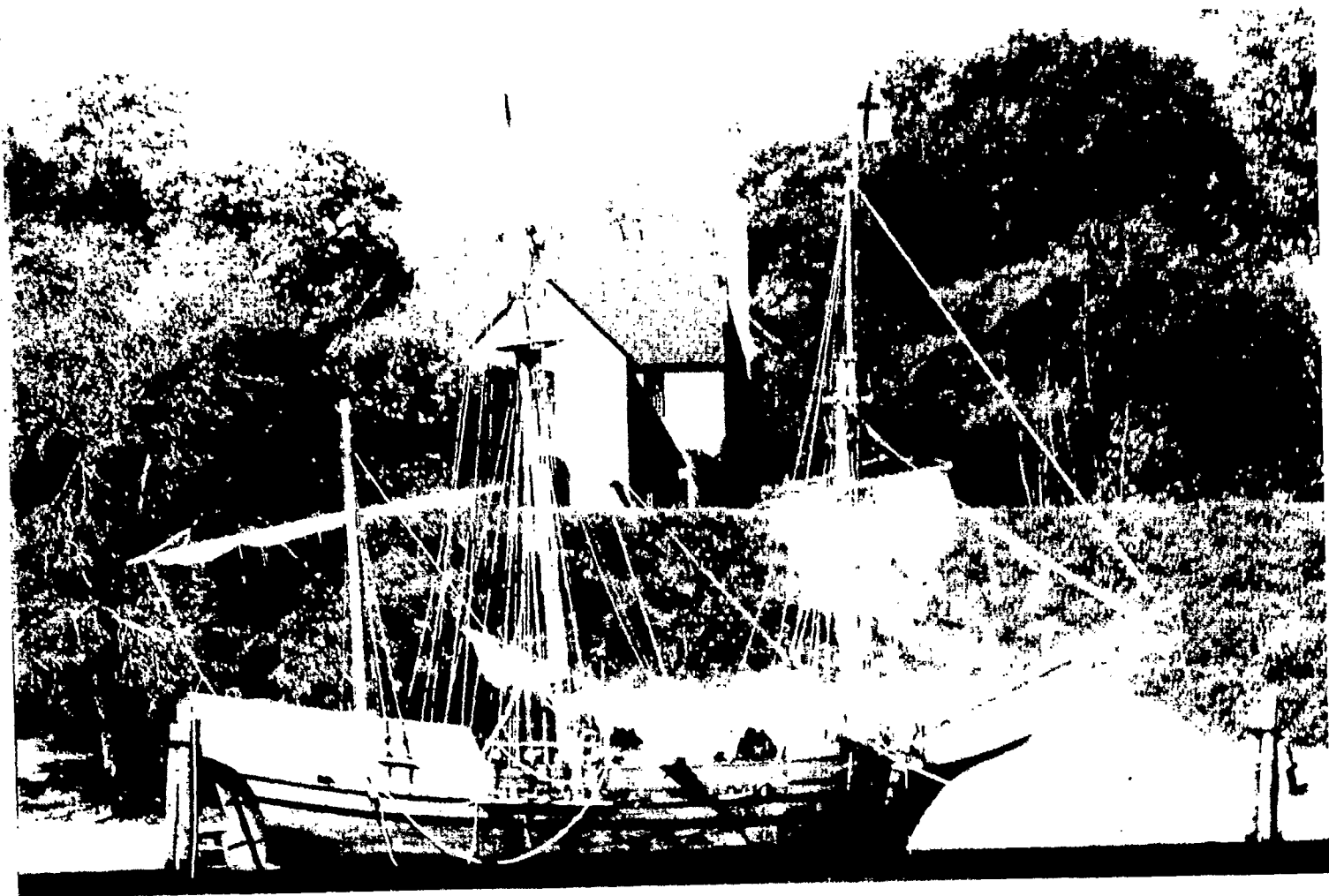


# Maryland's Tobacco Heritage





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# Maryland's Tobacco Heritage

Maryland's colonial history begins with tobacco. The only colony founded expressly to grow the leaf, the Free State was the dream of George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore, who in 1632 asked Charles I for a grant of land along the Chesapeake Bay, that "I . . . may yet do the King and my Country more service there by planting of Tobacco."

