

St. John's Catholic Chapel

Sweet Springs, West Virginia

WEST VIRGINIA'S OLDEST CONTINUOUSLY USED
CATHOLIC CHURCH, BUILT BEFORE
1859

A Brief History:

*The Chapel,
its community, and the Old Catholic Cemetery and
the Lewis family Cemetery*

By Father Harry E. Winter, O.M.I

numerous were the Irish immigrants who came to this area seeking employment at the Sweet Springs resort and, later, on the nearby railroads and whose ambition it was to buy some precious land which they had been unable to preserve in Ireland. The second group, most crucial from the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church's leadership (faced with the threats from the KKK and the "Know Nothing Party"), were the wealthy Catholic landowners such as the Lewis' and the Woodville's. It was by sturdy Catholicism of such families that the Catholic leadership hoped to gain entry to the social and political structures of the area and correct some of the glaring prejudice and ignorance towards Catholics. The third group, even more crucial were the black people who worked the estates - and who became Catholic through the influence of the more conscience-aware church goers.

A tragic fire devastated the Lewis home, Lynnside, one winter evening in the early 1930's. The family was able to rebuild the roof. From the steps of the Chapel, the home looks normal, but the interior could not be repaired. Not only the family records, but many of the Chapel records as well were destroyed in the fire. For this reason, anyone with photos, clippings, and even recollections of the Chapel and the Catholic events of the Lewis family and the Sweet Springs area, is urged to contact the pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Church, White Sulphur Springs, so this history may be reconstructed.

Letitia Preston Floyd Lewis (1814-18??), Foundress

The heirs of the Lewis family state there is a tradition that the current chapel was built in 1834 by slaves with bricks fired on the plantation. At present, no records have been found to verify this. The Lewis family Bible records that Letitia Preston Floyd became the bride of William Lynn Lewis in New Orleans March 13, 1837 by Rev. Jacobus J. Mullen "at the house of their relation John B. Grayson." We have an important verification here that three great frontier families (Lewis, Preston, Floyd) had intermarried even before Letitia and William Lynn.

Morton, the historian of Monroe County, (*A History of Monroe County West Virginia*, Oren F. Morton, Staunton, Va., 1916, reprinted 1874) records that William Lewis (1724-1813), the brother of Andrew Lewis of Point Pleasant and Lewisburg fame, had built a stone house "immediately to the rear of the site occupied by the present mansion of Lynnside" (p.370). It was William's grandson, William Lynn, who built the house one sees from the Chapel steps "about 1845" as Morton states (p.207). It was to this house that William Lynn Lewis brought his Catholic wife and their four oldest children in 1848.

Sr. Margaret Brennan SSJ, the diocesan archivist, to who we are very indebted for her research into the diocesan and state records, notes the hesitancy in the diocesan records to stating that there was a finished church at Sweet Springs. The 1847 Catholic Directory makes no mention of Sweet Springs, noting that Union is visited four times a year by Father Daniel Downey, with a "Church to soon be erected." The 1850 Directory, which would refer to 1849, is the first to mention Sweet Springs, noting "A church is here to be erected, chiefly by individual liberality and a clergyman is to be placed at this point, to attend to Union and other neighboring places." The 1853 Director specifies that "a chapel is to be immediately erected" at Sweet Springs and the 1854 Directory states that Father Walters "is temporarily residing here. A brick chapel is being erected." No name is given the church until the 1860 Directory when it is listed simply as St. John's. This would make it the oldest standing church in the diocese, if we assign 1859 as the year when it was definitely finished (St. Joseph's in Martinsburg is 1860). One wonders how many other churches in the English speaking area west of the Alleghenies were built before 1860 and are still in use. Thus, we use 1859 as the final date, noting 1853 is a strong possibility and even 1834 is a possibility, since local reports usually have some historical fact behind them even if it is unrecoverable. Sr. Margaret does not rule out "The possibility of a temporary chapel being erected around 1853."

