

Fragment From An Old Story

By JOHN W. OWENS

The death of William Milnes Maloy brings to mind numerous incidents in the public affairs of Maryland during the last generation. One of them may be worth reviewing because of the personalities who had part in it and because it is an illustration of the strange sequences through which democracy may do its best work.

Thirty-five years ago there was a session of the Legislature which moved at unusually high pressure. The year of 1914 was the flood-tide mark of the old Progressive movement. Some four months after the session was adjourned the shot was fired at Sarajevo which opened a new and terrible volume in the history of humanity and among the multitude of things written differently was the story of internal politics in the United States. But in the Spring of 1914 people in the United States were following Woodrow Wilson into a new era of progress and Maryland had moved out of conservatism to join the movement. Such bitterly contested measures (of that simple day) as workmen's compensation finally triumphed over the opposition of business and of lawyers who quoted the constitution.

Not surprisingly, the session was expensive (for that simple day). Appropriations originated in the Legislature and usually were carried to completion in logrolling so intricate that only experts could follow it. Part of the logrolling was between minority city members and majority county members. One afternoon, the veteran Peter J. Campbell, dean of the city's delegation, turned privately to Mr. Maloy, a youthful Senator, and exclaimed: "Willie, you are the most expensive man Baltimore ever sent to Annapolis!" To which Mr. Maloy replied cheerfully: "Yes, but look how these countrymen are voting on the city's bills!"

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Passing over the fact that the logrolling session resulted in a deficit of \$1,500,000, which shocked all Maryland people (for it was a simple day), and passing over the fact that Mr. Maloy was a valuable member of the Goodnow Commission which next year framed the State's budget system, we may get on with the story.

One of the measures which appeared in the flood tide of Progressivism was a bill to provide a survey of public schools in the counties. In the literacy rating of 48 states, Maryland stood low. The principal cause of its low standing was believed to be the backwardness of many of the counties. Not much attention was paid at first to the survey bill. Talk about conditions in the county schools was old talk. But one day some of the people who urged the measure went to see Mr. Maloy. Not much talk was necessary. Mr. Maloy was a product of public schools and a zealot for education of the masses. He stopped thinking of the survey bill as one of the things which always turn up and put it on his list. Of course, there usually is no way of telling exactly the influence which tips the scales in legislation. But Maloy—gayly rolling logs as the rule of the game—soon had the survey bill in the center of the swirling tangle. After a while, the bill was passed, with an appropriation of about \$5,000, and observers wondered how many thousand of dollars in other appropriations Maloy had traded for the \$5,000 to survey county schools.

The story moved into another phase. Governor Goldsborough named Mr. B. Howell Griswold, Jr., to head a commission to conduct the survey. But, simple as was the day, \$5,000 was but a fraction more than \$200 per county. Surveying a county's schools for \$200 would take some doing. Mr. Griswold put on his hat and went to New York. He returned with an undertaking by the General Education Board to conduct the survey and to pay the cost. Two years later the survey was complete and a bill to institute modern education was on paper. After pulling and hauling, it was law. But not much was done. The war was coming closer. In 1920, however, Governor Ritchie was new in office. He decided he would have action. He asked Mr. Van Lear Black to become a member of the Board of Education. Mr. Black was mildly astonished. In all the variety of his work, he had never been anywhere near county schools and their problems. But the Governor explained why he was needed. And one day Albert S. Cook, builder of Baltimore county's notable system, was superintendent of education and the new program was in motion—with the minimum of luss.

Twenty-five years after the logrolling at Annapolis to procure \$5,000 with which to survey the county schools, the rate of illiteracy in Maryland was estimated at 2.8 per cent. When the survey was made, Maryland stood where it had long stood—at the top of the poor Southern states. Today and for several years past it ranks among the most advanced states.