

FOREWORD

In the past, when an edition of the *Maryland Manual* came out, you held it in your hand, gauged its weight, eyed its cover, and leafed through pages to glean what was new. This edition, however, is different. The *Maryland Manual, 1996-1997* is the first to be issued in electronic as well as paper formats. Through the World Wide Web of the Internet, this *Manual* links electronically to Maryland's public schools and libraries, to her students and citizens. On-line access also is afforded Maryland government officials through the state's fiber optic intranet.

The new electronic medium allows anyone interested to draw upon the government information services of the Maryland State Archives. Since these are continuously updated, an electronic *Manual* enables citizens to keep informed about government directly from an excellent source. And, indeed, we cannot maintain a democracy without staying informed, not only about the common problems we face, but also about the government we have created.

In Maryland, government centers in Annapolis, the state capital. Its heart is the State House, an eighteenth-century structure where our legislature has met regularly since 1780. In the State House is the Old Senate Chamber in which George Washington resigned his commission as commander in chief of the Continental Army in 1783, and where the Continental Congress ratified the Treaty of Paris in 1784 ending the American Revolutionary War.

Important to our past, the State House continues as the vital center of both the executive and legislative branches of Maryland government. Here, the state Senate and House of Delegates convene each January. Here, as well, throughout the year the Governor, his staff, and the leadership of the General Assembly work. During legislative sessions, the Department of Legislative Reference runs the information desk in the building's basement, close to the offices of the press.

From land or water, the State House stands visible by the eminence of its octagonal dome, which graces the cover of this *Maryland Manual*. It was from the State House dome that Thomas Jefferson and James Madison gazed over the city of Annapolis in 1790. And, it was the State House dome that Frederick Douglass watched, on route to Baltimore, from a boat on Chesapeake Bay in 1826.

For over two centuries a "Franklin" lightning rod, constructed and grounded to Benjamin Franklin's specifications, has served as the State House spire and more recently as its flagpole. By 1788, workmen had carved Eastern Shore cypress into the shape of a large acorn which has steadied the rod for all these years. Despite alterations in the State House over time, recent examinations of the dome and acorn reveal that nearly all material in the acorn, its pedestal, and the lightning rod date from the eighteenth century. They are protected in part by lead sheathing added and proudly signed by craftsmen in 1837.

The State House dome, designed and built by Annapolis architect Joseph Clark between 1785 and 1797, requires close attention and maintenance as does the government it shelters. For Maryland, the State House dome symbolizes the continuity of process that democracy embodies. As the largest wooden structure of its kind in North America, it stands as a metaphor for the efforts to bind the new nation together by a freshly drafted and quickly amended Constitution. The dome was constructed to last at the same time that, beneath it, Maryland ratified the work of the Philadelphia convention and proposed a "bill of rights," most elements of which would be adopted. Noah Webster, who lectured on the American language in the State House while the dome was under construction, defines a keystone as the piece that holds other pieces in place. It is an apt description of the cypress acorn that surmounts the State House dome, evoking the expectation that government will be "sound as an acorn," without flaw, and free from imperfection.

The scientific innovation of Franklin's lightning rod, which pierces the acorn, has protected the present dome and the seat of Maryland government for over two hundred years. Technological innovations of the present similarly may afford democratic government a way into the future. To the extent that we use electronic technology as a resource for student learning and for citizen participation in government, we are constructing what we believe is a 21st century version of our own lightning rod, designed to attract attention to the structure of state government and to help protect the democratic process that forms the basis of enlightened self-rule. May our efforts in making the *Manual* electronically accessible be as visible and as lasting as the architectural and engineering triumph built by the architect Joseph Clark over two hundred years ago.

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