

The Roman Catholics

~ Chronology, before 1900 ~

- 1565 The history of Catholicism in America began with the founding of the town and parish of St. Augustine in 1565.
- 1634 Roman Catholics founded Maryland; later they were restricted by law in Maryland and most other colonies. These restrictions were not lifted totally until after the Revolution.
- 1689 Toleration was granted to members of Protestant sects other than the Anglicans, but Catholics were still not tolerated except in Maryland and Pennsylvania.
- 1704 The Toleration Act was revoked with the establishment of the Anglican Church in Maryland, after which it was illegal for a Catholic priest to say mass. This incensed both Catholics and Protestants with the result that the bill was suspended and later annulled.
- 1756 A Maryland Father Superior estimated 7000 practicing Catholics in Maryland and 3000 in Pennsylvania.
- 1763 There were fewer than 25,000 Catholics in a population of 2.2 million. Catholics were under the jurisdiction of the vicar apostolic of London.
- 1787 Catholics were finally permitted religious freedom along with civic freedom with the adoption of the United States Constitution. Maryland membership at this date was 15,800; Pennsylvania had 700; Virginia had 200; New York had 1,500.
- 1789 Baltimore, Maryland, became the first diocese in America. It became an archdiocese in 1808.
- 1852 Three plenary (or national) councils were held at Baltimore in 1852, 1866, and 1884.
- 1875 Archbishop John McCloskey of New York became the first American cardinal. In 1877, Archbishop James Gibbons of Baltimore was elevated to the same rank.
- 1890 Largely because of the flood of emigration from the Catholic countries of Europe, there were over six million Roman Catholics in this country in 1890.

~ Records, Resources ~

Although the government of the Roman Catholic church is hierarchical, lay members of the parishes assume much responsibility, especially since Vatican Council II (1962-65).

Records today are usually found with the rector of the parish church. If a church becomes defunct or no longer functions as a church, the nearest Diocesan Library usually becomes the custodian of the records.

Because almost every diocese publishes a weekly newspaper, genealogists ought to become acquainted with geographically appropriate publications.

Virginia Humling's book, *U.S. Catholic Sources: A Diocesan Research Guide*, identifies the records available and a contact person for every archdiocese and diocese in the United States.

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~ Bibliography ~

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