

The following document was published back in the 1930's and is illustrative of the issues facing archives all over America and it speaks to our present day responsibilities as well.

Hall of Records Commission (Annual Report), FY 1935 - 1939, 1st - 4th. MdHR 20020014, Location: 2/3/13/40, I15850, vol. 441, Archives of Maryland Online.

EARLY HISTORY OF MARYLAND ARCHIVES

The problem of the proper care and preservation of governmental records has troubled the State of Maryland, as it has other states, almost from the beginning of this Province. The General Assemblies of the 17th century made repeated examinations of the public records, and their reports often bristled with criticisms and recommendations. The elaborate care provided at the time of the removal of the records from St. Mary's City to Annapolis in the last decade of the century is characteristic of this concern.

Not much was accomplished, however, in those early days until 1716 when a special committee provided for a great deal of copying of records which had badly deteriorated. The proceedings of that committee, containing full lists of the work accomplished, are now preserved in the Hall of Records, and the volumes copied at that time are for the most part easily recognized and still in use. From time to time less ambitious projects of this kind were undertaken during the Colonial period, but at the time of the Revolution the state of the public records was generally unsatisfactory.

Resolution No. 44 of the December Session 1834 marked an important step in the effort to improve the care of public records. This resolution directed the State Librarian to survey all of the records then stored in the various State offices, to list them in detail and to recommend ways and means of improving the situation then admittedly bad. This was the first time that the Assembly had gone outside its own ranks for its record work and the first appearance, therefore, of what would now be called an Archivist in Maryland. Three excellent reports of the Librarian, David Ridgely, were duly prepared and published in 1835 and 1836. Previously the Assembly had had to deal with the care of records of defunct offices, but it had never thought to redistribute the records in wholesale fashion among offices which were equipped to take care of them. This proposal on the part of Ridgely must have been considered revolutionary at that time—it was a first step in the direction of the modern archives devoted exclusively to record-keeping for other offices. It is not possible to know whether Ridgely's recommendations were carried out fully but it is certain that they were carried out in part.

Some copying of records was done, but by the middle of the century (1859-61) John Henry Alexander and Ethan Allen reported steady deterioration, with many of the items listed by Ridgely already lost. These two distinguished scholars prepared a Calendar of Maryland State Papers which is still useful. In 1866, Colonel Brantz Mayer reported in some detail on the State records and suggested a plan for their care which was later adopted.

Nothing was done at that time, but the report was used in 1878 in a renewed appeal for the care of the records by Dr. Lewis H. Steiner, an appeal which was supported by the Maryland Historical Society. This new effort bore fruit in 1882 when the Assembly ordered all the early records, covering roughly the Colonial and Revolutionary periods, to be transferred from Annapolis to the vaults of the Historical Society in Baltimore. Of great importance was the fact that an appropriation was made then for the care and publication of the records which has continued to the present time (1935), although it is now used solely for publication.

The Maryland Historical Society became at that time, in fact, the archival agency of the state. It had already received some records in 1846-1847, a great collection came as a result of the Act of 1882, and many other lots were sent from time to time even as late as 1927. However, the Land Office had early become the depository for early Land records and for the records of the Colonial Probate Court while the Court of Appeals held its own early records and most of those of the defunct Provincial Court and General Court. County records remained in the county seats except that for a time the Charles County records had been deposited at the Land Office, and this agency also held some of the Anne Arundel County court records through 1935.

While, in a sense, the early state records were provided for at the turn of the century, the county records had for the most part continued to be ill-housed and subject to every kind of destructive agent, from the damp, the heat, the vermin, the pilferer who operated slowly but surely throughout the state, to the disastrous fires that destroyed a great proportion of the early records in St. Mary's, Calvert and Dorchester counties. Stimulated by the action of other states and the educational campaign of the American Historical Association, the Maryland Assembly, in 1904 (Chapter 282), provided for the appointment of a Public Records Commission to survey all the records of the state and to make recommendations for their better care. This commission began its work under the chairmanship of Mrs. Hester Dorsey Richardson in June 1905. It conducted a survey by competent persons in twenty-two of the Maryland Counties and in some of the state and municipal offices of Annapolis and Baltimore. Unfortunately, its full report of 2,000 pages, prepared after almost two years of work, has never been found although the chairman stated that it had been deposited in the Land Office. A very condensed report was made to the American Historical Society at its 1905 meeting in Baltimore and a fuller but still much condensed report was printed and submitted to the Governor. The Assembly did not renew its appropriations and the work of the Commission was left unfinished.

A quarter of a century was to pass before anything further was done toward the establishment of a central archives. To be sure, the records were not neglected. The Maryland Historical Society continued its publication program, issuing on the average, one large volume a year. It also initiated a repair and binding program. A useful survey of the records of the counties in the Colonial period was begun during the nineteen-twenties and carried to completion some years later by Louis Dow Scisco. Later, at the time that the Hall of Records was being completed, the WPA began its work of surveying and copying Maryland records.

But the idea of a centralized archival agency had long been in the minds of many Maryland citizens. An opportunity for its realization presented itself in the celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of the landing of the Ark and the Dove and the founding of the Province.