The initial grant was for a territory between the James and Roanoke rivers, in present-day Virginia, extending westward to the Allegheny Mountains.

The Virginia interests in England interceded, however, and forced withdrawal of that grant. In its place, Calvert won land along the northern Chesapeake and named it Maryland, for Queen Henrietta Maria.

George Calvert had failed, after a cold, hard winter 11 years earlier, in an attempt to settle Newfoundland. He died before the Maryland charter was formally approved. The task of settling the more clement Chesapeake area fell to his sons, Cecil, who inherited the title of Lord Baltimore, and Leonard, who became

the first governor. Cecil never set foot in the New World, but Leonard, with 20 gentleman adventurers and 200 artisans, set out in 1633.

Their ships, the *Ark* and the *Dove*, landed at St. Clements Island in the lower Potomac on March 25, 1634. Two days later the settlers bought a small village from the Yoacomico Indians and established their capital, St. Mary's, closer to the Chesapeake at the wide, well-protected mouth of a quiet river.

There they set about clearing land, building temporary shelters and planting their first crop of the golden leaf that has, to the present, contributed so much to the history and economy of the Free State.



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# Nourished With Pride

Unlike Virginia, which was a dominion under Crown control, Maryland was a palatinate, the Calverts enjoying royal prerogatives of their own. It was therefore free, at first, to ship its tobacco wherever it pleased, while royal decree called for all Virginia leaf to go directly to England. Maryland's chief markets outside England were Holland, Germany and Scandinavia.

The area proved a haven for colonists. The Chesapeake Bay area, with its unsurpassed network of natural waterways, opened up thousands of square miles of hinterland to immediate settlement and made possible the adoption of export tobacco as a staple. Maryland colonists, instead of using strong-arm tactics and appropriating land from the Indians like their Virginia neighbors, bought needed land and thus maintained good relations with the Indians.

By the middle of the 17th century, so many colonists were relying solely on the golden leaf for a living that the Maryland Assembly was forced to order all tobacco planters to plant also at least two acres of corn. Tobacco paid for imports of manufactured necessities and even a few luxuries. High prices, inflated wages and cheap land enabled freed indentured servants to start farms of their own.

## Call for Quality Control

The settlers' concentration on tobacco, coupled with overproduction in Virginia and the Carolinas, soon led to an oversupply of leaf and depressed prices in the Old World. In an effort to make up for the low prices, farmers began shipping more tobacco of lower quality.

Virginia suggested in 1663 that the three colonies limit production under a plan that would prohibit transplanting after a certain date. Maryland's northerly location meant a later tobacco season and, from England, Lord Baltimore vetoed the plan as discriminatory. He proclaimed that if the planters were poor, "it is not from the low price of Tobacco, but from their owne sloth, ill husbandry, and profusely spending their cropps in Brandewine, and other liquors."



In 1666, the three colonies again tried to come to an agreement to limit production, this time prohibiting cultivation for a year. Back in England, Lord Baltimore, who has been called the *bête noire* of control legislation by one tobacco historian, again opposed the plan, this time taking the part of the poor planters and the King's customs collectors.

A depression in the 1720's forced the Maryland Assembly to enact laws prohibiting the export of trash tobacco. However, enforcement depended on oaths, fines and informers rather than compulsory inspection. In 1730, Virginia succeeded in enacting inspection laws, thus giving Old Dominion planters an edge over their Maryland counterparts.

Two years later, enraged planters in Prince Georges County destroyed their crops in protest of the assembly's refusal to pass satisfactory inspection legislation.

One planter told the fifth Lord Baltimore in 1743 that Maryland tobacco was in such "disreputation" that it could hardly defray the expense of freight to England. No improvement was possible, the planter said, without a regulation "as will prevent the sending to Market Such trash as is unfit for any other use but Manure." Four years later Maryland finally followed Virginia's example and passed such a regulation. Inferior leaf was burned immediately, assuring that only the finest Maryland leaf could be sold, by consignment to British merchants or within the colonies.

