

INTRODUCTION

by Edward C. Papenfuse, State Archivist

George Calvert, first Lord Baltimore, was deeply committed to founding a colony in the New World. In 1623 he received a charter for land in Newfoundland called Avalon. The Charter to Avalon granted him extensive powers and seemingly secured him a comfortable existence in America away from the pressures of Court and growing anti-Catholic sentiment in England. One harsh winter in Newfoundland was enough to dispel any such hopes. In August 1629 Calvert wrote King Charles I that he had "met with greater difficulties" than he had expected. He lamented that "from the midst of October to the midst of May there is a sad face of winter upon all this land. Both sea and land [are] so frozen for the greatest part of the time." It was impossible to fish. Plants would not grow for eight months of the year and during the winter the air was "so intolerable as it is hardly to be endured." Calvert pleaded with the King to grant him lands in a warmer climate, preferably Virginia, and permit him to leave "this place to fishermen that are able to encounter storms and hard weather."

George Calvert undoubtedly had read Captain John Smith's account of Virginia. Smith explored the Chesapeake Bay in 1608. His glowing report of the region's prospects for settlement, first published in 1612, proclaimed it "a country that may have the prerogative over the most pleasant place