TERCENTENARY AND THE HALL OF RECORDS

Preparations for the celebration to be held in 1934 were begun in 1928 when Governor Albert C. Ritchie appointed a Tercentenary Commission. This Commission organized itself immediately, although its legal status was not secured until the Assembly met the following year. At that time this Commission was told to make plans and report to the Assembly of 1931 (Acts 1929, Ch. 470). Meanwhile the Hall of Records had been mentioned at the second meeting of the Commission which was held May 21, 1928. It was mentioned again June 18, 1929 when the idea was attributed by a member of the Commission, Daniel Randall, to Chief Judge Carroll T. Bond who had intended to bring the matter before the Legislature but for reasons not given had not done so. By November of that year the Commission had firmly adopted the idea and was asking for recommendations for a site.

The choice of a site was not an easy one and was to cause much heartache before it was finally made. When the Legislature met in 1929, the Commission asked Governor Ritchie to include in his Supplementary Budget the sum of \$5,000 for the expenses of the Commission, including the sum necessary for the securing of an option on a desirable site. In the Spring of 1929 an offer was made of a lot on the St. John's College Campus, and at its first meeting the newly appointed Executive Committee of the Tercentenary Commission asked Mr. Randall and Mathew Page Andrews to investigate the possibilities of such a site. While negotiations with the St. John's College were going on, the Mullen Property adjoining the Post Office was suggested.

But the Commission soon became aware that approval of the Hall of Records project was not to be unanimous. Certain County officers were opposed to sending their records to Annapolis, and the Land Office and Maryland Historical Society were reluctant to relinquish their rights as archival agents for the State. This unexpected opposition, plus the great cost involved, induced a subcommittee of the Commission to ask the Governor to separate the Hall of Records project from the other features of the Tercentenary. They asked that \$400,000 be appropriated for the building and equipment, \$5,000 for an architect's competition and \$1,000 for the expenses of dedication. It will be seen that the Governor asked for half the amount proposed for the building, the competition was never held and the building never dedicated. But the Executive Committee rejected the recommendation of the subcommittee and perhaps by so doing saved the Hall of Records from being cut off altogether.

The Commission was very much divided over the question of a site, and until the last moment those who were opposed to the St. John's offer continued to urge others. The Commission was also to be plagued by the problem of finding a useful purpose for the Hall of Records without infringing on the prerogatives of other offices. For example, a curious division of records then held by the Land Office was proposed late in 1930: the Hall of Records was in no way to encroach upon the fields of the Land Office—the Hall of Records would receive only those records created during the Provincial period, the Land Office would retain all the records created since statehood.

In the meanwhile, early in 1930, Governor Ritchie had asked Judge Bond to form a committee to estimate the amount of records which would have to be housed in the proposed Hall of Records and to estimate the size of building needed and the approximate cost. Judge Bond associated with him in this survey Dr. J. Hall Pleasants and Judge T. Scott Offutt and after several preliminary statements, a final report was made available to the Governor in February 1931. Judge Bond reported that space would have to be provided for about 5,000 bound volumes and a like amount of space for unbound materials. Including a margin of space to allow for the accumulation of an additional 25 years, Judge Bond proposed a stack space of 60x40 feet in area by 25 feet in height. For the overall size of the building he reported "After working over figures for space to include a reading and exhibition room, two offices, a repair room, a bindery, a photostat room, and a dark room for photography, washrooms and passages, we come to the conclusion that two floors and a basement each 60x60 feet in area and 15 feet high, would suffice."

The cost of such a building was estimated as follows: building \$144,000; equipment including steel stacks, \$50,000; architect's fees and heat connections \$25,000. Therefore, a round figure of \$250,000 was proposed. Governor Ritchie recommended less than that by \$50,000 to the Legislature then in session and this in turn was \$200,000 less than had been asked by the Tercentenary Commission for this purpose (Acts of 1931, Ch. 253). In the same year the Tercentenary Commission was given power to condemn

or otherwise to procure a site for a "Memorial Hall of Records.....in which shall be gathered all ancient public and private records of the Province and State of Maryland from the beginning of the province to the adoption of the Federal Constitution." The building was to be equipped with the best desks, tables, chairs, etc. Finally every such act of the Commission was made subject to the approval of the Board of Public Works (Acts 1931, Ch. 487).

The sum of \$200,000 suggested by the Governor was appropriated. The name of the new building later became involved in some controversy but the Governor, who disliked the use of "Memorial" and wanted it omitted, finally won the point although, as some members of the Tercentenary Commission pointed out, the name had been fixed by law. The Board of Public Works exercised its authority in disapproving a contest of architects which had been recommended by the Commission. There was, however, no disagreement as to the qualifications of Laurence Hall Fowler of Baltimore who was finally selected as architect by the Board of Public Works shortly before March 9, 1932. By September 15 of that year Mr. Fowler had completed his plans and the memorial committee reported to the executive committee that it had made three suggestions: 1) an elevator be installed; 2) a room on the third floor be finished and used for assemblies and conferences; 3) the inscription read "Memorial Hall of Records." The first and second suggestions were carried out although later the Hall of Records Commission was to limit strictly the uses to which the Hall of Records might be put. As we have already seen, in the end the architect had nothing to do with the wording of the memorial.

