

Happy Birthday, Maryland 380 looks good on you

By Maria Wiering

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Native Marylanders don't know how good they have it.

The state celebrates Maryland Day on the anniversary of the landing of the Arc and the Dove, two ships of roughly 150 English settlers (including a couple Jesuits) March 25, 1634, the Feast of the Annunciation.

Marylanders commemorate our origins, from the optimism of these colonial men and women to the spirit their descendants showed in their rebellion for independence.

Growing up in Minnesota, I had nothing of the sort. The Land of 10,000 Lakes was granted statehood 84 years after the Declaration of Independence. It was never English; the part where I grew up once belonged to France, and was acquired by the U.S. through the Louisiana Purchase. After nine years as a U.S. territory, it joined the union May 11, 1858, in time to fight in the Civil War.

May 11 doesn't stick in my mind like March 25 does. Minnesotans don't make a thing out of it. It's certainly not a state employee holiday. They've got nothing like Defenders' Day, either. (Some may try to pull out the Kensington Runestone and make a case for a Viking day, but I'm not among them.)

And, to my jealousy, I've discovered one more thing Maryland has that Minnesota doesn't - its own Downton Abbey. It's not the real Downton Abbey, of course, or the Highclere Castle in Hampshire, England, used for filming. It is, however, an impressive estate named Kiplin Hall in North Yorkshire (where PBS' Downton Abbey period drama is set) where Maryland was born.



Kiplin Hall in North Yorkshire (Flickr, Nick Bramhall)

The estate was built around 1625 by George Calvert, first Lord of Baltimore and founder of Maryland. He built it as a hunting lodge, the kind of thing noblemen did in those days. It left the Calvert family in 1722 when Charles Calvert sold it to a cousin. In the centuries since, the house has undergone significant renovation, and little beyond its facade now ties it to the Calverts.

That, however, has not discouraged Marylanders, including students from the University of Maryland, from playing a role in its revival and preservation. Today the great manor house is a museum. According to a Maryland Public Television

documentary on the estate, it's revered stateside as the place where the idea took form in the mind of Lord Baltimore, a recent convert, for a colony dedicated to religious freedom for Catholics.

Maryland renewed its connection in the 1980s with teams of architecture students interested in its preservation, but the estate is also riding the wave of newfound interest from the success of Downton Abbey.

Perhaps this Anglophilia is inappropriate for Americans - and especially Marylanders - who fought so hard to wrest ourselves of Britain's grasp, but I'm as taken as anyone by the events of the post-Edwardian lives of Downton Abbey's upstairs and downstairs characters. Its fourth season came and went far too quickly this year, airing its finale last month.

Thankfully, they're filming season five.

I have a longtime fascination with old houses. Marylanders were building estates when Minnesota was still wilderness, and the only Europeans there were fur trappers and explorers such as the state's legendary Father Hennepin. I love driving into historic Annapolis and seeing 1649 as our capital's founding year.

Historic preservation and period dramas such as Downton Abbey inspire greater wonder at the lives of the real men and women - in Yorkshire, Maryland and elsewhere - who were affected by the events we only understand today through their artifacts and stories.

Here's to Maryland, my adopted state.

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