

should be called, and a companion bill that provided that if the vote on calling a convention were affirmative the convention would convene in Annapolis on 12 September 1967. Both bills passed the 1966 session of the General Assembly and were signed into law by Governor Tawes.

The referendum on the question of calling a constitutional convention, held 13 September 1966, was approved overwhelmingly by the electorate, with 160,280 in favor and just 31,680 opposed. With this mandate from the voters of Maryland, the Constitutional Convention Commission drafted enabling legislation, passed by the General Assembly in 1967, prescribing the procedures for assembling the convention. The enabling act provided for 142 delegates, a number equal to the combined representation in each house of the General Assembly, to be elected at a special poll on 13 June 1967. These delegates were to meet in the State House on 12 September 1967 and conclude their work within ninety days, or by 12 December, unless a majority of the delegates concluded that a further 30 days were required. In no case could the deliberations of the convention extend beyond 12 January 1968.

With the state now committed to a constitutional convention that would completely rewrite Maryland's constitution, persons of all persuasions and representatives of every special interest avidly sought election to the convention. Some 700 candidates vied for the 142 available seats at the special election in June. Middle-class, middle-aged white males generally prevailed at the polls, but a handful of women and five blacks were among the successful candidates. For some delegates, election to the Constitutional Convention represented the culmination of decades of public service; for others, including one who celebrated his twenty-second birthday during the convention, election served to launch active and continuing political careers.<sup>4</sup>

Although Maryland had not written a constitution in a hundred years, the delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1967-1968 had a wealth of background material and experience to draw upon. Hawaii and Alaska had only recently written their first state constitutions, and several other states had engaged in full-scale constitutional revisions within the past few years. Voters of the State of New York, in fact, provided a sobering reminder of the ultimate authority of the electorate by rejecting a proposed new state constitution even as the Maryland Constitutional Convention met. More important, the Constitutional Convention Commission had exhaustively examined virtually every conceivable constitutional topic, preparing detailed reports and study documents. A special four-day orientation session for newly elected delegates in late June, followed by an organizational session in July, further paved the way for a Convention that would waste little time in getting down to business.

It is doubtful that many of the delegates who gathered in the State House in Annapolis on 12 September 1967 believed that their work would be in vain, that the people would fail to ratify what they drafted at the special ratification election the following spring. Their task was simply too important, and the deficiencies of the existing constitution too generally recognized. Furthermore, despite a change in administrations in the state, the convention continued to enjoy the support of the chief

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<sup>4</sup> The youngest delegate to the Constitutional Convention was Donald P. Hutchinson of Baltimore County, who was elected at the age of twenty-one and celebrated his birthday during the Convention on 31 December. He later served in the House of Delegates and as county executive of Baltimore County.