Meanwhile the search for a site continued. As late as December 5, 1932 it was reported that this matter was still unsettled. Two weeks later, however, the Commission was informed by Governor Ritchie that the Board of Public Works had chosen the site on the

St. John's campus offered by the College and that Mr. Fowler had been instructed to request bids. Apparently the Tercentenary Commission and its various committees had proved to be too unwieldy and had been clothed with too little authority to conclude so complicated and so expensive a task. As the time for the celebration approached the Commission concentrated its attention more and more on the other features of the program. Its Minutes reveal only a few more references to the Hall of Records. On January 11, 1933, it was resolved that the Hall of Records be dedicated on March 25, 1934. On January 30, it was announced that the completed design of the Hall of Records had been accepted by the Board of Governors of the St. John's College who had deeded a plot of ground on their campus with the condition that the architect's design be in harmony with the other buildings of the college. In February of the next year, the year of the Tercentenary, it was announced that contracts for the construction of the building had been awarded.

The Board of Public Works, which had in fact taken over the business of building the Hall of Records, was specifically vested with this authority by the Legislature of 1933 which instructed this body to acquire by purchase or condemnation a suitable site in Annapolis for this purpose (Acts 1933, Ch. 344). On February 21, 1934, a deed was executed between the Visitors and Governors of St. John's College and the State of Maryland granting to the State the site on which the Hall of Records now stands for "ten dollars and other good and valuable considerations." (Recorded March 5, 1934 in Liber F.S.R. No. 120, folio 301, Land Records of Anne Arundel County). On March 7, 1934 the first spadeful of earth was turned by State Senator Ridgely P. Melvin of Anne Arundel County who had sponsored the bill providing for the Hall of Records. The building was completed one year later and it was occupied by the Land Office in June 1935 and by the Hall of Records Commission on October 1, 1935.

When the building was near completion the Legislature of 1935 passed an Act providing for the governing of the Hall of Records along the lines which had previously been outlined to Governor Ritchie by Judge Bond and his colleagues (Acts 1935, Ch. 18).

BUILDING AND EQUIPMENT

By agreement with the Board of Visitors and Governors of the St. John's College the Hall of Records was designed to face on the campus of the College rather than on the street. The architect was further required to plan the building to conform as much as possible with the other buildings of the quadrangle. Comment of the architect on this point is interesting: "The minimum requirements for the Hall of Records called for a building having a cubic content considerably greater than that of any other building on the campus.

It became necessary, therefore, to arrive at some design which should be large enough to meet these minimum requirements, while still appearing small enough to take its proper place among the other less extensive buildings of the group. In its final form, the mass of the structure was largely determined by the necessity for it to appear as small as possible; it was therefore given a flat roof, in this respect following an English rather than the American precedent."

The architect's description continues: "The construction is fire-proof: brick bearing walls, steel girders, and reinforced concrete floor and roof slabs. The specially hand-made face brick—a reproduction in size, color and texture of the Annapolis Colonial brick—is laid, with tight joints, in Flemish bond. The steps, and the coping and finials of the terrace walls, are of white marble. The cornices,

window frames and sash, and the entrance door are of wood, while parts particularly subject to deterioration, such as copings, window sills, and the capitals and bases of the pilasters, are of limestone; but wood and limestone alike are finished to give a uniform white painted surface."

Exclusive of professional fees the building cost 60 cents a cubic foot for its approximately 300,000 cubic feet. The total cost was \$233,831.81 of which the State provided \$173,580.10 and the Public Works Administration \$60,251.71. The full amount appropriated from the bond issue was not made available because of the need to use some of these funds for the repair of the Governor's Mansion. The building itself cost \$205,575.90, the original equipment provided before the building was turned over to the Hall of Records Commission accounted for another \$28,255.91. The building is divided into two parts. There is a stack section of six floors from the basement level to the roof. This section is constructed exclusively of steel and concrete and is isolated from the rest of the building by fire doors. There are three normal entrances: from the Hall of Records research room, from the Land Office research room and from the Hall of Records office section. There is also an emergency entrance to the basement which was cut after the building was put into use. The air-conditioning system functions for the stack area alone and there is a dumbwaiter which provides the sole means of mechanical transport from one stack level to another.

The area outside the stacks contains a basement in which there are a loading platform, fumigator and air-conditioning unit, an unassigned room now used for the display of certain Indian relics, a vestibule and the photographic room and dark room. The first floor contains a conference room, the public research room which extends two stories in height, a small vestibule, a large entrance vestibule and a third vestibule, all used for exhibition purposes, and the offices of the Land Office. The second floor contains a public work room directly over the conference room, the offices of the Archivist, Assistant Archivists and Secretary, a vestibule and the repair room. On the third floor there is only one room, an assembly room which extends the length of the second floor offices. This outside area has an elevator running from the basement to the third-floor assembly room and a dumbwaiter from the photostat room to the vestibule directly outside the repair room on the second floor.