

The Peter Family of Tudor Place

The Peter family of Tudor Place had a lengthy association with Christ Church, Georgetown, going back to the earliest years of the parish. After Thomas and Martha Peter purchased the Tudor Place property in 1805, they began attending St. John's Episcopal Church in Georgetown, and their family maintained ties to both St. Johns and Christ Church for the next two centuries. In 1831, St. John's fell on difficult times, and the building was abandoned for a period of almost ten years during which Thomas and Martha Peter and their children began attending Christ Church. Thomas Peter's younger brother, Major George Peter, was also an early member of Christ Church, appearing in the Vestry Books in 1819 when he rented Pew No. 36. Major Peter lived on Gay Street (now N Street) and also maintained an estate in Montgomery County. Major Peter had a lengthy military career and served as commander of Fort Bellefontaine near present day St. Louis, Missouri, when Lewis and Clark's expedition returned from their Voyage of Discovery in 1806. During the War of 1812, Major Peter served with the Maryland Volunteers and later won election to the U.S. House of Representatives serving two non-consecutive terms.



Britannia Kennon of Tudor Place

The family member who had the longest association with Christ Church was Thomas and Martha Peter's youngest daughter, Britannia, who was born at Tudor Place in 1815 and died there on the eve of her 96th birthday in 1911. Britannia recalled to her grandchildren that Reverend John T. Brook (Rector of Christ Church, 1829–1835) objected to confirming anyone in the church who would not give up dancing. Britannia and her sis-

ter America clearly enjoyed dancing, and, as a result, she stated that they were confirmed at St. John's Lafayette Square.

Britannia married Commodore Beverley Kennon, U.S.N. in the Drawing Room at Tudor Place in December 1842, and Reverend John Hoff (Rector of Christ Church, 1838–1843) officiated. Tragically, Britannia's marriage would last only



sixteen months as commodore Kennon was killed in an explosion aboard the USS *Princeton* on February 28, 1844. Widowed at twenty-nine, Britannia and her four-month-old daughter Martha returned to Tudor Place.

By the time of the Civil War, the citizens of Georgetown who were Union loyalists tended to flock to St. John's Georgetown while the families with more southern sympathies attended Christ Church. Britannia made no secret of her pro-southern sympathies, even to the Union Officers who boarded with her at Tudor Place from 1862 until the end of the war. She later recounted to her grandchildren that Reverend William Norwood (Rector of Christ Church, 1854–1861) “was a downright Southerner to the backbone. According to the prayer book, he was required to use the ‘Prayer for the President of the United States’; and this he refused to do: consequently, he couldn’t remain here, so [he] went South.”

In May of 1869, Robert E. Lee, then president of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, came to Washington, D.C. to meet with his former military adversary, President Ulysses S. Grant. Lee, whose wife Mary was Britannia's first cousin, stayed at Tudor Place during the visit. Britannia recalled the visit to her grandchildren thirty years later: “He stayed two days, if not three, spending Sunday with us. It was a rainy, disagreeable day and I suggested, as the weather was so bad, we would not go to church in the morning but, if the weather cleared, we would go at night, which we did, Cousin Robert accompanying me. The Rev. Mr. [Walter W.] Williams (Rector of Christ Church, 1866–1876), was very much disappointed that we did not come to the morning service, it being communion Sunday, he had hoped to administer the sacraments to General Lee.”

In the spring of 1867, Britannia's daughter “Markie” Kennon married her distant cousin Dr. Armistead Peter (1840–1867), a prominent

Georgetown physician and active member of the Christ Church congregation. The wedding took place in the Tudor Place Drawing Room on April 23, 1867, and was officiated by Reverend Williams of Christ Church. An 1868 list of Christ Church membership includes Mrs. B.W. Kennon, her son-in-law, Dr. Peter, his wife, Mrs. M.C. Peter, and their young son, Walter, all of whom were living at Tudor Place.

Each Sunday morning, Britannia would walk the two blocks down Congress Street (now 31st Street) from Tudor Place to Christ Church to attend services. She also served for several decades as president of the Christ Church Sewing Society, noting that she resigned from that position in 1886. Surviving receipts in the Tudor Place archives indicate that she rented Pew 60 and later, as additional grandchildren came along and a large pew was needed, Pew 85.

In 1882, Britannia's son-in-law, Dr. Armistead Peter purchased the property at 3044 O Street, across 31st Street from the church, and constructed a large house for his family that now included five children. When Mrs. Peter died unexpectedly in September 1886, Reverend A. R. Stuart (Rector of Christ Church, 1876–1902) conducted her funeral and subsequent burial service at Oak Hill Cemetery. Dr. Armistead Peter, now a widower, his five children and his mother-in-law Britannia continued to attend Christ Church.

Britannia died at Tudor Place on January 25, 1911, and her funeral was conducted by Reverend James H. W. Blake (Rector of Christ Church, 1902-1924) in the Tudor Place Drawing Room. One lasting legacy of the Peter family to Christ Church was the ordination of George Freeland Peter (1875–1953), Britannia's youngest grandson. Freeland was first mentioned as a Lay Reader at Christ Church by Reverend Stuart in his 1895 report on Christ Church that was compiled for the Diocese of Maryland. Rev. Dr. Peter attended the General Theological Seminary in



New York City and preached his first sermon as a young seminarian at Christ Church in the late 1880s. He would go on to attend Sewanee and Hampden-Sydney. After serving in associate positions in other parishes in the District and West Virginia, Dr. Peter served as rector of St. James Church in Richmond, Virginia, for 15 years. He returned to the District and served as Canon of Washington National Cathedral from 1928 to 1936. Following his departure from the Cathedral, his final appointment before retirement to his Albemarle County, Virginia, farm was as the Priest in Charge at Christ Church.

Grant Quertermous, Curator, Tudor Place Historic House & Garden

Objects and archival items from the Tudor Place collection related to the history of Christ Church will be exhibited for the May 18th picnic.