We are faced with a similar lack of solid knowledge concerning Letitia Preston Floyd's conversion to Roman Catholicism. Her father, who was the last governor of Virginia under the old constitution and the first under the new (1831-35), makes no mention of his eldest daughter's conversion in the fascinating journal he kept as governor (*Life and Diary of John Floyd*, by Charles H. Ambler, Richmond Press, 1918, copy available at Concord College). But he does make keen and penetrating observations about religion in general and Catholicism in particular. And there is a local tradition that when he died suddenly at the Sweet Springs resort on August 16, 1837, only five months after his daughter had married Lewis, he had converted to Catholicism. (This report is denied by Richmond Catholic officials, who note that it did gain enough credence to be printed in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*). At any rate Letitia some time in her late teens became a Roman Catholic with Father Henry Parks in *Some Notes On The Rise and Spread of the Catholic Missions in Virginia 1774-1850*, observing that the Floyd daughters were the first of the family to receive the Faith. They made their submission in Richmond. Mrs. Brenda of Virginia, a fervent convert, acting as her angel." (p.26) Nicketti, the second oldest daughter, married John W. Johnston, who became a Catholic, settling his family in Tazewell County and serving in the U.S. Senate. The youngest daughter, Lavalette, married George Frederick Holmes who remained an Episcopalian and became a most respected professor of English at the University of Virginia. The youngest son, Benjamin Rush Floyd, studied law at Georgetown University, followed his convert wife into the church (Parks notes she was "one of the most accomplished ladies of the day"), and as a prominent judge defended his faith most ably during the Know-Nothing era. The second son, Dr. William Floyd, became a Catholic while in Memphis, Tenn., but also settled in Tazewell County. The oldest son, John Buchanan Floyd, who like his father served as governor of Virginia (1850-53) never became a Catholic but will enter into our history again during the Civil War. Another son, Colonel George Roger Clarke Floyd, settled in Logan County, served several terms as representative in the WV House of Delegates and as Parks observes was "a staunch Catholic."

After many years of struggle, Letitia's mother, Letitia Preston Floyd became a Catholic. Her letters of frontier and political life are printed in many histories of the time; she had a sharp mind and keen wit. Parks notes that she dies six months after her Dec. 12, 1852 conversion: "her remains were escorted by her sons, her sons-in-law, and the priest of Wytheville, a journey of eighty miles, from Burke's Garden in Tazewell County to Lynnside, in Monroe County, for interment near the last resting place of the Governor, her husband." (p. 26) Picture if you will the cortege winding to the plantation. A serious correspondence between Mrs. Floyd and Bishop Whelan, the first bishop of Wheeling, exists and has been made available by the generosity of the Richmond diocese archivist, Mr. James Donahue.

There is no doubt that the conversion of such a family during this period when Catholics were largely despised and persecuted, meant a great deal to the leaders of the Church. The children of William Lynn Lewis and Letitia who were born at their South Carolina estate, were baptized by the leading prelates of the day, including Bishop John England of Charleston. When William Lynn Lewis moved back from South Carolina to his home at Lynnside in 1848 and took possession of it, these same bishops enjoyed the hospitality of his home, attracted also by the resort of Sweet Springs less than a mile away.

The Sweet Springs Resort, "Old Sweet"

The household over which Letitia Preston Floyd Lewis presided was one of the most glittering in the entire Appalachian region; especially because of her husband's involvement in the resort. (Ownership of 6,000 acres from what is now the Virginia-WV border to Gap Mills helped also.) Already in 1790, overseas visitors were recording in the diaries and letters their impressions of the lodging in "logge cabins" at the resort. William Lynn Lewis' father John began construction

Irish immigrant labor. The main building had been designed by Thomas Jefferson before his death and many presidents visited the resort, especially in the 1830-1860 period.

Marshall Fishwick, in his 1978 *Springlore in Virginia* (Popular Press, Bowling Green U) states "Everyone knew what you meant by 'the Six'--those springs close enough for easy visits, grand enough to support even the most pretentious" (p.6). Three were, in Monroe County: Sweet, Red and Salt Sulphur; two were just outside: White Sulphur (The Greenbrier) and Red Sweet (Chalybeate). And Fishwick concludes "The whole circuit could be made in less than 170 miles. But one HAD to be at the Sweet for the last week, in August and the first week in September. It was like the salmon, who knew when it was time to go back up the Columbia River."

The Lewis family maintained a dominant interest in the resort until 1852, according to Morton (p. 206). There is no doubt, as one examines the initial baptismal record book, that some of the influential vacationers fell under the influence of Letitia Lewis and began their conversion here at the plantation chapel.

