

John Halfhead, Citizen of St. Mary's

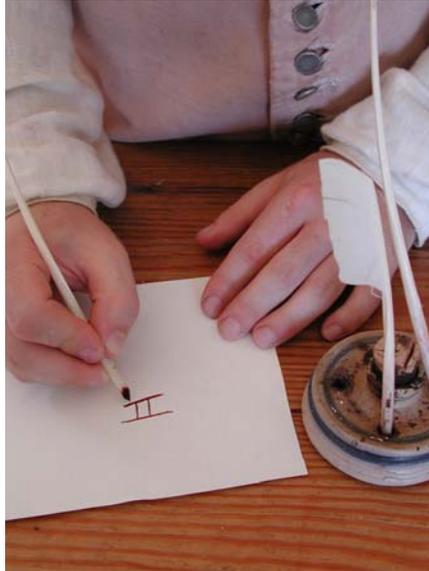
Good day! 'Tis Master John Halfhead here. The last we chatted I had just started me own plantation. Tobacco remains a difficult crop to tend, but I have learned much over these past years. Not only have my crops and my profit grown, but me family as well! Me wife, young son John, and indentured servant help me in my duties as master of this plantation. Before long it will be young John's turn to take care of his own house and land.

'Tis not only tobacco that keeps me hard at work these days. The small town of St. Mary's has grown quite a bit since first we arrived at the shores of this river. Each week, it seems, a new building is being framed, or a new proprietor opens an ordinary or an inn. The fine large house in the center of town that was once Master Calvert's is now where the Assembly meets. Me own house is not quite so grand, but it serves me well. The business of

tobacco, the government meetings, and the dealings in court keep St. Mary's an interesting town, indeed. Very often I must travel to the court to settle debts, register papers, or appraise an estate. Appraisal, you see, is when the worth of goods is determined. For instance, if a man dies, which is all too common what with the seasoning, other men must write down all that he owns and how much it is worth. Then his debts can be settled. Trading with tobacco is no easy task. We cannot hand hogsheads of tobacco back and forth to each other each time something is bought or sold. Nay, instead we exchange papers, or bills, that state how much we owe. Once a year or so, we settle all those debts and the tobacco changes hands. Most of the time, it is a fine system, but there are disputes—some of them are ugly, indeed. I have been called upon to give my testimony in more than a few instances.



When these disputes come about, a court case is almost always the way they are settled. The parties involved will come together and tell the judge their side of the story, and the judge will decide if tobacco is owed. The clerk writes down all that is said in the record. The clerk has to know his letters in order to dot his, of course.



Most people in Maryland simply sign a mark on documents. When we spend so much time in the fields, who has the time to spend learning letters? I learned a trade in England, so only need to sign my mark on occasion. My wife, also, signs her mark when need be. Those few men who run an ordinary or an inn or a storehouse also write and read, but they are few.

'Tis quite pleasing to see so many businesses here, though. It seems as though we have carved quite a nice little settlement out of the wilderness. Why, when I arrived there were trees, rivers, and but a few Indian dwellings. Now, a true town has begun. It fills me with pride to know that I have risen from humble beginnings to owning me own

land, having a family, and taking part in the goings-on of government business—all opportunities I could never have dreamed of in England. This small town has become so busy that I am thinking of purchasing land farther out, along a nearby river called the Patuxent. It is a magnificent river, leading into the bay called Chesapeake.

Ah yes, even though near twenty years have passed, this land is still bursting with opportunity. It is my great hope that I will continue to prosper here in Maryland, and when my time has passed, that my son will do just as well. Being born here in Maryland, he never had to endure the horrors of the seasoning. And he has grown to a healthy young fellow, eating Indian corn rather than English grains. He will never spend even an hour as an indentured servant. Nay, he will work hard to be sure, but his youth will be a good deal better than mine. And one day, he will inherit my land, my house, my goods, and my servant. These twenty years in this new colony have been quite good to me—and that is more years than most live to see here. But only time will tell how the rest of my days will play out.

