HISTORIC ST. MARY'S CITY
A MUSEUM OF HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY AT MARYLAND'S FIRST CAPITAL

FOR TEACHERS
TRADE AND TRAVEL

PHYSICAL ADDRESS

Visitor Center
18751 Hogaboom Lane
St. Mary's City, MD 20686

CONTACT INFORMATION

Peter Friesen, Director of Education
Phone: 240-895-4984
Email: PeterF@DigsHistory.org

TRADE AND TRAVEL

In name and size, *Maryland Dove* at Historic St. Mary's City commemorates the *Dove* of 1634, which accompanied Lord Baltimore's original expedition to Maryland. *Maryland Dove* is a re-creation of a trade vessel from the late 17th century. It would have been used for trade between the colonies and sometimes for trade with England and Europe.

Ark and Dove

The *Ark* and *Dove* set sail from England in late November, 1633. Just a few days after the voyage began, a storm forced *Dove* to turn back and seek refuge off the southwest coast of England. The *Ark*, unable to make contact with *Dove* and assuming she had been lost, continued its course. The two ships were reunited in Barbados in January of 1634 where they continued on to Point Comfort in the Virginia colony. There they secured corn and other supplies before heading northward to the Potomac River. On March 25, a Catholic mass was celebrated on St. Clement's Island, led by Father Andrew White. Within a few days, the English began a permanent settlement in a shared Indian village south of St. Clement's Island and named it St. Mary's. At the end of May, the *Ark* returned to England leaving *Dove* behind to provide transportation for goods to be traded up and down the Atlantic seacoast. The following year *Dove* headed back to England but never arrived and was presumed lost at sea. Throughout the 1600s, ships continued to travel to and from the Maryland colony. Maritime trade and transportation touched almost every aspect of life just as automotive transportation does in our society today. Ships and water travel played many roles in colonial society including trade, transportation, and communication.

Trade

Colonial Maryland's economy was based on trade with England and other English and European colonies around the Atlantic Ocean. Maryland and the Chesapeake region provided Europe with tobacco, beaver pelts, timber, and other "exotic novelties." In exchange, Marylanders received manufactured goods such as furniture, metal wares, glassware, cooking utensils, sewing notions, textiles, shoes, hats, clothing, pottery, and imported food stuffs such as spices, spirits, wine, and sugar. The trading ships also brought "truck" or trade items specifically intended to be used for trade with the native peoples primarily for beaver pelts and corn. Smaller quantities of other furs and other items were also traded. These included shell beads which functioned as currency among the native peoples and could be used to trade for other commodities more desirable in the European or colonial market. The most popular truck items desired by the Indians were small axes, hatchets, hoes, sheets of copper, knives, bone or horn combs, glass beads, jaw harps, hawks bells, scissors, linen shirts, wool blankets, and iron fishhooks.

Corn, furs, and some beans were regularly traded to the northern colonies for dried fish and livestock. Similar items and, occasionally, shell beads were traded to the Caribbean for manufactured goods brought from Europe, as well as sugar, rum, servants, and later, enslaved labor. Trade ships could also transport the occasional passenger visiting another colony or visiting other areas around the Maryland colony.

Tobacco was the basis for nearly all trade which took place in Maryland. Payment for goods coming into the colony was based on profits gained from the cultivation of tobacco. Once emptied of their trade goods, the ships returned to England filled with tobacco.

Transportation

For any person seeking to travel to the New World, whether to immigrate or to conduct trade, ships were the sole means of transportation. If passengers were wealthy, they may have been able to afford a private bed space on a ship. Otherwise, those of both high and low status had to cross the same 3,000 miles of ocean on wooden ships, eat salted and dried foods, pass long and boring hours, suffer storms and seasickness, and pray that no disaster or pirates would claim their lives before they reached their destination.

In England, most people did very little traveling for everyday business and marketing everything they needed was usually available within their immediate community. However, in Maryland things were very different. Most of the early colonists built their houses along waterways in areas where the few towns could be several days journey away and the nearest neighbor could be several miles. Travel was a necessity for communication and trade, and in the early years water transportation was the best or only choice.

Communication

The arrival of a ship meant the arrival of letters and news from England or from other colonies. Since very few of the Maryland colonists could read or write, the ship's crew and passengers were often their only source for the latest financial reports, political events, European fashions, new discoveries, and more.