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Sun Article

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re construction of Hall of Records

Evening Sun 3/24/1931

Protecting The Archives

With the passage of the Memorial Hall of Records bill by the State Senate yesterday prospects are bright for the construction of a \$200,000 fireproof building to house the priceless collection of colonial and State documents which Maryland possesses. Although final passage must await the passing of the budget bill, no one anticipates any further obstacle in the way of the measure.

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It is, in fact, impossible to see how any serious objection could be raised against the bill. Historians throughout the country have testified to the excellence and completeness of the Maryland records which through good fortune have thus far survived disasters that have been visited upon the archives of other States. The term "good fortune" is used advisedly, as the State has waited all too long to house the collection in a structure that would remove them from fire hazards. It is pleasant to discover that the present Legislature is aware of its responsibility in this connection and that the necessary appropriation is now reasonably sure of passage at this session.

Hall of Records

March 24/31

TO PRESERVE THE PAST

Many years of effort for the preservation and proper utilization of the invaluable records of Maryland, as palatinate, royal colony and sovereign state, are at last rewarded through provision toward that end in the budget which Governor Ritchie sent down to the Legislature Monday.

One of the most important items in the list is the \$200,000 which he proposes be set aside for construction of a Hall of Records at Annapolis, to which can be transferred the papers already in the State's custody and those which antiquarians have long wished to present to the State once it should have a place for their secure and advantageous housing. The most famous of these privately owned documents is no doubt the Washington letter to the Congress at Annapolis at the end of the Revolution. Long ago it vanished from the archives, reappeared two years ago in a London auction, was purchased by a Maryland syndicate and ever since has rested in a Baltimore bank vault because the State had no suitable place for it. Once the new hall is finished it will go there, and beyond doubt scores and hundreds of treasured documents now in private collections will follow it.

Thus is rewarded the persistence with which, for example, Chief Judge Carroll T. Bond has harbored the papers lodged in the Court of Appeals vaults, refusing to permit them to be opened lest, once opened, the parchment could not be refolded without cracking. The proposed new building will be so arranged that all such papers will lie flat and remain uninjured. Naturally it will be fireproof and dustproof and, presumably, thiefproof, which the State's experience has shown to be not the least important. But, beyond that, it will not be a mere mausoleum for safekeeping, rather a repository whose contents can be studied by the expert and thus fulfill the prime purpose of all antiquities, to guide later generations back to past virtues and to keep them clear of past blunders.

It is not commonly known that in the Court of Appeals vaults, in the Land Office and in the Historical Society archives are records which in many respects are the most complete in America, recording as do those of no other State the transition from Colonial days to our present institutions. New England fury and Virginia passion destroyed much that is irreplaceable; easy-going Maryland preserved it, and students reap great benefit therefrom and will reap more once the new Hall is erected and operating. As to whether \$200,000 is enough, time will tell. Certainly it is enough to start with, and if the Board of Public Works wisely selects in Annapolis a site which will permit additions and a design which will allow them, more can be spent as needed.

In the same message the Governor recommends \$35,000 for expenditure by the Maryland Tercentenary Commission, which, it will be remembered, urged both the Hall of Records and a few monuments to mark the events of 1633-4, including one at Cowes, England, from which the Ark and the Dove sailed; one at St. Clements Island, where they first touched, and a more impressive one at St. Mary's City, on the spot where the colony had its real beginnings; the land or its use has already been donated in all three cases. There is a natural interest in how the commission proposes to spend the fund, not a large one, yet perhaps enough for what the State itself should do, leaving to patriotic and historical societies expenditures which conceivably they will be glad to make.

Shall of Records