported the new church by paying voluntary taxes and by helping to build the chapel.

1662: St. Francis Xavier’s first Church was completed on the present cemetery grounds. It is assumed that the cemetery ground was originally the private burial plot of the Bretton Family.

1668: The Manor of Little Bretton was purchased by the Jesuits for the purchase price of 40,000 pounds of tobacco. In colonial times, tobacco was valued at forty four dollars per thousand pounds. For a purchase price of approximately \$1,760.00, with the manor as their central post, the Jesuits were able to establish and maintain missions in other parts of the colonies. It is noted in the *Newtowne Ledger* that there were farming and other business activities flourishing at the Manor which provided capital for the Jesuits to support their apostolic work.

1684: Newtowne’s first resident priest arrived. His name was Father John Pennington. He remained until 1685. Father Pennington is believed to be buried at Newtowne.

1704: The Intolerant Act of 1704 forbade Catholics from engaging in public worship.

1719: Henry Spink left 1,000 pounds of tobacco to the Jesuit Fathers in his will for the purpose of rebuilding the Church if and when they were allowed to do so. It is assumed that the 1662 church built at the present day cemetery was destroyed by fire prior to this date.

1731: A new “chapel-house” was built with no external markings to indicate that it was to be used for religious worship. This is the central section of the current St. Francis Xavier Church. Archaeological research has indicated that a brick manor house was built next to the chapel at roughly the same time.

1767: A semi-octagonal shaped addition made of brick was added to the front of the church to provide a vestibule and a choir loft.

1789: The present manor house was constructed.

1816: A semi-octagonal shaped addition was made to the rear of the church. This provided a sacristy, confessional, and waiting room. The original gambrel roof of the Manor House was raised to create a half-story addition.

1868: Jesuit Missionaries moved their headquarters from Newtown to Leonardtown, Maryland. The manor retained its function as a working farm and home for the farm manager and his family.

1915: Up to World War I many parishioners arrived for Mass at St. Francis Xavier by boat. There were well worn paths leading from the banks of Breton Bay and St. Clements Bay to the church.

1941 to 1945: During World War II physicists from Johns Hopkins University and the Naval Ordnance Laboratory used leased land on the Newtowne Neck for testing related to the development of the proximity fuse.

1962: St. Francis Xavier Parish celebrated its 300th Anniversary with Pastor, Rev. Joseph N. Behr, S.J. presiding over the parish at that time.

1967: St. Francis Xavier Church, the Newtowne Manor House and the surrounding nine and one half acres are transferred to the Archdiocese of Washington when the Jesuits withdrew to perform their missionary work in other areas.

1972: St. Francis Xavier Church and the Newtowne Manor House were added to the National Register of Historic Places.

November and December, 1981: An archaeological survey was conducted by Dennis J. Pogue. The date of construction of the middle and earliest section of St. Francis Xavier Church was established as 1731.

1984: Restoration of St. Francis Xavier Church was completed and the dedication ceremony was held October 21, 1984.

April, 2009: The State of Maryland purchased the remaining Jesuit holdings on the Newtowne Neck (approximately 750 acres). The state designated the land as a park to be administered by the Maryland Park Service.

September 2011 to April 2012: Scott Lawrence of *Grave Concerns*, a historic cemetery restoration company located in Park Hall, Maryland, and James Gibb of *Gibb Archaeology Consulting*, conducted several phases of exploratory digs at St. Francis Xavier Church Cemetery in an effort to discover the location of the original 1662 chapel structure. The investigation was carried out with the volunteer assistance of many local residents and parishioners. Architectural and domestic artifacts dating to the mid 1600's were found on the land described by the 1661 deed. More work is required to confirm the exact location of the 1662 church.

December 3, 2011: Our 350th yearlong celebration began with the feast day of St. Francis Xavier. The altar portrait of the St. Francis Xavier vested in the red stole of Pentecost, preaching Christ Crucified is returned to its place over the altar. The painting is believed to be over one hundred years old and is likely the work of Brother Francis Schroen, S.J.

January 1, 2012: The Department of Natural Resources Park Services closed Newtowne Neck State Park due to the discovery of unexploded ordnances.

June 9, 2012: A Mass for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi was held with His Eminence, Donald Cardinal Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington as the Principal Celebrant and Homilist. Immediately following the mass was a reception on the lawn.