### **A Matter of Taste**

The tobacco grown in colonial Maryland was known as Oronoko, which was bulkier and coarser than the sweetscented leaf for which Virginia was then famous. Oronoko, which probably originated near the South American river of the same name, had a sharper leaf than the long, broad sweetscented. Some planters of the time likened its shape to a "fox's ear."

At first, Oronoko brought less than sweetscented, as it was thought to be too strong for the Englishman of discriminating taste. It came into great demand on the continent, however, and eventually developed a wider market. Between 1812 and the Civil War, Maryland tobacco consistently brought higher prices on the world market, and proved more profitable to the planters than the sweetscented.

Seeds were sown in late March or April. Plants developed in May and were transplanted to the fields in June. When the flowers appeared, the plant tops were broken off to prevent seed production. Colonial tobacco planters were said to have been easily recognizable by their long thumbnails, which they hardened in the flame of a candle to facilitate the tobacco topping that created stronger, more flavorful lower leaves.

Once it reached full growth, 4½ to 7 feet tall, about six weeks after topping, Oronoko was cut down whole. After curing, the entire plant, including the stem, was packed into hogsheads, weighing between 400 and 800 pounds, for shipment overseas. Bulkier than sweetscented, Oronoko could not be packed as



*Baltimore - 1837*





tightly, so hogsheads weighed about half as much as those of sweetscented. This led to continued attempts by Maryland planters to enlarge the size of their hogheads, as British excise taxes and fees for overseas transport were based on the number of hogsheads, not their size or weight.

### **Seeds of Revolution**

The mid-18th century marked the beginning of a golden age in Maryland agriculture. Great families began to accumulate wealth and power. A colonial aristocracy emerged, widening the gulf between the classes in Tidewater society.

Many settlers moved west. By 1730, present-day Cumberland had been settled where the Potomac cut through the Alleghenies. Free schools were established in each county. Baltimore, founded by an act of the Provincial Assembly, was chartered as a tobacco port in 1729.

Now that inspection laws offered an assurance of quality, tobacco leaf became a widely used medium of exchange. As there was not enough currency to go around, debts were paid with inspected leaf, taxes payable in cured leaf.

By 1750, tobacco production in the Chesapeake colonies had grown to about 72 million pounds a year. Most leaf was going directly to the mother country by this time, as the Navigation Acts required that all tobacco be landed first in England or an English settlement, with customs duties paid the Crown.

With these duties enriching royal coffers as no other product of the New World could, colonists were becoming increasingly

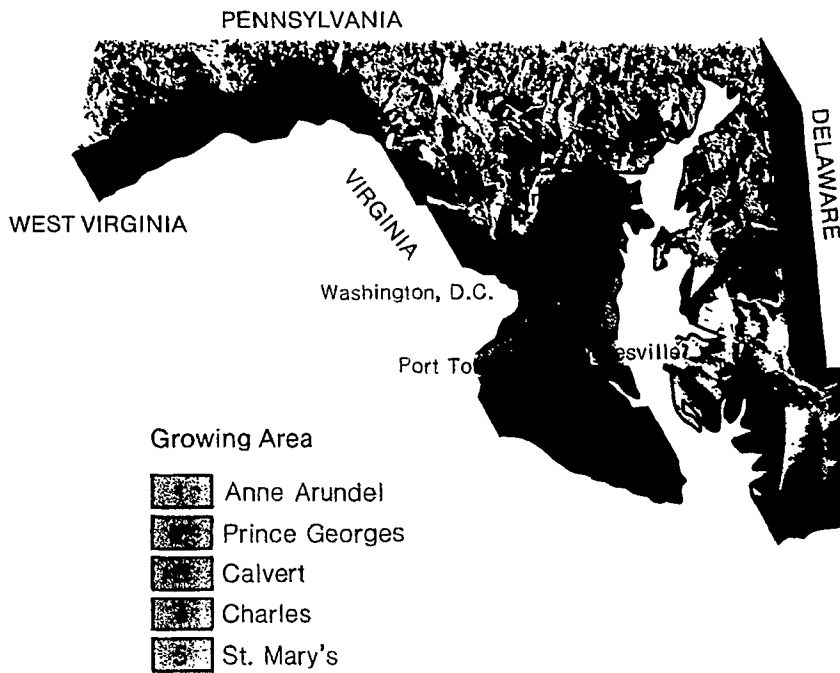
restless over what they viewed as restraints on their free commerce. Many historians see in tobacco laws the seeds of the American Revolution.

