

GENEALOGICAL AND MEMORIAL
ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF THE
STATE OF MARYLAND

A Record of the Achievements of Her People in the Making
of a Commonwealth and the Founding of a Nation

Under the Editorial Supervision of

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SEVERN TEACKLE WALLIS

SEVERN TEACKLE WALLIS was born in Baltimore, September 8, 1916, and was the second son of Philip and Elizabeth Custis Teackle Wallis. His mother was the daughter of Severn Teackle, of Talbot county, Maryland. Philip Wallis, the father of Severn Teackle, was the only child of Samuel Wallis, of Kent county, who settled there in the eighteenth century.

Severn Teackle Wallis received a collegiate education at St. Mary's College, which, in 1841, conferred upon him the degree of LL.D. He graduated in 1832 with the degree of A.B., at the age of sixteen, and obtained his M.A. degree two years later. He commenced his legal studies with William Wirt and finished them with John Glenn, in 1837. Mr. Wallis was graduated in the law at nineteen, and permitted to practise it, though he could not formally enter the bar until he reached his majority.

His knowledge of Spanish obtained for him, in 1843, membership in the Royal Academy of History of Madrid. In 1846 he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries of Copenhagen. In 1847 he made a trip to Spain and published "Glimpses of Spain; or, Notes of an Unfinished Tour." In 1849 he paid a second visit to Spain, holding a commission from the Secretary of the Interior "to report upon the titles of public lands in Florida as affected by Spanish grants during the pendency of negotiations with this country in 1819." He wrote on his return: "Spain: Her Institutions, Politics and Public Men." He made visits to Europe in 1856 and 1884.

The friend and cotemporary of Reverdy Johnson and John Nelson, he had early reached the very forefront of the profession of his State and Nation. He was frequently before

the Court of Appeals of Maryland and the Supreme Court of the United States. His powers of description, his biting wit and profound learning, coupled with his undaunted courage, invested even the most unimportant questions of law that he argued with the most entertaining and agreeable attire of forensic and oratorical drapery.

In politics Mr. Wallis was a patriot before he was a partisan, and whenever he espoused a cause, he did it with all the ardor of a brave and ardent nature. His first inquiry was, "Was it right?" That settled, all other questions were relegated to the rear while he unsheathed his keen and spotless blade of war. Unfortunate was the opponent who crossed swords with him: he was a swordsman as strong to defend as he was powerful in attack.

Mr. Wallis entered politics as a Whig, but when the prospective Know-Nothing clan sprang from the ashes of the party of Clay and Webster, Mr. Wallis went boldly into the ranks of his old Democratic antagonists. In 1857 he was offered by President Buchanan the position of United States District Attorney, but declined it. In 1858 he wrote the reform address, which movement led to the election of a Democratic Legislature and the reforms of 1860, when the police force of Baltimore was placed under the State control and a reform city government established. He supported these measures before the Court of Appeals, which determined their legality.

In 1861 Mr. Wallis was one of that large body of influential Marylanders who hoped and acted to prevent the Civil War. After the riot of the 19th of April, Mr. Wallis was one of a committee to visit President Lincoln to try to stop the passage of troops through Baltimore. When the special election for members of the Legislature took place in the spring of 1861, Mr. Wallis was elected a member from Balti-

more city and was made the chairman of the Committee on Federal Relations. He reported on order that "the House of Delegates had no power to pass an ordinance of secession." In May he reported an order for commissioners to visit the President to secure the opening of communications with the North. He also further reported that it was "inexpedient to call a convention to consider secession." This order that the House adopted, should have settled with the Government, for the time at least, the intentions of the House; but not so. On the night of September 12th Mr. Wallis was arrested by the order of General John A. Dix, United States Army. Soon afterward other members of the Legislature were seized. While the Legislature of Maryland had taken no steps to inaugurate secession, it had tried, against the overwhelming odds of the Government, to vindicate the rights of the State. Mr. Wallis, as the chairman of the Committee on Federal Relations, was the chief exponent of the State's views and the champion of its privileges. He wrote the report of the Committee on Federal Relations, a most trenchant and convincing arraignment of the administration for its usurpations of power. The feeling against this report was manifested by the Federal soldiers burning thirty thousand copies of it at Frederick that the State had ordered to be printed. Conveyed to Fortress Monroe, transferred to Fort Lafayette, and thence to Fort Warren, Mr. Wallis remained a prisoner until 1862, resolutely refusing to take any and all oaths offered him as a precedent qualification for his liberty. At last the prison doors opened without conditions, and Mr. Wallis was again a free man.

Though debilitated by his long imprisonment, Mr. Wallis returned to the profession he graced with ardor and success, and the best efforts with his pen and his most important labors for political reform in the State were made at this

period and continued until his death. In passing from the stormy days of the Civil War, it is curious to note that Mr. Wallis, like a famous prisoner of old, never had any accusation laid against him why he was arrested, and he and the other members of the Legislature never knew, beyond suspicion, why they had been incarcerated in military prisons.

Mr. Wallis was impelled to a public life by a high sense of duty to the young men—the obligation of setting them an example of, and encouraging them to show, independence in political action. He accepted the presidency of the Civil Service Reform and the Reform League, which positions he relinquished only at his death. He was the candidate, in 1875, of the Independent and Republican parties for Attorney-General. That he was elected was no question. The men who robbed the people of their choice, years afterward, confessed their crime; but, as in Mr. Tilden's case, another man than the one who had been elected took the office of Attorney-General. His celebrated letters in that campaign are amongst the choicest of the choice polemics of Maryland's famous political campaigns, both of Colonial and Republican periods. Mr. Wallis's addresses number amongst them:

Valedictory before the School of Medicine, 1868.

Address upon George Peabody.

Address to the Law Class of the University of Maryland.

Address upon the unveiling of the statue of Robert Brooke Taney, 1872.

Address on the Lee Memorial Association, 1875.

The address of Mr. Wallis on George Peabody was repeated by request of the Legislature before that body in 1870. In 1844, he delivered a lecture "On the Philosophy of History and Some of Its Popular Errors." Amongst his poems are: "Blessed Hand," "The Last of the Hours," "Truth and Reason," "The Spectre of Colalto," "In Fort Warren," "Henon," "God's Acre," and "Midnight."

Mr. Wallis was a lover of home, books and friends. A Wallis Memorial Association, in 1896, published a memorial edition of his works. His State included him in the group of her distinguished sons of the legal profession, which is to be chiseled in the frieze of the Supreme Court Room of the new Court House in Baltimore. Mr. Wallis did not marry. He died April 11, 1894.