

Catholic chief justice will administer oath again

Barack Obama will take the presidential oath of office Jan. 20 with the same Bible that Abraham Lincoln used at his March 4, 1861, inauguration.

Lincoln was sworn in by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, a Maryland Catholic most remembered for writing the majority opinion in the Dred Scott decision of 1857, which essentially said that people of African descent could never be American citizens.

Now as then, a Catholic chief justice, John G. Roberts, will administer the oath of office. Chief Justice Roberts also has ties to Maryland, as his mother is a parishioner of the Church of the Resurrection in Ellicott City and his father, who died last November, was a general manager for Bethlehem Steel in Sparrows Point in the 1980s.

The only other Catholic to be chief justice of the Supreme Court also had a link to Maryland.

Edward Douglass White Jr., a Louisiana native who briefly studied at the prep school attached to Mount St. Mary's College in Emmitsburg before the Civil War, served as chief justice from 1910-21. He administered the presidential oath of office to Woodrow Wilson in 1913 and 1917, and Warren G. Harding in 1921.

Catholic News Service contributed to this article.