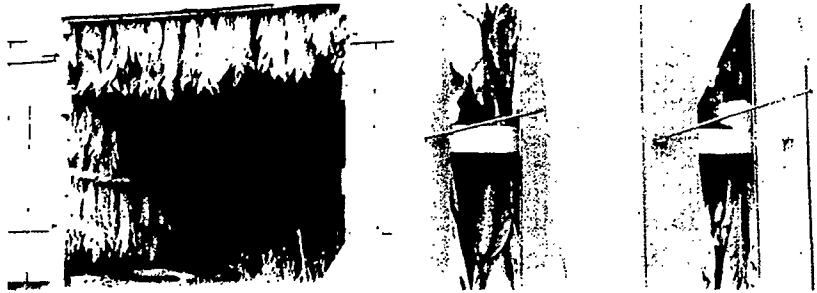
At the time of the revolution, tobacco production in Maryland and Virginia exceeded 100 million pounds annually with a value of \$54 million. That represented more than 75 percent of the total value of commodities exported from the Chesapeake area.

### **Tobacco Wars**

British blockades during the revolution shut down most of the colonies' trade, including tobacco. Cargoes that left port were captured by British warships. In the last years of the war, the British moved their so-called "tobacco war" inland, sweeping through the Chesapeake region in an attempt to paralyze the economy. Thousands of hogsheads of tobacco were destroyed.

Although the colonies were victorious, the war and lack of trade slowed tobacco cultivation in Maryland. Most planters found themselves hopelessly in debt to the British merchants who filled the goods orders that accompanied the crop each year to the mother land. When the Continental Congress met in Annapolis in 1783 to ratify the Treaty of Paris, it also recognized all debts unpaid before and during the war.





Marylanders had exempted themselves from these during the war and now many faced permanent ruin. Thomas Jefferson estimated the debts owed to Britain by Virginians alone amounted to more than three times all the money in circulation there. The situation was no better in Maryland. In the end, however, little of this "hereditary debt" was ever paid.

### **Star "Spangled" Future**

Tobacco trade to Europe and the newly independent states revived somewhat after the war, although its golden age had ended in Maryland. Eastern Shore counties relinquished tobacco culture in favor of wheat.

Observing the decline of tobacco in Maryland during the 1790's, Roger B. Taney opted instead of farming to study law. Some history buffs might enjoy speculating on the constitutional ramifications had the nation's fifth Chief Justice raised tobacco on the ancestral plantation in Calvert County instead of presiding over the Dred Scott decision which led, indirectly, to the Civil War.

Although Maryland would never produce as much leaf as she had prior to the revolution, her tobacco would continue to be prized for its quality.

The Free State was making serious efforts to produce the highly desired, attractive yellow tobacco some 14 years before a North Carolina slave accidentally cured the first Carolina bright. Growers were already experimenting with charcoal and flues for curing in Maryland, leading one historian to comment, "had Maryland contained the vast stretches of [poor] soil found in [North Carolina and Virginia], the story of Bright Tobacco would have been different, at least from a geographic point of view."

In 1825 a farmer received an extraordinary price on the Baltimore market for a light leaf that provoked comment as far away as Raleigh, North Carolina, where one editor wrote, "red and yellow tobacco are still in demand in Baltimore, there being none in the market."

These famous red and yellow "spangled" curings account for the proud position of Maryland tobacco prior to the Civil War. By 1845 "Maryland" was the trade name for all yellow tobacco sold in European markets, symbolizing better-than-average leaf.

Before the North Carolina discovery of bright, Maryland's liveliest competitor for yellow tobacco was Ohio, in whose eastern counties farmers were producing exceptional yellow leaf. Some buyers considered the Ohio type, when produced on virgin soil, superior to Maryland, leading to a year-long battle in the pages of the *American Farmer* on the respective merits of the two.