1853-1860: The Golden Age of St. John's Chapel

Father Walters began the baptismal register of "St. John Baptist's Church" with the following entry: November 13, 1853: Baptised Margaret born August 23 (1853) daughter of John Sullivan and Ellen Hagerty. Sponsors Dennis Callighan and Honora Callihan." In the next few months, the number of families who had several children baptized at once is quite large, suggesting that Father Walters had just taken up residence and was catching up on overdue work. In 1854, 99 people were baptized and the numbers increased steadily until 1860, when 174 were baptized. Father Walters seems to be at St. John the Evangelist Church in Summersville in 1858 with the diocesan directory which would cover that year listing Sweet Springs as vacant. But the baptismal register in Father Walters' handwriting lists 124 baptisms that year, including Letitia's nephew Fredrick Lawrence Holmes, born in April to George Fredrick Holmes and Lavalette Floyd, with the eldest son William Ignatius Lynn Lewis and the eldest daughter Susan Massie Lewis as sponsors for their cousin.

That same year Bishop McGill of Richmond made the journey to preside at the marriage of Susan to Alfred J. Frederick of St. Matthew's parish, South Carolina, (December 8). It must have been one of the social events of the area. The following year Bishop Whelan of Wheeling journeyed to Lynnvillle to preside at the marriage of the second oldest daughter, Letty Preston Lewis, to Thomas Lewis Preston Cooke of Cumberland Co., Ga. (Oct. 19 1859). Note the Lewis and Preston names in the groom, which explains why a dispensation for consanguinity is noted in the marriage register.

In the directory which covers 1859, Father Walters is back residing at Sweet Springs, and is listed as visiting Union and White Sulphur Springs. For the year 1860, although the diocesan directory lists Father Daniel O'Conner as pastor, with Lewisburg visited, all the entries in the baptism and marriage registers are by Father Walters right up until 1868, wh Rev. Hugh McMenamin's entries appear.

There is not doubt that for the turbulent years of beginning, and through the Civil War, until 1868, Father John H. Walters worked from Sweet Springs, covering an immense and almost unbelievable area, baptizing, celebrating Mass and marrying thousands of Catholics. Both black and white, both rich and poor. Truly, he was the founding pastor, with all that those two word imply. And his strong right hand during these years was Letitia Preston Floyd Lewis, who may in truth be called the foundress.

In 1862, three soldiers from "22nd Va. Regiment" were baptized, the first and last times such soldiers are listed. On January 2, Father Walters entered this information: "Baptized and received into the church by Rev. L.P. O'Connell, Daniel Crocket, age 25 years, sponsor Sister Mary Helena." On January 12, he made another entry: "Baptized and received into the church by Rev. L.P. O'Connell, Samuel R. Justice, age 22 years, sponsor Sister M. Helena." And on January 18, Father Walters wrote: "baptized and received by same, James Cadie...age 20 years," no sponsor listed. Not only is the 22nd Va. Regiment fascinating by its brevity, but the mention of sisters, presumably nuns, is also intriguing. On February 13, 1862, "Mother Teresa" was the sponsor for a 16 year old girl, Sarah Frances Mary Heightz, and on March 31, 1862, Sr. de Sales was a sponsor. Were these nuns any part of the group which are mentioned in the historical marker along Interstate 81 (first northbound rest stop) just north of Christiansburg (and just over Peters Mountain from Sweet Springs)? This group nursed both Union and Confederate soldiers, many of the nuns dying from disease and now lying in unmarked graves. Until we have further information, the presence of the sisters at Sweet Springs in 1862 is a mystery.

Letitia's only non-Catholic brother, John Buchanan Floyd (1807-63) enters our history here, for he is the reason cited for the vandalizing by Union soldiers of the brick mansion visible from the church steps. He had served as governor of Virginia from 1850-53 and as Secretary of War in President James Buchanan's cabinet until his resignation in the autumn of 1860, because of his deep feelings for secession. It should be noted that his governor father had fought for the frontier combination of states rights and abolition of slavery views, trying to reconcile the frontier thirst for independence from the rights of each individual, black or white. Many reluctantly went along with the South.

Because of the notoriety of Letitia's brother, Lynnside was laid waste when General David Hunter's troops occupied the area. Private William B Start of the 34th Massachusetts Volunteers, kept a diary which is widely quoted: "Lynnside...was ransacked from top to bottom...the boys acted like madmen and destroyed much that was of no use to them. They found wine and other liquors of which they partook freely. They played upon the piano and then pocketed the keys for mementoes" (cited from Fishwick, p. 176.)

