



History

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History

Established in 1654, Calvert County is one of the oldest counties in the United States. Native people lived in Calvert County 9,000 years ago, according to evidence unearthed by archaeologists at Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum. Calvert County's earliest identified settlers were Piscataway Indians. Indian tribes established villages at intervals along the river with the largest being at the mouth of Battle Creek. They grew corn and tobacco on rich farmlands that were to prove very attractive to colonists arriving from England in the early 1600's.

John Smith is reported to be the first Western man to lay eyes on Calvert County's peninsula, describing it in his journal as he saw it in 1608 during his exploration of the Chesapeake Bay. The first English settlement in Southern Maryland dates to somewhere between 1637 and 1642, although the county was actually organized in 1654. Established by Cecelius Calvert, the second Lord Baltimore, English gentry were the first settlers, followed by Puritans, Huguenots, Quakers and Scots. In 1695, Calvert County was partitioned into St. Mary's, Charles and Prince George's, and its boundaries became substantially what they are today.

The original location of the county seat was Calvertown, Calvert Town or Calvert Towne, on the Patuxent. When this proved to be inconvenient the county seat was moved in 1722 by an Act of the Assembly to a tract known as "Williams' Old Field" which was designated as the site of a new courthouse. The town created by this act was named Prince Frederick. The Courthouse was finally completed in 1732.

British troops invaded Calvert County in 1780, during the Revolutionary War. A second invasion took place during the War of 1812, when Calvert County became a battleground, both on land and sea. The battle of Barney's flotilla at the mouth of St. Leonard's Creek is an exciting and important point in county history. Recently divers discovered the remains of that famous flotilla at the bottom of the creek where Barney's men scuttled their barges to keep them from falling into British hands. During this engagement, the county court house and jail were burned.

The main crop in Calvert County was tobacco, a labor-intensive crop that resulted in a reliance on slavery to make it profitable. This made the county very vulnerable to the forces that tore at the nation, resulting in the Civil War. Although Maryland was officially aligned with the North, many countians sympathized with the Confederate cause. A prison camp for captured southerners was built at the mouth of Battle Creek, near the site of Calvertown.

When slavery was ended, profound changes swept the countryside. Out of necessity, the economy of the county turned away from large plantations dependent on cheap labor and to the livelihood available in the waters. In 1867, Captain Isaac Solomon established a commercial fishery in the southernmost part of the county, which became known as Solomon's Island. A cannery and a fishing fleet combined with boat building to create a bustling economy.

Life in Calvert County continued without much change into the 20th century. The introduction of the automobile made inland travel more attractive, although the lack of good roads made for a rough ride. In 1936, the county had only 15.2 miles of paved roads. Electrification did not come to the county until 1939, when Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative began service in the area. A toll bridge was built across the Patuxent River at Hallowing Point in 1951, connecting Calvert and Charles Counties. A workboat or ferry was the only direct link with St. Mary's County from Solomons. As recently as 1972, children in Solomons commuted to school in St. Mary's County by boat.

Economic Development

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The Second World War brought real change to Calvert County. In 1942, Solomons became the training site for Navy and Marine detachments, with the establishment of an Amphibious Training Base at Dowell. The invasion of Normandy was simulated on the lower Cliffs of Calvert. This influx of personnel and dollars brought a new prosperity to the county.

Two other improvements that have dramatically affected the county are the construction of MD RtA, and the Thomas Johnson Bridge. Md Rt. 4, a 38 mile-long four-lane highway begun in 1964 and completed in 1987, runs the length of the county and is named after Comptroller Louis L. Goldstein. The Thomas Johnson Bridge connects Solomons to St. Mary's County. These changes have fueled the remarkable growth that Calvert County is experiencing today.

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