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Archives & Special Collections Waidner-Spahr Library Dickinson College P.O. Box 1773 Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

The Roman Catholics of chargeaud. There is a period in the history of our country to which every american must look with gratitude interest and delight: it is the period which relates to the first settlement of changland. It was when religious elis cord and badion were shaking England to her very centre, and Mrowing a round her a deep and mel on droly gloom- when the stronger and prerailing religious led was Exercising a could and merciless sway over the weather and more obscure that a little band og Naman Catholics 8m. igrated to charge and. They had now come to a vart wilderness where no civilized foot had trod, but it was a wilderness which grew not The deeds of offnession and persecu-Nion- one in which they meather an almosphere which dis eval and Jaction could not injected They gazer whom the preaceful waters of the Chesapeake and listened to the cheering melody of the forest bird, and may

choudless sky whose sun spread around them a double lustre and

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R. D. Sellman

Commencement Oration of Richard D. Sellman, Class of 1850
Transcribed by Michael M. Geduldig, November 2006
Edited by Don Sailer, September 2009

The Roman Catholics of Maryland

There is a period in the history of our country to which every American must look with gratitude interest and delight: - it is the period which relates to the first settlement of Maryland.

It was when religious discord and faction were shaking England to her very centre, and throwing around her a deep and melancholy gloom - when the stronger and prevailing religious sect was exercising a cruel and merciless sway over the weaker and more obscure that a little band of Roman Catholics emigrated to Maryland. They had now come to a vast wilderness where no civilized foot had trod, but it was a wilderness which grew not the seeds of oppression and persecution - one in which [they?] breathed a new and wholesome atmosphere – an atmosphere which the miasma of discord and faction could had not infected. They gazed upon the peaceful waters of the Chesapeake and listened to the cheering melody of the forest bird, - and they

were canopied by a clear and cloudless sky whose sun spread around them a double lustre and a double glory.

The form of government which they adopted was based upon the practical assertions of the sovereignty of the people. With their freedom of concience was the only basis on which could rest a perfect discipline, and the only means by which to establish and secure perfect harmony and concord throughout their midst. The evil effects proceeding from the spirit of intolerance then manifested in the New England Colonies were constantly presenting themselves before their eyes, and experience and wisdom had taught them that to prosper and grow rich with the blessings of God their country and their offices must be opened and free for all except the unworthy.

The intolerant spirit among the Puritans allowed none to come or remain within their borders but those who might of their own accord conform or whom they might force

to their doctrines of religious worship. The innocent and harmless Quaker worshiping looking up to his God in a manner he thought and believed to be right and his duty, had heaped upon him the burdens of oppression, was persecuted or forced to leave beyond their borders. He might strive for what his concience told him to be right - he might struggle to break asunder the shackles which bound him - but in vain his efforts: - he might plead for mercy, but the iron grasp power of Puritan prejudice and bigotry still crushed him to the earth. Here in America - but another name for freedom herself - the shrieks and groans or persecuted people! - the heart becomes deadened at the thought, and the soul shrinks into shame!

But there was nothing no feeling of this kind manifested in the Roman Catholic's province of Maryland. There was no breath there not breathed a selfish spirit. Under its this

constitution and laws the rocks and the hills and the forests were still as free as they had ever been. Although they were despised and looked

upon with contempt scorn by the Puritans yet they returned good for evil - love and good feeling for hatred and contempt. There was an affectionate and kind hand stretched out to greet and to welcome all who visited her its their soil - within their her its precincts was a home and asylum for both the oppressed and the free. There were in the Roman Catholics a gentleness, a kindness, a previty of soul which were alien to the Pilgrim fathers - a nobleness love, a nobleness a humanity in the one which were not in the other.

Thus at this period in the province of Maryland first shone the star of religious liberty. The cloud which had concealed it at length broke off and dissolved into air - the chain which had bound it down at length grew weak and powerless. It was the a mighty harbinger of everlasting glory. Civilization which had been dormant felt its stirring influence and although awakened from her lethargy began to renew her energies and to enliven and rejoice mankind. Systems which had held the world in bondage, van-

ished - the spirit of Religious intolerance lay crushed within its grasp. Happy ever for America, happy ever for the world! Amidst the deep, dark gloom which then overhung humanity it dates had its birth - to the wisdom and foresight of the Roman Catholic settlers of Maryland it owes its being.

The Roman Catholics settlers of Maryland! - There is a something in that word which every Marylander loves to recall and which every American must love to venerate. It is indelibly impressed upon our hearts - it will live to the latest posterity. Although we do not agree with them in their precepts of Religion yet we love and admire them for their many virtues and for their unswerving spirit of Religious Toleration. It is not the nobleness of character they manifested which makes them dear to our hearts, it is for their noble deeds that we shall never forget them. And should there ever be any hand so vile as to endeavour to degrade them and to blot out the glory their works have

achieved: - should any so base to attempt to exalt the character of the Puritans by debasing that of theirs, their "virtues will plead like Angels - trumpet-tongued" against the sectarianism of the Pilgrim Fathers.