1866-1976

Judging from the baptismal and marriage entries, the work of St. John's Chapel even increased after the Civil War. One of the more intriguing non-Irish names involves the entry of Letitia Elizabeth Garibaldi, born of John Garibaldi and Sarah Post on September 28, 1865, and baptized July 8, 1866, with W. L. and L.P. Lewis as sponsors.

Mrs. Lewis also served as sponsor to marry Frances de Sales Breckenridge, born December 2, 1831 of Cary Breckenridge and Emma Gilmore, and baptized conditionally July 20, 1867, indicating that this adult convert, like the little Garibaldi baby, were received into Catholicism during the "season" with an influential sponsor. Undoubtedly, the Lewis Catholic influence was spreading.

In 1867, Letitia's stepdaughter, Ann Lewis, who had been born March 18, 1825, to William and his first wife, Anna Stuart, was baptized a Catholic, with her stepmother as sponsor (July 30). Nor did Mrs. Lewis' benevolence extend only to the well born; in the entry for October 9, 1863, for an 8 year old child. Father Walters had simply noted: "The child is an idiot."

influence Henry H.H. Beirne, who was born to Andrew Beirne and Elizabeth Fraiza on December 2, 1857, was baptized at St. John's on January 22, 1898. Andrew's father had been a trusted collaborator of Letitia's father when he was governor of Virginia. His wife was the daughter of an early Catholic settler, Edward Keenan, so Henry's grandmother was Catholic. Henry's daughter Margaret Elizabeth, born September 27, 1885, was baptized at St. John's on December 5, 1907.

On January 10, 1897, James Lewis Charles Woodville, who was born January 8, 1820, to James L. Woodville and Marie Sophia Lewis (sister to William Lynn Lewis), was baptized with Sarah E. Lewis and Father Charles F. Schlipp as sponsors. The Woodville estate was known as Glencove or Glen Carey; James was a prominent doctor, and his wife, Mary Breckenridge (see above).

With such prestigious members, it seems a surprise that St. John's Chapel went into decline. But it did. The baptismal records for 1875, which included now Lewisburg, Ronceverte, and perhaps as far as Covington, Va., list only 14, quite a drop from the 174 of 1860, and the 132 of 1861. It seems that the wave of Irish immigration had passed and perhaps many of the second generation had moved west with the railroads. The resort declined slowly and Fishwick states "after years of neglect, before and during World War II, the property was sold to West Virginia" (p. 177) The crowning blow came on the cold winter evening in the early 1930's. A small fire was reported from Lynnside to the local fire departments. Mistaking the location as the town of Lindside, about 30 miles below Lynnside, on Rt. 219, the firemen went there first. By the time they found their mistake and returned to the manor, it was completely gutted with only the walls standing. Miss Coralie Lewis re-roofed it, but the interior was never completed and so it stands to this day.

The decline took many years. An anonymous writer, perhaps Miss Coralie herself, wrote probably after World War I and before the fire, about the Chapel of St. John:

Our little church has been honored from time to time, by the August presence, of many of the greatest dignitaries of Our Holy Mother Church—Bishop Keene of Richmond, Bishop Keane of Wheeling, our own Bishop Donaghue (probably should be James Donahue who was the third bishop of Wheeling and died in 1922) Bishop J. O'Connell of Richmond, former rector of the Catholic University, Bishop Keily of Savannah, Archbishop Janssens of New Orleans and above all our venerated and well beloved Cardinal James Gibbons—names of which to be proud on the Rostrum of our little church.

It should be noted that Lavalette Lewis, granddaughter of William Lynn Lewis, married Professor Jarvis Keily, brother of Bishop Keiley of Savannah. When Coralie Lewis died on October 26, 1966, the estate passed to the Keiley children who included Phillip and Madeline Keiley. Their son in law and daughter, Mr and Mrs. Jack (Lynn) Spellman still live in Sweet Springs and administer what is left of the estate and Lynn remains active in St. John's and St. Charles Borromeo Churches.

1976-1983: Restoration Begun

In 1976, the heirs of the Lewis' approached the pastor of White Sulphur Springs, Father John J. O'Reilly, to see about disposing of the church building, which had not been used for services since the mid-1960's. Father O'Reilly approached Bishop Hodges, who was surprised to discover that there was a chapel in Sweet Springs which went back to the origins of the diocese. He was further surprised to discover that the diocese did not own it. He began immediate plans to acquire the property from the Keiley's and Spellman's, which was done in 1977, through Father O'Reilly.

