

The first article of the constitution relates to the elective franchise. Some salutary reforms were made in this with the view of obtaining the purity of the ballot-box. Illegal voting had been a great source of complaint from both political parties. The right of suffrage required a residence of twelve months in the State, and six in the city or county. The act of Congress requiring members of that body to be elected by single districts throughout the United States, made it necessary to divide the State into congressional districts. There was no fixed duration of residence required in passing from one district to another within the same county or city. This gave facility to the perpetration of frauds on the elective franchise under the system, known as "colonizing voters."

The first attempt to have a registration of voters was made in 1837. In that year a law was passed to provide for the registration of the voters in Baltimore City. This law was considered by many to be unconstitutional, because it imposed duties upon the citizens of Baltimore City, which were not common to other citizens of the State. An unsuccessful attempt was made in the convention of 1850 to provide for a general registration law in the State. It was not until 1865 that Maryland had such a law.¹⁸

The constitution of 1851 required six months' residence in the district, and twelve in the State, in order to exercise the right of suffrage. The right to vote was retained in one district, until the same right was acquired in another. The constitution also provided that a person guilty of receiving or giving bribes for the purpose of procuring votes, should be forever disqualified to hold any office of profit or trust, or to vote at any election thereafter. The pardoning power of the governor did not extend to this offense. All officers before entering upon their duties were obliged to take an oath that they had not been guilty of bribery or fraud in any way.¹⁹

¹⁸ Steiner's *Citizenship and Suffrage in Md.*, p. 47.

¹⁹ Art. i, sec. 4.