

northward for purely economic reasons. They nevertheless have been described by historians as having strong libertarian tendencies with regard to religion, although all—so it seems—adhered to the doctrines and conformed to the practices of the Church of England. Presbyterians and other sects moved in afterward. All lived together in harmony, and Maryland, founded by the Calverts as a place where English Roman Catholics could worship as they saw fit, became a religious sanctuary for all peoples.

The situation differed greatly in other parts of the North American colony. In the North, the Puritans drove the Episcopalians out of their colony. The peaceful Quakers, as we have seen, were bound to the whipping post—had their tongues slit or their ears bored. In Virginia, the Catholics and the Puritans alike were banished. Even in Rhode Island, founded by the gentle Roger Williams, Catholics were not given the political rights assured to all others. Only in Maryland was there true toleration and liberty of conscience, which won for her the name, “land of the sanctuary.”

We know, of course, that the Religious Toleration Act passed by the freemen in St. Mary’s City in 1649, was, in effect, nullified a few years later and that the darkness of religious bigotry and intolerance was not swept away until our Constitution was adopted more than a century later. But the step taken in St. Mary’s City was an important part in the movement that culminated in the adoption of the First Amendment to our Constitution in 1791, which says, in part, that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

George and Cecil Calvert began an experiment which reached fruition a century and a half later when their ideas of religious toleration became a part of the basic law of the new Republic and of the states constituting the federation. When the freemen of Maryland, assembled in St. Mary’s City, “assented” to the Toleration Act of 1649, they set a course for this nation and other nations to follow in the unending quest of civilized men for freedom and peace.