In that same year, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate were offered the opportunity to place a resident priest in Monroe County, who would be the first resident priest since the 1870's. Father James MacGee, O.M.I., settled in at St. Andrew's House in Union which Father Edward McDonald, the pastor of Ronceverte, had purchased. Bishop Hodges directed Father MacGee to supervise the restoration of St. John's and Father MacGee secured the help of two local contractors, Mr. Richard Mundell of Greenville and Mr. Barry Rupp of Union.

It should be emphasized that services for Catholics never stopped in Monroe County, and at Sweet Springs itself. The pastors of Ronceverte and White Sulphur Springs came regularly to the Rowan Home (the former resort) in Sweet Springs to offer Mass for the elderly residents, and extend pastoral care. Two nuns of the Congregation of the Daughters of the Holy Spirit, Sisters Alice Chicoine and Judith Kenhart, and a laywoman, Annabel Edwards, established a center for battered women in one of the Rowan Home buildings, working in this way under the auspices of the Family Refuge Center of Lewisburg. Sr. Judith did much of the initial work in recording the following structural changes which Mundell and Rupp made in the Chapel. The three women left in June of 1982.

Sometime about 1914, and also about 1950, extensive remodeling was done to the chapel. A false ceiling had been put in, with jacks in the roof. Mundell and Rupp removed the false ceiling, and portion of the top section of the wall. In his work of restoration, Mundell discovered the original stencil designs in the unpainted portion of the top section of the wall. In his work of restoration, he carefully extended the stencils to where they probably were in the original church. A new roof had to be put on, and extensive repairs done to the tower. The building had never been wired, so electricity was installed.

During a presentation at St. Charles (White Sulphur Springs) Parish Association, June 21, 1978, which received extensive coverage in the local newspapers, Mundell discovered that local Black people had passed on the story of a leper residing in one of the rooms over the sanctuary. He had probably been given hospitality there by the Lewis family.

Because of its wooden floors, the Zenith Dance Theatre, under the direction of Carli Mareneck, used the Chapel during this time.

Restoration Completed: 1982-83

When Father Harry Winter, O.M.I., was assigned as pastor on September 1, 1982, he was urged by diocesan architect Don Morris and historian Father John McDonnell to finish the restoration as quickly as possible. Several visits by both Father McDonnell and Mr. Morris resulted in plans to install electric heaters. Rich Mundell undertook the major rewiring needed, and finished insulating the building. He repaired completely the walls of the two downstairs sacristies and in repairing the upstairs rooms, left many of the "graffiti" from early in the century, and preserved the chimney hole where the stove was for use of the leper. Shenandoah Studios of Stained Glass in Front Royal, Va., completely sealed the windows with their Lexan covering, thus safeguarding especially the beautiful window in the choir loft, over the main door. (This window's glass may be original to the building; its simple lines are almost certainly original.)

The reed organ(harmonium) originally built in Staunton, Va., in 1910 by WW Putnam and Co. Was still playable. Daniel E. Bickel, who had worked on the new organ at Sacred Heart Church, Bluefield, completely restored this instrument at his studio in Edinboro, Pa. A sign was designed by Edward Herman of Union, and is being installed on the road.

((The information presented thus far has been reprinted from the Rededication Mass, St. John's Catholic Chapel, a booklet in the library of Greenbrier Community College in Lewisburg. Credit is given in the booklet "To historians Virginia Mason, Haskell Shumate, Marty Banks, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Baker, and Mrs. Stewart (Pollyanna) Ross for the time they spent recovering some of the rapidly disappearing story of the Lewis family and St. John's Chapel; To Carol Duffy for her many hours organizing and typing this program; ...To Mrs. Michele Hallis for the artwork adorning the cover of our program; ..."))

Since its Rededication Mass on April 17, 1983, the Chapel was used for Mass each Saturday at 6 p.m. for the years of service to the Monroe County Parish by Father Harry Winters and since then was closed as a Church and is a chapel in the Parish of St. Charles Borromeo Church, White Sulphur Springs.

