

INTRODUCTION

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This volume of the *Archives of Maryland* continues *The Journal and Correspondence of the State Council of Maryland* published in 1970 under the editorship of Dr. Aubrey C. Land. It follows, as will the subsequent volumes, the plans of the Publication Committee to publish first the manuscript Journals of the State Council to the date 1821, then the Letter Books of the Council, and finally the Letters Received by the Governor and the Council. The great bulk of these materials is deposited in the Hall of Records, Annapolis. (*Arch.*, LXXI, No. 9, pp. xiii-xv). The editors envision two principal goals: first, the logical publication of the materials to facilitate their use and, second, the rendering of attention to the dire need for published primary sources dating generally from the early national era through the Jacksonian period. This era is poorly represented by published documents in comparison with those of the colonial period and those of early revolutionary times. Especially is this true of material emanating from the states.

The manuscripts printed here witness the history of the state under the new national government. It is the moment of triumph of the antifederalists following their frustration in the ratifying convention, when they moved the legislature to send to the Congress suggestions for constitutional amendments, many of which were to be incorporated in the Bill of Rights. It was a decade in which political parties took on more positive structures than previously as they were influenced by the events and developments of Hamiltonian finance, the Jay Treaty, the Whiskey Rebellion, the Sedition Act and, finally, the election of Thomas Jefferson to the Presidency. In state politics it was a time of conservative federalist domination, but also a time of resurgence of the democratic ideals born out of the earlier phases of the Revolution. Renewed agitation for universal manhood suffrage begins in 1792; a minority of Maryland citizens—many of the first rank of society and belonging to either political party—bring up the anomaly of slavery and the principles of the Revolution; and the struggle for mass education through public support, which began directly after the war, revives during the decade.

The user of this volume, and of subsequent ones, may find that such developments in national and state history are more shadowed than substantiated. Much of what is contained here was routine, for the Council rarely took up matters of a controversial nature. This does not render the work useless, for by examining this material deeply one finds these documents sometimes modifying or buttressing, perhaps even changing generally accepted historical conclusions. For example, they offer insights into the conditions of the poor. Under the Constitution of 1776 the Council accepted petitions from the courts and rendered decisions thereon and the volume is filled with descriptions of the plight of many of the incriminated poor through their appeals for relief. Economic difficulties continued to beset the citizens of the state. The new federalist government had not yet solved the depression of the "Critical Period," as indicated by such pleas as a stay of the payment of taxes from "sundry Inhabitants of Harford County" and by descriptions of the failures of many mercantile houses.

Other entries in the Council's Journals shed further light on Maryland's Confiscation Act of 1780 under which men bought the seized properties of British subjects, and then in their impecunious years of the Confederation found that they could not pay for what they had acquired. Furthermore, the Council was empowered by statute and resolves of the General Assembly to adjust or settle debts held by the state against individuals. With the assumption