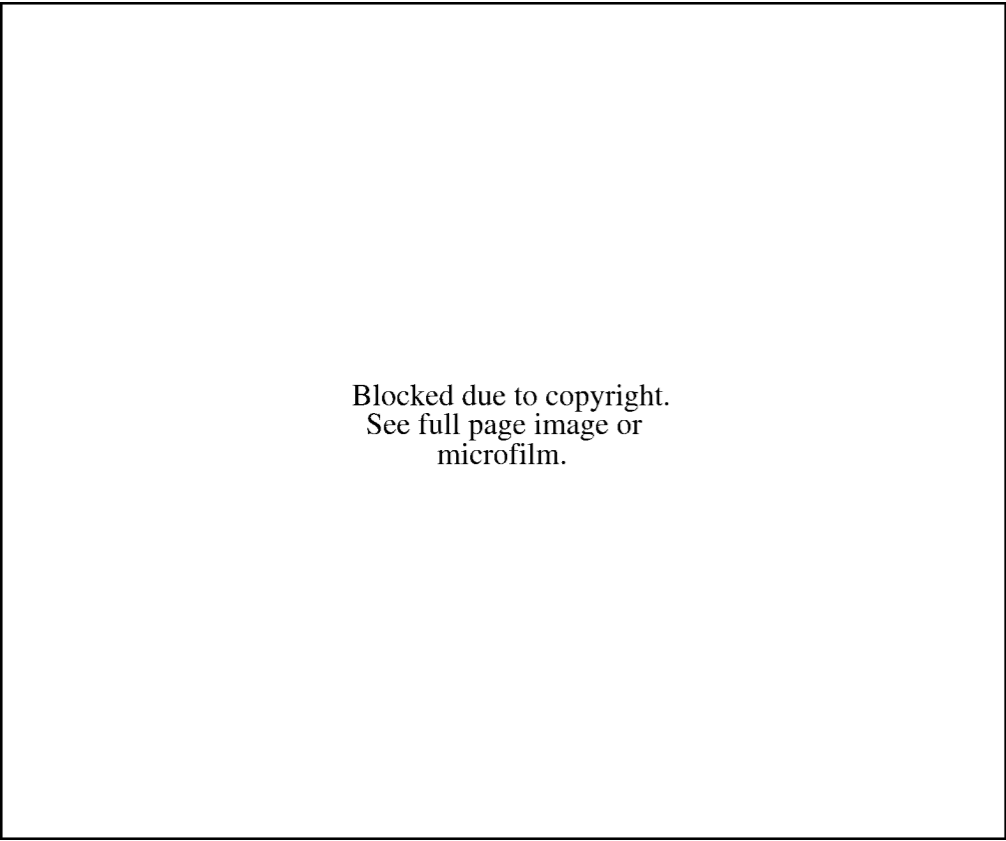


Maryland May Restore First Capital

By Richard Homan Washington Post Staff Writer

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By Richard Homan
Washington Post Staff Writer

ST MARYS CITY, Md. — More than 300 years ago the State of Maryland built a city here near the mouth of the Potomac River. Now they want to do it again.

Of the 60 buildings built here in the 1600s, including Maryland's first State House, governor's palace and church, only two houses remain.

In 1934, the 300th anniversary of the settling of Maryland, a replica of the first State House was built, but foundations of most of the major buildings have lain neglected under a shallow covering of dirt.

Now a special commission created by the last General Assembly is examining the possibility of reconstructing the city in the manner of Virginia's Williamsburg.

The commission, headed by Del. Louise Gore (R-Mont.), has met with area residents and landowners, historians and architects and will meet with other interested persons before preparing its recommendations for action by the next General Assembly.

Miss Gore is already enthusiastic about the possibility of restoration.

'Part of the Future'

"The Governor and the General Assembly are very friendly to the idea," she said last week. "We must take the first couple of steps to establish that there is going to be restoration. I don't know how long it will take, but it is part of the future of Maryland."

Backers of the idea have only hazy ideas of what it might cost. A frequently mentioned figure is \$50 million.

But they point out that the State is generous with funds for Southern Maryland, which is losing its slot machine industry within three years; that the program would be spread over many years and that, when completed, it could be self-sustaining.

Now there is no town at St. Marys City.

There is St. Marys College, soon to be expanded to a four-year school, the State House replica, a church and graveyard built on the site of the original state house, and farm land and homes.

Capital Until 1694

From 1634 until 1694 the town was Maryland's capital.

Colonists came to the New World on the Ark and the only hazy ideas of what it might cost. A frequently mentioned figure is \$50 million.

build a city on the beautiful bluff looking down on St. Marys Bay, which opens into the Potomac River.

The Maryland General Assembly met several places here before the State House was constructed in 1676. At one of these meetings it enacted the first legislation in

America guaranteeing religious freedom to all citizens.

