

Happy Birthday America

MY NAME IS EBENEZER SMITH. I AM A FARMER AND THE YEAR IS 1636. It has been two years now since I came ashore at St. Mary's City. I have me this house now...and this farm...and God has been merciful to me. I can see Mary, over by the coose, filling her basket with ripe, luscious berries. And John...coming from the river with one



country philosopher

By Amos Arthur Holmes

of them stripped fish that Martha bakes so well. I sometimes feel guilty at the happiness I have now as compared to the turmoil and persecution we endured in England. When the Calverts painted a picture of the New World I was only faintly interested...until I heard the part about religious

tolerance. Oh, God! If that were only true! If I, and my family, could worship God without being hounded and cursed and beaten. And on this chance...on this hope that the Calverts were honestly offering this sanctuary...I packed me family up and off we sailed. On this past Sunday morning the Protestants gathered for their services and what a glorious day for honoring the Lord. We have met, in Christian fellowship, every single Sunday since arriving and not once have the Catholics interfered. The Calverts have been true to their word and...it is here...in this new land called Maryland...that religious freedom actually exists. Only yesterday Father Andrew White came by the house and Martha fixed him a deer steak with gravy. The good Father is partial to wild game in any form and it was a pleasure having him in our home. Well, I'm near the end of this row of corn. The sun is hot today. The sweat drips from my brow and my throat is dry. Perhaps I will slip away in a moment...there's a new tavern in St. Mary's City...and a tankard of cool ale would reward me magnificently. Ah! I will go now...while Martha has her back turned.

MY NAME IS HENRY MATTINGLY. I AM A BLACKSMITH AND THE YEAR IS 1776. There's going to be hell to pay down to St. George's Island. Captain Beall done passed

by here this morning with some of the finest soldier boys I ever did see in my life. I'll be going on down there myself as soon as Ned Briscoe gets here. Ned says I'm just too dang old, at 80, to go fighting them Redcoats. Hell! I'm a Mattingly and there ain't no Mattingly alive can't hit a squirrel in the eye at 100 yards. You know...I never really got riled up at them British rascals. I sort of ignored them taxes and them demands that were creeping up on our freedom. But when Lord Dunmore's fleet started raiding and looting and killing...well...a man protects that what is his. Now them done come ashore at St. George's Island. By golly...that's where Aunt Ellen Sparling lives...and Will Norris...and the Widow Robertson. Course I might get myself killed in this here battle...but Lordy...if a man can't fight for liberty and freedom...if he can't sort of taste them words...then what's the sense to any of it? Hey! Here comes Ned Briscoe. Watch out, Redcoats! Henry Mattingly is a coming!

MY NAME IS JAMES SOMERVILLE. I AM A SOLDIER AND THE YEAR IS 1918. It is raining and the trenches are filled with mud. The night is chill and in twenty minutes we charge the German positions. I'm near scared to death...but I know I'll stand tall when the time comes. Now...in these few minutes before we charge...I have been thinking about my home in St. Mary's County. I remember those hot days in Mr.

Ashton's tobacco fields and the bitter cold when I oystered with Mr. Clay Tippet over near Cherry Cove. I remember services at old Bethel Baptist Church and I remember Silas Williams saying, "James, why you fight this war? It ain't nothing but a white man's war". Well, I didn't believe that then...and I don't believe it now. I love my country. There are sure things that need righting. There's got to be a day when mankind does away with prejudice. Ah! It is so hard to understand prejudice. I know that Mr. Ashton wouldn't sit down and have dinner with me...and yet I know...I KNOW...that he would give his life for me. It just don't make any sense. But if we ever see equality of races...if we ever see true brotherhood...then by damn...it's going to happen right here in the good old U.S.A. I can see the day when black men and women walk the halls of congress. I can see the day when little white boys and girls go to school with little black boys and girls. And if these dreams aren't worth fighting for...aren't worth dying for...then this is going to be a sorry, sorry world. (There is a plaque on the monument in Leonardtown Square that reads: James Somerville. Pvt. A.E.F. Killed in Action. France.)

MY NAME IS AMOS ARTHUR HOLMES. I AM A COLUMNIST FOR THE ST. MARY'S GUARDIAN AND THE YEAR IS 1976. I am so glad that I am a writer with a writer's imagination. Because, without leaving my desk, I can see the cotton fields of the south. I can see the surf roaring madly against Maine's rockbound coast...and feel awe at the splendor of Northwest forests. I can actually picture Ebenezer Smith, Henry Mattingly, and James Somerville...and I respect so deeply the heritage they left behind. I am thankful for the happiness I enjoy in this great land of ours...and for her people who guard so closely those treasures of liberty and freedom. I am glad that I am a history buff because it has allowed me to etch within my heart each single struggle this nation has endured. I weep, with proud sorrow, for all those gallant men and women who have given that last measure of devotion to protect those noble principles on which this great nation was founded. Twenty-odd years ago I placed my little daughter on my knee and taught her a song. My country 'tis of thee...sweet land of liberty...and the pride I felt as that little girl sang praises to my beloved country. This morning I watched as my daughter placed her son upon her knee and taught him that very same song. Tears formed in my eyes as that tiny voice sang...land where our father's died...land of the pilgrims pride...from every mountain side...let freedom ring. And when the child had stopped singing...I looked across the Potomac River. My eyes saw the forests on the Virginia shore and as my vision embraced the distant horizon, I whispered, "Happy Birthday, America!"