



**ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT      COMMISSIONERS OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY**  
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**NEWS RELEASE** *for Immediate Release*

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**March 11, 2019 2:30 p.m.**

**Original 17th Century Iron Cross Erected by the First English  
Colonists in Maryland to be on Display**

**Leonardtown, MD** – The 17th century iron cross, initially erected on St. Clement's Island by the earliest English settlers to Maryland on the first "Maryland Day," March 25, 1634, will temporarily return to its first home in the Americas where it will be on display at St. Clement's Island Museum during the Maryland Day Ceremony on March 25.

The hammer-welded cross, made of ship's iron and measures 4 feet tall, 2 feet wide and weighs approximately 24 pounds, was brought to the New World by the settlers and their Jesuit companions aboard their ships, the *Ark* and the *Dove*. It is said that upon landing on St. Clement's Island in March of 1634, Fr. Andrew White, S.J. erected the cross and then led a Mass of Thanksgiving for the mainly Roman Catholic English settlers. This was thought to have been the first Roman Catholic Mass on English-speaking American soil and because of this the cross is considered by its caretakers to represent the freedom of religion, upon which the United States of America was built. More recently, the cross was used in Pope Francis' first Mass in the United States at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, in Washington D.C., in September 2015.

The cross was originally discovered in 1989 by Rev. G. Ronald Murphy, S.J. in the Georgetown University archives and subsequently hung at the university's Dahlgren Chapel, until recently when it was taken down while the chapel underwent renovations. Rev. Murphy is a professor of the German Department and a member of the Jesuit Community at Georgetown University – the same group that landed with Fr. Andrew White, S.J. in 1634. Rev. Murphy will be this year's Maryland Day Ceremony keynote speaker and will bring the cross back to St. Mary's County for display.

"Because Father Andrew White is considered the forefather of Georgetown University, the St. Mary's County Museum Division [the caretakers of the St. Clement's Island Museum and hosts of the Maryland Day event] is very pleased to present Rev. Murphy as the keynote speaker at this year's Maryland Day Ceremony," says Karen Stone, Manager of the St. Mary's County Museum Division.

MORE

According to the university, the Georgetown University Jesuits are an apostolic religious community grounded in love for Jesus Christ and animated by the Ignatian spiritual vision of helping others and seeking God in all things. They serve God's people at the nation's oldest Catholic and Jesuit University, established in the religiously-inclusive and international spirit of Georgetown's founder, John Carroll.

“We are so excited about having this cross return to the original landing site this year. Its presence will add an entirely new dimension to the ceremony and we hope people will come out to see this amazing piece of state and local history,” states Stone. “We appreciate Rev. Murphy making the effort to bring this exciting and symbolic piece of history back to where it all began.”

To hear the story of how the cross was found and saved over the centuries, plus more Maryland Day activities, head to Maryland Day at St. Clement’s Island Museum on March 25. The ceremony will feature dignitaries from around the state and much more, and will occur from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. The museum will be open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and offer free admission, plus free water taxi rides out to St. Clement’s Island. All are welcome during the ceremony as well.

For more information regarding Maryland Day at St. Clement’s Island Museum, please call the Museum at 301-769-2222. For hours of operation, programs, admission prices and more, visit the St. Mary’s County Museum Division’s Facebook pages at [www.facebook.com/SCIMuseum](http://www.facebook.com/SCIMuseum) or [www.facebook.com/1836Light](http://www.facebook.com/1836Light) or on Twitter at @StClemIsMuseum or @PineyPtLHMuseum.