Father Winters also undertook the restoration of the original Catholic cemetery which is located on the knoll behind the Floyd family cemetery and was, until 1977, the only property in Monroe County, owned by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. The Alleghany Highlands Council 8689 Knights of Columbus and St. Andrews in Union and the now closed St. Peters in Peterstown, helped finance the restoration.

Each Memorial Day at 5 p.m. the Alleghany Highlands Council 8689 Knights of Columbus has a Mass or Communion Service and a Rosary for the intentions of the living and dead of St. John's and those buried in the old and new cemeteries. A Mass observing the Quincentennial of Christopher Columbus in 1992 was held in St. John's under the sponsorship of the Knights of Columbus and with Father Nguyen Ngoc That Son who had served the Monroe County Parish while still in the seminary, as the celebrant.

Much credit for the maintenance and use of St. John's Chapel must go to Shirley and the late Ted Urice who lived next door to the Church and who operated Turtle Creek Indian Gallery. They seemed to be always on call for St. John's. Shirley and Lynn (Mrs. Jack) and her daughter, Jackie, Spellman are the main members left to be active in the Chapel. Recognition must also be given Sister Molly Bauer, S.S.J., pastoral coordinator for the St. Andrews Catholic Parish, for always being willing to help.

Tidbits in the History

Edward Kennan was an early Catholic settler in Monroe County and in 1785, gave the land for building of Old Rehoboth Methodist Church, now a museum near Union and Rehoboth is the oldest Methodist Church west of the Alleghenies.

On one of his trips to Sweet Springs, Bishop Whelan, first bishop of the Diocese of Wheeling, said Mass in Mud Tunnel on the C & O Railroad near Callaghan, Va., and "was very glad for the place to have Mass." Mud Tunnel is visible from Interstate 64 between Callaghan and Covington, Va.

In honor of the Monroe County Bicentennial, the Alleghany Highlands Council 8689 Knights of Columbus hosted its annual Motorcycle Poker Run for Charity with a mostly Monroe County route, including passing St. John's Chapel; sponsored the Memorial Day Communion Service and Rosary at St. John's; serve as hosts for the Historic Sites tour at St. John's and present this short history of the Chapel.

To help us recover and discover and deepen our roots, any group or parish wishing to visit St. John's Chapel may do so by contacting the priest at St. Charles Borromeo Church, White Sulphur Springs, 304-536-1813.

Traditionally the Feast of the Assumption Mass at St. John's was followed by an ice cream social and, for as much as possible, the Urice's and the Spellman's have continued that observance with the cooperation of the priests at St. Charles Borromeo, the members of St. Andrew's in Union and St. Peter's in Peterstown and the Alleghany Highlands Council 8689 Knights of Columbus.

The Alleghany Highlands Council is currently working on having a highway marker placed for St. John's Chapel, noting that it is the oldest, continuously used Catholic Church in West Virginia.

Any donation of historic material or money for maintaining St. John's Chapel is welcome and should be mailed by St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, Box 598, White Sulphur Springs, WV 24986 where a fund for St. John's is administered by the resident priest.

Any praise for this Chapel and it being opened for visitation, give God the glory...any complaints, let the Knights of Columbus members know.

For your safety, the upstairs rooms over the sacristy are not open for visitation, nor the stairway leading to them.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE LEWIS FAMILY AND OLD CATHOLIC CEMETERIES, SWEET SPRINGS, WV

On the knoll above the Lewis mansion of Lynnside, across the road from St. John's Catholic Chapel, two very unique cemeteries lie side by side. Slaves, Irish immigrants, and the very influential Lewis family rest in peace in the same burying ground.

THE LEWIS FAMILY CEMETERY

The front one-third (about .3 acres) of the burying ground is the Lewis family cemetery.

Graves of the Lewis family, and Gov. and Mrs. John Floyd:

The most logical place to start a visit is at the large triangular stone cairn over the graves of William Lewis (1724-1811) and his wife Ann Montgomery (1737-1808). This monument was erected by the last Lewis to live at Lynnside, Miss Coralie Lewis (1881-1966). She died before she was able to have the names placed on the cairn; you will notice a rectangular space where the inscription is supposed to be. William Lewis was a brother of Andrew Lewis of Point Pleasant fame. (More details on the lives of the people here described are available in the history booklet St. John's Catholic Chapel, below):

Coming towards the front of the cemetery one finds a large stone slab 36 inches wide, 2 inches thick and 68 inches long, covering the grave of William's famous son, John. The slab reads:

