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## *Thomas Reading and the Issues of his Press*

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to print all publick Matters as Speeches, Answers, Votes & Proclamations &c as your Honours please to direct.

And further whereas there hath been a former Ordinance of this House to Mr. W. Bladen and others that had printing Presses in the Province obliging all Clerks, Commissarys, Sheriffs, and other Officers to make use of printed Blanks [that ordinance] may be renewed and settled on your Petitioner.

And that there is a small House upon Wapping Wharf built by the Public, but at present of no use, therefore prays that the same be granted him . . .”<sup>1</sup>

A discussion took place on the reading of this petition from the printer as to “what encouragement might be sufficient to give him for his expeditious Printing the Body of the Laws of this Province,” and it was determined finally to allow the petitioner twenty shillings a copy from each county for the proposed body of laws, and to give him permission to offer copies for sale at a rate not to exceed twelve shillings each. Furthermore, he was to be allowed “for what other Acts shall be passed in any future Assemblies . . . the same in Proportion to the present Body of the Laws.”<sup>2</sup> Reading agreed to these terms at the time, but a few days later he returned and asked a more generous allowance for the body of laws, receiving in response to his appeal an additional ten shillings from each county and from the “country.”<sup>3</sup> The delegates also proposed to him an annual rental of twelve pence, payable each Lady Day, for the unused house on Wapping Wharf, and made a further agreement with him whereby he was to copy the body of laws for the press for the sum of two thousand pounds of tobacco.<sup>4</sup>

The necessity for a new edition of the laws had arisen at this time because in the year 1703 Queen Anne had ordered that “all Laws now in force be revised and considered” for the reason that the entire Provincial code depended upon the single “ascertaining act” of the year 1699.<sup>5</sup> At various times since the confirming act of 1700 the Province had felt some uneasiness as to the validity of its statutes, and in the year 1701 the Governor had asked committees of the two Houses to meet together for the purpose of considering the question of revision. The conferees had gone carefully into the history of the existing body, and after consideration had declared that it would be “soone enough to alter the present Estabmt when his Matys dis-

<sup>1</sup> L. H. J., April 8, 1706, *Archives of Maryland*, 26: 576-577.

<sup>2</sup> L. H. J., April 8, 1706, *Archives of Maryland*, 26: 577.

<sup>3</sup> L. H. J., April 17, 1706, *Archives of Maryland*, 26: 605. See also p. 585, where Mr. Thomas Bordley was named “to examine & correct the Press in Printing the Laws,” and allowed 3,000 lbs. of tobacco for the service.

<sup>4</sup> L. H. J., April 8, 1706, *Archives of Maryland*, 26: 577.

<sup>5</sup> L. H. J., April 27, 1704, *Archives of Maryland*, 24: 371. The instructions of the Board of Trade appended to this entry refer to the ascertaining act of 1699, but L. H. J., May 9, 1701, shows clearly that the Province was using the code adopted by the confirming act of May 1700. In all essentials the two were the same, save for the difference remarked on in the preceding chapter.