

REMARKS ON THE HISTORY OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FREDERICK

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Our beloved State of Maryland has had, in all, three capitals, and in each one of these three our legislative body has performed acts that have affected the whole nation—St. Mary's City, Annapolis and Frederick. It is impossible to follow the broad course of American history from its beginnings to the present without mentioning those Maryland cities for their contributions, made by acts of our General Assembly, to the American system, which is now recognized to be the hoped-for system of the whole free world.

We are a little State surrounded by large neighbors, yet I think our name is written consistently through the long drama of our nation's development. And the acts of our General Assembly down through the years have done much of the writing, not, however, with flamboyance—never ostentatiously. Our Assembly instead has followed a notably discreet and matter-of-fact pattern throughout its history. It has concerned itself always with three duties. First, it has conducted the business of the State. Second, it has contributed, like a conscientious member of a proud family, to the welfare of the whole nation, when such contributions were needed. And third, it has firmly and courageously defended its own rights and prerogatives.

In April of 1861 when it came to Frederick, the General Assembly was 225 years old. The federal Congress, on the other hand, had existed only 73 years. The State's experience of self-government was older than the nation's. I do not propose to describe the events which took place here in your historic city. We saw this afternoon those events played out dramatically with talent and taste—and I know we shall always remember them. Let us instead look quickly at some of the events preceding—high points along the road that led to the momentous Frederick session.

In the first capital of Maryland, In St. Mary's City, our General Assembly began its record by requiring the colonial proprietor to concede it the right to initiate legislation. Thus early it laid down a most American principle—that, if it were to be a representative body, it would be a representative body. That was in 1635. Fourteen years later, in 1649, it protected by law the practice of religious toleration which had been in effect in Maryland since the founding. As to how significant this act was, I leave to you. There is simply no measurement of it.