

which strike me as having deep significance, and as a basis for my talk this morning, I should like to recall them, giving you some of the impressions they have produced upon my mind.

The first Christ Church, of Great Choptank Parish, was built, as you know, in 1693, the year following passage by the colonial Assembly of the original Vestry Act, under which the Church of England became the established church in Maryland. This law divided Dorchester into two parishes, Great Choptank and Dorchester.

You will understand, I believe, that in recalling these events my mind would naturally move southward from here to my own Somerset County, where at the same time the county officials were setting up four parishes, Coventry, Stepney, Somerset and Snow Hill. But for my story, I would like to go back a few years further to some events which preceded this era which the historians call the Protestant revolution in Maryland. In so doing, I go back to a time when Somerset and Dorchester were one, being designated by the Calverts simply as the "Eastern Shore below the Choptank." Your county, Dorchester, and my county, Somerset, as well as the counties subsequently created on the lower Eastern Shore, have a common historical heritage. The early history of one is the early history of the others.

One of the brightest events in the history of colonial Maryland—and in all its history, for that matter—was the passage by the General Assembly in 1649, only a few short years after the settlement in St. Mary's City, of the Religious Toleration Act. This inspiring and courageous deed by a little band of freemen, writing the laws under which the new colony would be governed, has been acclaimed far and wide as the first law guaranteeing religious freedom enacted in the New World. It was, indeed, one of the first laws in Christian civilization in which men were given protection to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences. We Marylanders, of course, are proud that our ancestors were pioneers in pursuit of the noble ideals of freedom, and we hold in great reverence this chapter of the History of Maryland. But there is another chapter in the annals of Maryland, less heralded perhaps, but just as glorious and just as momentous as this achievement of the assemblymen of St. Mary's City. And that is the chapter I would bring to your attention here today. It is the story of the "Eastern Shore below the Choptank." It is a page from the early history of our great region.

The two events—the adoption of the Religious Toleration Act and the settlements on the Annesmessex and Manokin Rivers—are, in fact, closely related, the one following perhaps as a result of the other. In reviewing