### **Manufacturing Overtakes Agriculture**

By the mid-19th century, burley tobacco grown to the west was gaining popularity in chewing and smoking tobacco, supplanting the Maryland leaf. Maryland's status as a tobacco producer began to decline. In 1830, the Free State accounted for 30 percent of all tobacco grown in the U.S. Ten years later it dropped to 11 percent, in 1890, 5 percent, as cigarettes made of the new bright leaf took hold in the marketplace.

Although Maryland tobacco was rapidly moving from a major crop to a specialty, many Free State farmers still depended on income from the leaf for their livelihoods. And they had for a number of years been depending on turkeys to help them produce a quality crop.

The Thanksgiving bird, they discovered, was ideal for controlling hornworms, the thumb-size green caterpillars that could devastate a tobacco crop. One season when farmers in Prince Georges County, just a short distance from the bustling nation's capital, were offering up to a quarter a month for "turkey rental," a Baltimore writer urged that it be remembered that "several months intervene between the worm-killing and turkey-eating season."

If Maryland's importance in tobacco agriculture was declining, however, her role in manufacture and export was definitely on the upswing. Baltimore had become the Chesapeake's leading port during the 1770's and shortly thereafter was christened "Queen of the Chesapeake."



As tobacco cultivation moved west into Missouri, Ohio and other territories, Baltimore kept pace as a prime market and shipping area for western tobacco and other goods. Completion of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad guaranteed increased trade with the west and assured Baltimore's future as a major port.

Next came the manufacturers, and by the eve of the Civil War, the port city was exceeded only by Philadelphia and New York in cigar manufacture. It was this enterprise that helped transform it from a southern town to a northern city after the war.

#### **Tobacco Brings New Growth**

Post-war reconstruction spelled hard times for tobacco growers in the southern part of the state. Although Maryland was officially a border state, her tobacco economy was heavily dependent on slavery and the sudden loss of labor forced many plantations out of business.

Baltimore adapted more easily in the hectic postbellum years. It managed to capture 15 percent of the burgeoning granulated smoking tobacco market, almost as much as Durham, North Carolina, where Bull Durham tobacco gave granulated its start. Richmond could get only 3 percent.

By 1880 Baltimore was matching Richmond's cigarette output and could also boast of being the nation's sixth largest cigar making center. During most of the 1890's Maryland led the nation in smoking tobacco output, running the gamut from plug cuts to long cuts to granulated and "German smoking tobacco," a heavy, coarse product popular with the immigrants who were filling the nation's cities.

Free State tobacco products also included a large number of high grade blends, which often used expensive ingredients like smoke-cured Latakia from the Middle East and Louisiana's strong, dark perique.

Among the brand names for which Baltimore became known were Red Indian, Miners Extra Long Cut, Fashion Plug, Old English Curve Cut, Continental Cubes and the inappropriately named Seal of North Carolina.

#### **Last of the Hogsheads**

The introduction and immediate popularity of the American blended cigarette just before the first World War assured Maryland tobacco of continued success. Long noted for its slow, even burning, Maryland tobacco today comprises a small portion of each blended cigarette.

Until the 1930's, Maryland tobacco continued to be sold in hogsheads, although growers of other tobacco types had long



since switched to loose-leaf sales. The farmer sorted his cured leaf and packed it in hogsheads for shipment to Baltimore. There inspectors broke open the hogsheads and took six to eight samples of leaf, each weighing about a pound and a half. Each sample was tied into a bundle for delivery to prospective buyers. Buyers made sealed bids, the tobacco going to the highest bidder.

The loose-leaf warehouse system was begun in Maryland in 1939 by Crosby Wyche, a University of Maryland student. During the first year of operation at a warehouse in Hughesville, the loose-leaf auction attracted a quarter of the Maryland crop. By 1941, over half the crop was auctioned this way. The last hogshead auction closed down in the mid-70's.

Today, Maryland's tobacco economy continues to thrive. With its long history of excellent crops and sales, Maryland tobacco more than lives up to George Calvert's dream of some 350 years ago.





### **Tobacco's Continuing Story**

Tobacco is grown now in five Southern Maryland counties: Anne Arundel, which includes the capital, Annapolis; Prince Georges, Maryland's most populous county; St. Mary's, where it all began; and Charles and Calvert. Officially classified as type 32 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, this air-cured leaf is uniquely suited to the light, sandy soil and long growing season of the middle Chesapeake.

