



Something Amazing Happened Here...

The Religious Freedom National Scenic Byway

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and it became a fundamental American belief. The Religious Freedom National Scenic Byway is more than just a glimpse of history. Visitors traveling along the Byway as it winds through Southern Maryland's scenic roads can immerse themselves in the natural and cultural spaces that shaped the early story of a cherished American Right. Along this Byway you will discover the story of the very first attempt in America to introduce the radical idea of religious toleration and to separate church from state. These concepts are now enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing everyone living in the United States the right to believe as they wish.

The Beginning of the Journey

Maryland's founding in 1634 was economically motivated, intended to further the Calvert Family's financial interests while extending their King's dominions. The Calverts were Catholic, and in Anglican England, Catholics were persecuted for their beliefs. To hold beliefs contrary to the official religion meant that loyalty to your country was suspect. Although the venture was to be led by Catholics, the Calverts took every measure to demonstrate that they and their colony were fervently loyal to the King and to England, not to the Pope.

Hoped for Peace and Prosperity

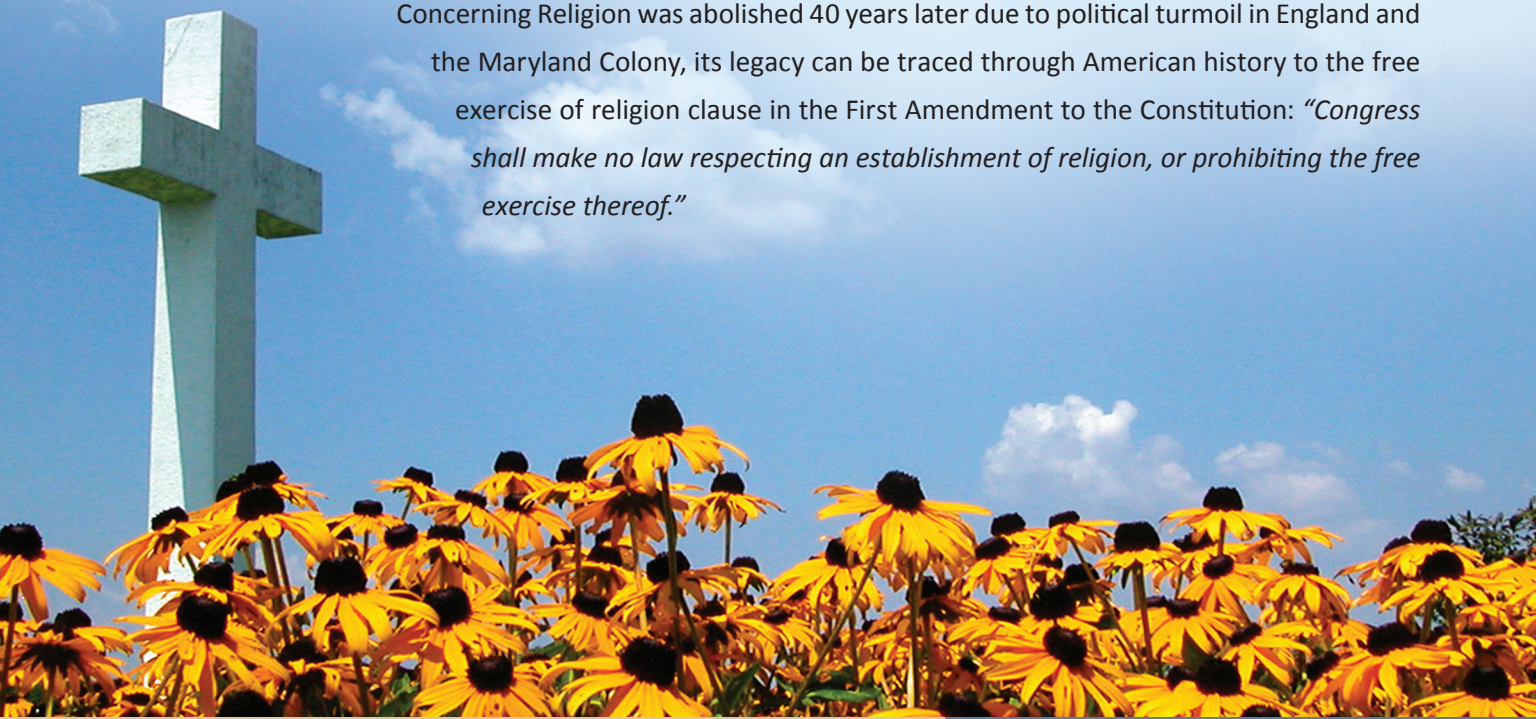
Maryland's early years were fraught with tension over the differing religious beliefs of its founders, its colonists, and the English government. In an effort to maintain peace and attract colonists of differing religious beliefs Lord Baltimore adopted a policy of freedom of belief and worship for all who settled in the colony. This practical measure was intended to prevent religious rivalry in the colony and fear in the King's court that Catholicism would be promoted as the religion of the colony.

An Act Like No Other

"...in a well Governed and Christian Commonwealth matters Concerning Religion & the honor of God ought in the first place to be taken into serious Consideration and endeavoured to be settled." The Act Concerning Religion, passed by the Maryland General Assembly on April 21, 1649, was among the first legislative acts in North America allowing liberty of conscience, though only for Christians. *"No Person or Persons...shall henceforth be in any ways troubled molested or discountenanced for or in respect of his or her Religion nor in the free exercise thereof..."*

A Founding Principle, a Basic Human Right

Most significant to the advance of western ideas, the Calverts introduced the concept of the division of Church and State into the New World and into Western political discourse. Even though the Act Concerning Religion was abolished 40 years later due to political turmoil in England and the Maryland Colony, its legacy can be traced through American history to the free exercise of religion clause in the First Amendment to the Constitution: *"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."*



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National Scenic Byway**
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