

and Gov. Robert Bowie, delegating to "the President of the board [i.e., the governor] to arrange with Miss Walton as to her compensation, etc."¹⁹ In 1910 Walton was employed to paint Francis Scott Key for \$300.²⁰

The actual management of state property in those halcyon years was not a major problem largely because, aside from the Fishery Force vessels, discussed below, there was little property to manage. A report received by the board in December 1904 showed that the state owned but twenty-two pieces of real estate: the State House, the governor's mansion, the governor's stables, five "homes" or asylums, two correctional institutions, two normal schools (Towson and Frostburg), the Maryland Agricultural College (today the University of Maryland), the Fifth Regiment Armory, five tobacco warehouses, one hospital, one lighthouse, and one other armory. The title report on these properties, prepared by Baltimore attorney Frank V. Rhodes, noted that "there is nothing in the records that shows that the State has a record title to the ground on which the State House stands except a plat." Rhodes had no doubt that the colony possessed good title when it moved the capital from St. Mary's City; he simply could find no records to prove it.²¹

One aspect of property management that assumed increased importance was insuring some of the public buildings, a responsibility also committed to the board. Each year, commencing at the latest in 1892, the board solicited bids and awarded insurance contracts on the tobacco warehouses, the governor's mansion and stables, the normal school, and, as new facilities were built or acquired, those as well.²² It does not appear that the State House itself was ever insured.

The board's responsibilities for the acquisition and care of public property soon extended beyond public buildings. In June 1878 it approved construction of a telegraph line from the House of Correction at Jessup to police headquarters and the Maryland Penitentiary in Baltimore City, as well as a lease (at \$200 a year) of the equipment necessary to make it functional. By 1882 the board had provided a telephone line from the House of Correction to City Hall, but then decided to get out of the communications business. On 25 May 1882 the board accepted a proposal from the Maryland Telephone Company that it take over the line and be allowed to place other subscribers on it, provided there be no charge to the state for the telephone instruments.²³

What first thrust the board into the vortex of public controversy was the dispute between Maryland and Virginia watermen over the oyster beds lying in Maryland's part of the Chesapeake Bay. As early as 1865 the General Assembly had enacted legislation restricting the catching of oysters in state waters, but, as the oyster trade grew more profitable, poaching and "depredation" became increasingly common. This was one of the most serious and persistent issues before the legislature, and in nearly every session for a decade or more the General Assembly passed legislation of one type or another relating to it.²⁴

Early on, in 1865, Governor Bradford told the legislature that draconian measures—the seizure of violators' boats, criminal sanctions—were proving ineffective. He suggested, as an alternative, a modest tax on oysters taken from state waters so that the state could at least realize some revenue from the bay, its most precious natural

19. BPW Minutes, 28 June 1900, vol. 1883-1905, p. 270; 19 April 1906, vol. 1 (1904-12), p. 295.

20. Acts of 1910, ch. 547; BPW Minutes, 6 June 1910, 1:449.

21. BPW Minutes, 20 December 1904, vol. 1883-1905, pp. 391-92.

22. Ibid., 2 March, 7 September 1892, 3 May, 12 December 1894, 10 April 1895, pp. 170, 184, 210, 221, 224.

23. Ibid., 3 June 1878, 25 May 1882, vol. 1851-83, pp. 311-12, 382.

24. Acts of 1865, ch. 181. See also Acts of 1867, ch. 184; 1868, ch. 406; 1870, ch. 364; 1872, ch. 167; 1874, ch. 181.