But in 1694 the capital was moved to Annapolis, which was more centrally located, and in 1708 even the county seat was taken away.

The town, scattered over a wide area, never filled in and

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Staff Photos by Bob Burchette

The Maryland General Assembly's commission strolls on the lawn of the State

House at St. Marys City. It is a replica of one of original buildings erected there.

Historic St. Marys Eyes 'Williamsburg' Future

remained a rural residential area.

"It was supposed to grow up like London." Dr. H. Chandlee Forman, a Maryland historian, said. "Planners in England thought this was a good place for a big city, so they spread out the first houses."

At a meeting of the Legislative Commission last week, Dr. Forman listed 17 major colonial structures that he said could be reconstructed on their original sites in the center of the town.

All would be within a two-mile radius, he said, and most could easily be reached by foot.

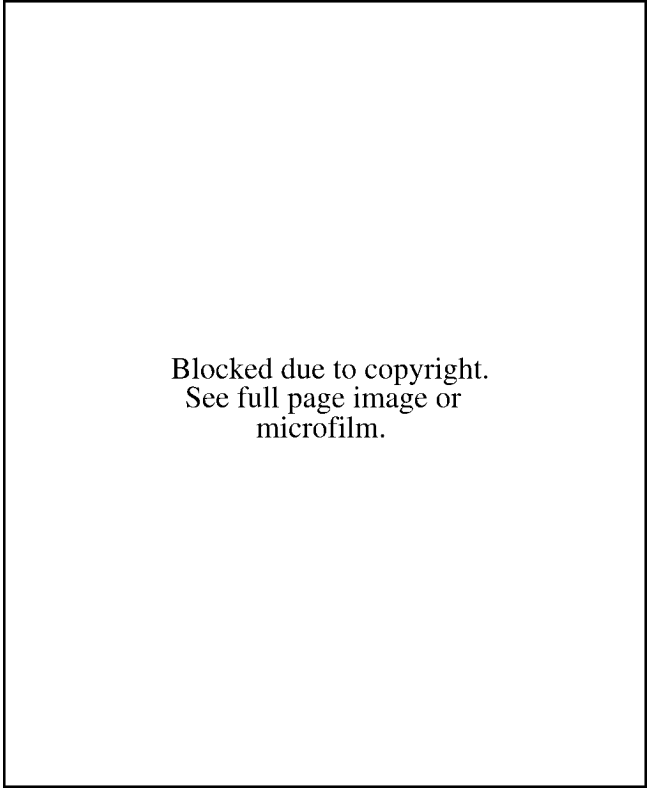
The structures included the governor's palace and the imposing Palace of St. John's, both built in the 1630s, the mayor's and secretary of state's homes, the first Roman Catholic church in America built by Englishmen, and homes of Leonard Calvert, Maryland's first governor, and Margaret Brent, a colonial suffragette.

Problems Explored

Also reconstructed could be Governor's Field, a subdivision of 44 one-acre lots, on which many of the town's houses were built.

Besides the enormous expense involved, there are other problems.

Nearly all of the land in the central city is owned by the family of J. Spence Howard Jr. Howard, like his father, has an intense interest in the history of the city and its



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By Bob Burchette, Staff Photographer

Men's dorm at coeducational St. Marys College.

restoration, but he has placed stringent conditions on use and surrender of his land.

St. Marys College is just beginning an expansion program, and ancient foundations may be covered by the new buildings.

Project Urged Now

"We're building a gymnasium in a few months," college president May Russell said, "and we could build on the site of

something we didn't know about."

The college, a women's seminary for many years after its founding in 1840, is now co-educational. It will graduate its first four-year class in 1971 and, soon after, will have more than 1000 students, including commuters, residents and adults.

Mrs. Russell, who has worked for restoration, thinks it should begin at once. "We've had many such meet

ings," she said last week, "and nothing happens. I get infuriated. I just wish something would happen."

Forman has recommended a four-square-mile section of the central city be made a state historical park and reconstructed. He also suggested construction of a museum and a long-range program of archeological and historical research.

Everyone is certain of one thing. They want a quiet, dignified setting and they fear that a Federal park would create a carnival atmosphere.

Old World' Atmosphere

"You get a feeling here in old St. Marys City," State Sen. J. Frank Raley said last week, "of an old world that has not been marred.

"I'd like to see it always remain like that, calm and peaceful, where people can come

and see our fumbling efforts to start democracy, to start a new world with religious freedom.

"I'd want something simple, not elaborate."

Now, Mrs. Gore said, the urgent concern is the "security of the land," which is al

ready feeling pressures of suburban expansion from Lexington Park to the east.

As if to illustrate her fears, the State has begun construction of a sewage disposal plant at the entrance to St. Marys City, two blocks from the state house replica.