



Cold Frosty Morn at West River

We think romantically of charming Christmases in New England or Pennsylvania in the early days of our nation, but the truth is colder and harsher: Puritans were decidedly anti-Christmas, and even the Quakers treated the day as no different from any other. Instead, lets go back to the earliest voyage to the new Catholic Colony of Maryland, where (as we learn from settler Hester Dorsey Richardson), the Catholics prayed mightily as bad weather swept the good ship The Ark in the Advent season of 1633; things improved so much that *“From this time to our journey’s end, about three months, we had not one hour of bad weather, but so prosperous a navigation as our mariners never saw so sweet a passage.”* Christmas that year on the ship was a joyous one.

When there was an attempt in the new colony to abolish the first acts of religious toleration in the New World by a group of Puritans who also burned Catholic churches in Maryland, the great influx of Anglicans helped to mediate between faiths, and tolerance was reinstated. The Anglicans also loved Christmas: from the time St. Anne’s Parish was established in 1692, there are many stories of the true Colonial Christmas spirit. In the early 18th century Maryland Reverend George Herbert, wanted one and all to be sure *“that the church be swept, and kept clean without dust, or cobwebs, and at great festivals strewed, and stuck with boughs, and perfumed with incense.”* Christ Church, on the West River, dates from 1867. It’s built in the “Carpenter Gothic” style that A.J.Davis advocated in the era, and is the happy home of Maggie’s latest Christmas celebration.

It’s appropriate we have an Irish singer in Pat Egan: the bragging rights for the first Irish to succeed in the New World belong to this little state. The scion of the huge clan whose mark is across the founding of the nation, Charles Carroll, was an Irish Catholic. A well-educated student of law, he came to Maryland

from Ireland in 1688 to serve Lord Baltimore as Attorney General. Our Scottish performer, Sharon Knowles will also be most at home on these shores. From Ninian Beall’s Maryland settlement of Scots in the early 1670’s, to the subsequent Jacobites who were captured and sold as servants, (or in the case of so many, escaped to a Catholic-tolerant land after the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie), this has been a home to people who celebrated Christmas with a Celtic temperament. Maggie’s Italian heritage is here as well. After the first craftsmen came in the early 1630s, Catholic Maryland was deemed a haven for Italian refugees; a formal declaration of the Lords Proprietaries of Maryland in 1649 encouraged Italians to migrate to the colony. And, in deference to our wonderful fiddler Andrea Hoag, the settlements that made up New Sweden extended into Maryland for decades. The pieces we’ve chosen are completely in keeping with a place and time of many merging traditions - recent and far past, Old World and New, sacred and joyous, thoughtful and hopeful. Our thoughts and hopes are with you and for you in this season: and may we be dreamers for a moment, and also wish that the idea of religious tolerance that was proffered 365 years ago in St. Mary’s City may once again catch fire in the hearts of everyone. — Robert Aubry Davis

All tunes traditional except Tr. 9, *Christ Church Cathedral* by John Sheahan; Tr. 10, *Planting in Winter* ©Andrea Hoag, Wildflower Seed Music (BMI) Publisher: Wonders Crossroads Music (BMI)/Maggie’s Music Administration.

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