Here lie the remains of
JOHN LEWIS
Son of Wm Lewis & Ann Montgomery
who was born in August 1754,
and died at the S.W.C. Springs June 8, 1823.
He was a man of noble nature, stern integrity,
high courage & pure patriotism, and the friend &
fellow soldier of Washington under whom
as a Va. officer he fought bravely the battles
of Brandywine, Monmouth, and with whom
he passed the winter of 1777 at Valley Forge.
He was the grandson of John Lewis, the pioneer
of Augusta Co. and in his day a generation did noble
service in establishing upon a solid base the liberties
of the country he had contributed so largely in
rescuing from a savage foe.
His wife Mary Preston who was born in 1776 & died
Feb. 4 1821 is here buried by his side.
This monument was erected in 1858 by their descend-
ants to commemorate their virtues: & as a grateful
recognition of the mercy of God to the seed of the
righteous.

dressed concrete, six feet long, three feet wide and four inches thick. It reads: JOHN FLOYD/TWICE GOVERNOR OF VIRGINIA/AN APOSTLE OF SECESSION/AND THE FATHER OF/THE OREGON COUNTRY/DIED AUG. 21, 1837.

His wife is buried by his side. On Aug. 15, 1990, the Most Reverend Bernard Schmitt dedicated the marker over Letitia Preston Floyd's grave (which had been unmarked). The slab reads: LETITIA PRESTON FLOYD/WIFE OF GOVERNOR JOHN FLOYD/MOTHER OF GOVERNOR JOHN BUCHANAN FLOYD/AUTHOR AND EDUCATOR/DIED DEC. 12, 1852.

Their oldest daughter, Letitia Floyd, became the third wife of John Lewis' son William Lynn. Letitia (1814-1886) and William Lynn (1799-1869) are buried in front of the graves of the governor and his wife. Letitia and William Lynn brought the estate to its greatest splendor, in the years just before the Civil War.

Letitia's sister, Eliza Lavalette Floyd (d. 9/12/1887) married George Frederick Holmes (1820-97) who later became a prominent professor at the University of Virginia. Markers for their graves are just behind Governor Floyd's.

One Lewis stone (Mary Fox, daughter of Pat Fox and Sarah Lewis, d. 7/29/1869) and one stone almost illegible have the very old style of printing. The Lewis-Fox stone is isolated, in the front left hand side; the other stone is on the right hand side, near the Rowan Obelisk (see below). The other stone currently lies flat.

The Graves of the Black Families

A large stone marker a few feet to the right of John Lewis' marker is inscribed FAITHFUL SLAVES TOM & DINAH DIED A.D. 1800. These were probably the house slaves of William Lewis.

It is certain that after the Civil War, other black families were buried here. The Woodville's, for example, (see below), employed a black servant girl, one of whose infant grandchildren is buried here.

Other Families

The markers to Dennis Stack (behind the Lewis') and the Rowan Family (a short obelisk in front of Tom and Dinah's marker) are also historically interesting. The unmarked grave of Letitia Preston Floyd and Frederick Osborne (d. 7/2/1933) is visible as a shallow depression in front and to the right of Gov. Floyd's marker. Her daughter, Letitia Preston Osborne Randall Laiser, was a renowned traveller and author.

From June 11-16, 1990, archaeologist Kenneth Robinson confirmed the locations of the graves of the governor and his wife, and carefully supervised the construction of the marker over Mrs. Floyd's grave. He also used a probe to verify the location of many unmarked graves, placing markers on them (Robinson, 1988b).

THE OLD CATHOLIC CEMETERY

Behind the graves of the Holmes family stands a large oak tree. Run a line directly through the tree, across the width of the cemetery and you have the boundary line of the Old Catholic Cemetery. Approximately .89 acres were obtained by Bishop Kain in 1882 for this cemetery. Until St. Andrew's Church in Union was established in 1977, this cemetery was the only property in the county owned by the Catholic Church. (St. John's Chapel was purchased from the Lewis heirs only in 1977).

Irish and German Families

Attracted by jobs building the turnpikes and railroads, many Irish Catholics came to the Sweet Springs area in the early 1800's. A scattering of German Catholic families also came. On the left side of this cemetery, note the foot high concrete wall for the Curran family. An interesting example of early 20th century concrete work, the wall encloses three generations of Curran graves.

