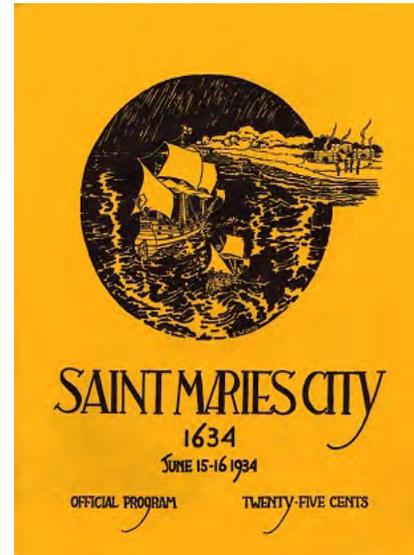


## Celebrating our Past Celebrations:

### The 1934 Tercentennial Celebration in St. Mary's City

*by Silas Hurry, Curator of Collections and Archaeological Laboratory Director*

In 1934, Maryland threw herself a massive birthday party. To celebrate the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Maryland a series of commemorations took place over two years. The first of these occurred in England at Cowes on the Isle of Wight where the colonists began their trip to the New World on St. Cecilia's Day, November 22nd 1633. This event was "simulcast" in the US with a special commemoration at the War Memorial in Baltimore, the placing of a plaque at Cowes, and a presidential radio address from Franklin D. Roosevelt. The second commemoration occurred at St. Clement's Island on March 25 (Maryland Day) and included the installation of the large concrete cross that still stands today, an outdoor Catholic mass, and a range of political and patriotic orations. The grand finale of this season of celebrations was on June 15th and 16th in St. Mary's City.



The original plan for the St. Mary's part of the celebration called for the creation of a stone exedra or temple on Church Point to commemorate the site where religious toleration was born. However, negotiations with the vestry of Trinity Church were slow and the plans for commemoration almost came to naught, until the descendants of Dr. John Mackall Brome stepped forward. The two Brome daughters, who had inherited most of the original town lands of St. Mary's City, from their father James Brome offered slightly more than an acre of land, but with stipulations. Rather than a stone temple to



*St. Mary's City – June 1934*

toleration, Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Howard offered the property for a reconstruction of the brick State House of 1676. Thus was born a lasting monument to the founding site of the Maryland colony. In conjunction with the dedication of the State House, two special events took place at St. Mary's City. The first of these was a water pageant featuring recreations of the Ark and the Dove, and visits by two U.S. Navy destroyers (USS Manley and the USS Overton), a British heavy cruiser (HMS Dundee), the Maryland Conservation

Navy, and an array of yachts and private watercraft. Many of the participants at St. Mary's came by steamship on special one day excursion rates.

The second event in St. Mary's City was a special historical pageant dramatizing the story of the early colony. Entitled, "St. Mary's, Mother of Maryland", the script was written by Kathleen Read Coontz and the cast was consisted of local St. Mary's countians, some actually playing the roles of their ancestors. Among the "stars" of this unique historical drama were Lettie Marshall Dent as Margaret Brent, William Fenwick as Leonard Calvert, Ruth (Jones) Wheeler as Mary Kitamaquid, Aleck Loker as John Lewger, Bascom Broun as Governor Thomas Greene, Father Horace McKenna as Father Andrew White, and Ernest Bell as Tayac or Chief of the Piscataway. According to newspaper accounts of the time, 100,000 people attended the celebration over two days with temperatures exceeding 100 degrees.

*This article is based on research prepared for a presentation to the St. Mary's County Historical Society. It was developed at the request of Polly Barber who actually participated in the 1934 celebration. The author would like to thank the Historical Society which provided a number of the images used, and most especially Carol Moody and Pete Himmelheber who assisted in the research.*