

THE LAND OFFICE

In the election of November 8, 1966, the electorate of Maryland voted for the adoption of an amendment to the Constitution to abolish the Land Office (Ch. 489, Acts 1966). Thereupon an Act providing for the takeover of the functions and records of that office by the Hall of Records Commission (Ch. 488, Acts of 1966), took effect.

More legislation was required to implement the Act and Mr. John W. Sause, Assistant Attorney General, was given the assignment. It was an extremely difficult task but at the end the Hall of Records was moved out of Article 41 of the Code and combined with the Land Office Article 17 into Article 54. Many changes were made in the procedure: all types of warrants except Special Warrants, were abolished; strict time limits were put on each step of the granting of a patent, and the amount of composition money which before had been a matter of individual judgment on the part of the Land Commissioner, was turned over to the Supervisor of Assessments of the county in which the alleged vacant land was located, who placed a fair market value on it (Ch. 355, Acts 1967). To assist in caveat hearings, an Assistant Attorney General was assigned; Mr. Sause was succeeded by Mr. Carville Downs, who in turn was replaced by Mr. Richard Rice, who was present at all hearings.

All of the records of land grants in Maryland, formerly in the Land Office, were moved to the Hall of Records, also the records of the Chancery Court and other miscellaneous records. The Abstracts of Deeds which were deposited with the Land Commissioner from 1783 to 1949, were deposited in the Library of the University of Maryland, the microfilm of the original instruments and the records in the counties remained at the Hall of Records, and the microfilm of instruments since that date are still held in the former quarters of the Land Office as are the plats of subdivisions from most of the counties and the papers having to do with municipal annexations. These records are being arranged and indexed by the Records Management Division in whose immediate custody they are.

The staff of the Land Office numbered six. On the retirement of the last Commissioner, the position was allowed to lapse. Mr. Malcolm Waring, Administrative Assistant, died and his position was not filled until the office was taken over by the Hall of Records. This position is now assigned to Program I. Mrs. Crockett, a Land Records Researcher, was assigned to Program II. Her duties are now to service the former