
A History of Printing in Colonial Maryland

house for his exct Sermon of that text Remember thy Creator in the days of thy Youth and Acquainte him that this house desires the same may be printed.”¹ In the possession of the Maryland Historical Society there is preserved an unique copy of a publication which, as far as has been recorded, is the earliest Maryland imprint of which a copy remains in America. Its title-page reads as follows:

The | Necessity | of an Early | Religion | being a | Sermon | Preach'd the 5th. of May
Before the | Honourable | Assembly of | Maryland | By Thomas Bray D. D. | Annapolis
Printed by Order of the | Assembly By Tho: Reading, For Evan Jones Book-|seller, Anno
Domini 1700.|²

A photographic reproduction of the title-page of this first recorded issue of the Bladen-Reading press is shown on page 20. The evidence which it presents of the general inferiority of the press which Bladen had set up with great pains and expense is supplemented by the occurrence throughout the text of broken letters, and of repeated indications of the employment of worn and irregular chases. These defects in equipment and a most notable carelessness in proof reading characterize so much of the work of this press as to constitute an aid in the identification of its issues.

THE FIRST EDITION OF THE MARYLAND LAWS, ANNAPOLIS, 1700

Although the Bray sermon is the first specimen of the Bladen-Reading press of which a copy remains, it is probable that it was not the first important issue of the new establishment, for in this same session of 1700, two days before the delegates had taken action in regard to Dr. Bray's discourse, when the bill for religion had been read the third time and assented to, it was "Resolved that the same Act be forthwith printed and that one of them be ordered for every parish in the pvince."³ In the absence of a copy of this act bearing the Annapolis imprint it is impossible to assert that the resolution of the House was complied with, but the fact that the delegates had begun immediately to requisition the services of the new press indicates that they appreciated fully its value in the conduct of public business.

Two days after the printing of the Act of Establishment had been ordered Bladen proposed a publication transcending it in interest when he suggested to the delegates:

"That if the house are desirous the body of Laws should be printed soe that every person

¹ L. H. J., May 9, 1700, *Archives of Maryland*, 24: 82.

² On the verso of the title-page occurs substantially the same order of Assembly as that which has been quoted, signed "Tho: Smithson Speaker."

³ L. H. J., May 7, 1700, *Archives of Maryland*, 24: 67.