

## II - TOBACCO COAST

The Protestant monarchs William and Mary were invited to invade England in 1688 in order to avoid a feared return to Roman Catholicism under James II. This “Glorious Revolution” had a faint echo in Maryland where a small group seized the control of the colony from the Catholic Lord Baltimore. To show their loyalty, and supposedly to stamp out such vices as Sunday gambling, the new legislature voted to establish the Church of England in Maryland in 1692. It took ten years and the work of Thomas Bray (see box) to secure royal approval, but for the next 84 years the Church of England in Maryland would be supported by a tax on tobacco. The Royal Arms and Table of Prohibited Marriages as shown restored below were required by law.



The province was divided into thirty geographic parishes of which Dorchester Parish was one, including all the territory between the Little Choptank and the Little Blackwater rivers. At the time of its creation it had 221 “taxables” or households, taxed at “40 pounds per poll.” Numerically, Dorchester was one of the smallest parishes. We might estimate that there were 1000 souls within the parish, but even in

1692, not all were churchgoers. Maryland had been established by the Calverts as a refuge for Catholics, but they were wise enough to know that a generous toleration was the best way to secure their own freedom of worship. So Maryland already had many Quakers, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and French Huguenots before the Anglican Establishment. Further, the area was a frontier, and accounts testify to the presence of many hard-drinking, hard-living men who attended no worship.

The population in America was far too spread out for daily worship, and even weekly gatherings were difficult for people living beyond seven miles by boat or horseback. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century Dorchester and most parishes built Chapels of Ease in remote locations. But even then it was mainly “men of substance” who gathered Sundays to exchange news before Morning Prayer, Litany, and Ante-Communion, the part of the service with the scripture lessons. A sermon of twenty minutes to an hour would be read. Most of the time children and servants did not attend but the men were expected to lead daily devotions for them from the Prayer Book or Bishop Gibson’s family prayers. There were no bishops in the colonies. The Bishop of London had nominal oversight but little control over the clergy.

For the most part, the Church of England in the American colonies did not actively persecute those who did not worship according to its rites, but it excluded them from political power. Where established, men were expected to receive communion at least three times a year according to the worship of the Church of England in order to hold public office. This resulted in the “occasional conformity” of many who did not really share her doctrine. However, the tradition permitted a wide latitude of belief and required only outward conformity. The 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of “Reason” as a guiding principle and by the time of the American Revolution, many within the church could be called Deists, while those who sought a religion of the heart had joined Methodist societies in addition to church membership.

From its English beginnings in the “Holy Club” at Oxford, the Methodist movement grew rapidly, especially in America where many responded to lively hymns and to extemporaneous open air preaching by lay as well as ordained preachers, and lay-led class meetings for women as well as men. While scripturally based, preaching in Anglican churches tended towards scholarly appeals to reason. The Church of England required an educated clergy, and ministers were ordered to wear their academic hood, a sign of their degree, when they preached. Anglicans also held with

their Roman Catholic counterparts that clergy must have hands laid on them by a bishop in the direct succession with the apostles in order to celebrate the sacraments. As there were no bishops in the colonies American-born candidates had to travel to England for ordination. Twenty percent died making the crossing over or back.

As American displeasure with English control rose so did problems for a body identified as the Church of England. Unless clearly siding with the rebellion, the clergy, who had taken an oath of allegiance to the crown, were seen as Tory sympathizers. Most were, in fact, loyal to their oath. At least one Maryland cleric preached with loaded pistols on the pulpit. Tax support of clergy stipends ended in 1776. Many clergy returned to England. The clergy who remained in Maryland, including the Rector of Dorchester Parish, organized quickly to petition the legislature to guarantee the church's continuing title to its property. It was they who in 1780 in Chestertown invented the name "The Protestant Episcopal Church" which would later be adopted by the national church in 1783. The name meant, of course, a Protestant church with bishops, but there were no bishops in the American Colonies.

The delay in getting bishops was a critical problem as bishops were required for the ordination of new clergy to replace those who had been lost. In 1784, John Wesley, himself an Anglican priest, made the decision to permit the ordination of clergy in America without bishops. Thus at Barrett's Chapel in Delaware and Lovely Lane in Baltimore decisions were made that separated Methodism from Anglicanism in America. In Maryland, this took a majority of the population and Methodism became numerically a far stronger denomination than the newly-named Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America (PECUSA). It is estimated that after the Revolution the Episcopal Church had only 1500 members in Maryland.

Thomas Bray was a devout pastor, but may be the only Christian Saint honored primarily for his administrative and political gifts. While the Episcopal Church has no mechanism for declaring anyone a "Saint," Bray is included in its calendar of "Lesser Feasts and Fasts," and the bishop's office building of eastern Maryland is named "Bray House" in his honor.

Bray visited Maryland in 1699 as a Commissary for the Bishop of London. He gave direction to the clergy, addressed the legislature, then took Maryland's Vestry Act to London and walked it through the Byzantine process of Parliamentary and royal approval. He had created the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge which provided for parish libraries and went on to form the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) which sent missionaries to America until the Revolution. Both organizations continue to the present day.