Thanks to the research of James L. Smith of Oceanside, CA., into his ancestors John Dillon (born 1820-21) and Mary Ryan (born 1830-31), we have extensive genealogical chart of one Irish family buried in the Old Catholic Cemetery. Among their descendants are Father Paul Hickey of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, and Sister Mary Claire SSJ, of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Wheeling.

The Hogan marker is precious to descendant Bob Neigan of North Carolina, who helped us obtain the services of Kenneth Robinson.

Woodville-Ferguson Families

One family of wealth and power, who are buried in both cemeteries, are the Woodville's. Dr. James Lewis Woodville (1820-1904) was the great grandson of William Lewis; his large estate near Sweet Springs, Glen Cary, probably rivalled the Lewis' Lynnside. He and his wife Mary Breckinridge (1831-83) are buried

with several other Woodvilles at the back of the Old Catholic Cemetery. Cary Breckinridge Woodville and his wife Sarah Lewis are buried in the Lewis Family Cemetery. Dr. Ferguson, M.D. married a Woodville; he owned the home to the north of the Chapel, Melrose.

Thanks to a descendant, Jane Flaherty Wells of Huntington, WV, we have a thorough history of the Woodville's, their connections to the Lewis' and Preston's and their relationship to the Episcopal and Catholic Churches.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Madeleine Keiley, wife of Lewis descendant Philip Keiley, furnished much information and encouragement, especially in 1985. She died in 1997 and is buried in the Lewis Family Cemetery. A special thanks also to the Monroe County Historical Society, without whose encouragement this could not have been written. The late Haskell Shumate and Izzy McCoy were most helpful with Letitia Preston Osbourne.

Kenneth Robinson began probing and restoring the burial ground from Sept. 27-Oct. 1, 1988, locating some 20 unmarked graves in the Old Catholic Cemetery, and marking them. His Map and Key (see below) gives a total of 165 graves in both cemeteries, with 108 named and 57 unnamed, as of 1990.

Sometime after World War I, another cemetery was begun, just behind the Chapel. It has been named "The New Catholic Cemetery." There is a very old and historic cemetery just to the left of the Andrew Rowan Home (the old Sweet Springs Resort). It contains some families who have also been buried in our cemeteries, e.g. Worshams. One may enter the main entrance of the Rowan home property and follow the access roads to the left, to reach the cemetery, known locally as the Sweet Springs Cemetery. The Monroe County Historical Society is working on listing of all the cemeteries in the county.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For comments regarding the Old Catholic Cemetery, see the Pastor, St. Charles Borromeo Church, White Sulphur Springs, WV. For comments regarding the Lewis Family Cemetery, see Mrs. Jack (Lynn) Spellman, Sweet Springs, WV. First edition of this description, spring 1986; second edition, fall, 1999. Kindly distributed by the Alleghany Highlands Council 8689 Knights of Columbus and authored by Father Harry E. Winter, O.M.I.

FOR FURTHER READING

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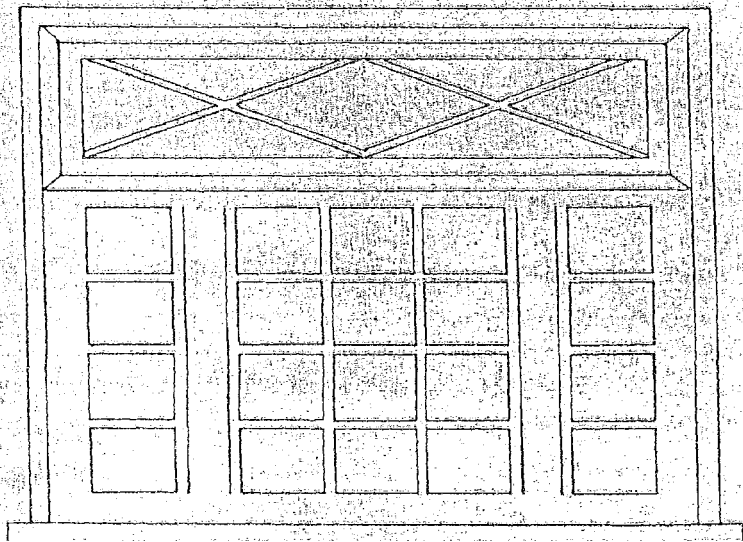
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