The growing cycle begins in the fall with the sterilization of the plant beds and ends some 18 months later when the crop is sold. During this time, about 250 man-hours are involved in the production of just one acre of leaf.

Seeds are planted in late February and early March. When the soil is warm enough—late May to early June—the seedlings are transplanted to the field. When blossoms first appear, the plant is topped by breaking or cutting off the flower and growing tip by hand. The remaining leaves can thus utilize the plant's nutrients to become larger, thicker and heavier. When lateral buds, or suckers, develop in the leaf axils, they are removed by hand or with chemicals.

As the plant ripens, it develops a yellowish color. At harvest time it is cut an inch or two above ground and speared on sticks to be left in the field a day or two. During that time, the stalk



wilts, losing water so it will not break during handling. Still on sticks, the stalks are taken into the barn and hung in tiers 9 to 12 inches apart to permit air circulation.

Four to six weeks later, the air-cured leaf is stripped from the stalk, tied in hands of about 30 leaves each or baled in preparation for the auction market.

#### **To Market, To Market**

Maryland's auction markets, all in Prince Georges and Charles counties, open for a six-week selling season in mid-April, closing about June first.

After sale to manufacturer or exporter, the raw tobacco goes into a warehouse for a two-year "sleep," during which natural processes age it in preparation for consumer use.

More than a third of the Maryland crop is exported. Switzerland purchases about half of that. Other major overseas purchasers are West Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg. The exported tobacco has become so important to Swiss cigarette manufacturers that in 1950 they created the Maryland Tobacco Improvement Foundation for research and dissemination of information on Maryland tobacco. West German manufacturers and other dealers who supply foreign buyers also support the foundation.

#### **The Supply Market**

Every state has a stake in the tobacco industry, what with the vast amounts of material, equipment and service involved between seed and sale. Maryland firms supply containers, flavoring and humectants and advertising and promotion services.

An extensive distribution network supplies finished products to retailers throughout the state. Free State consumers spend hundreds of millions of dollars annually over the counter and in vending purchases of tobacco products, pipes and other smokers' articles.

These purchases produce important government revenues. Tobacco is more heavily taxed than any consumer product, and Marylanders who enjoy tobacco have been contributing to federal coffers since the first excise in 1862. The state cigarette tax, enacted in 1958, has added more than a half a billion dollars to the treasury in Annapolis. Excises, plus the sales tax collected on tobacco products, account for one-third of the price of each cigarette pack. These growing revenue sources provide services for all Free State residents.

#### **Carrying on a Proud Tradition**

Although small in area, the Free State is uncommonly rich in history. Through the years tobacco has been a colorful part of that history. The hard work and enthusiasm of the Maryland tobacco farmers assure that the golden leaf will remain deeply rooted in Maryland's heritage in the years to come.



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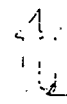
National Archives—pages 2 (1921),  
5 (1925), 11 (1927) and 14 (1927)

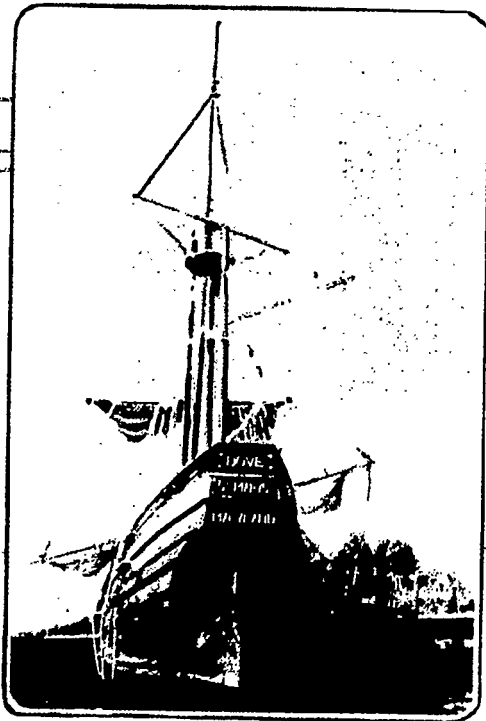
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