

FOREWORD

As the fourth in its series of publications the Maryland Hall of Records Commission has prepared for students of Maryland history and genealogy this work on colonial land and probate records. Since the county land records and the records of the deputy commissaries general, the county probate officers, are not yet all in Annapolis, it has been thought wise to restrict the scope of these studies to (1) the records which were created by the proprietary and royal land agents and to (2) the archives of the central probate office.

Maryland is fortunate to have preserved such complete land and probate records. Doubtless much credit for this good fortune is due to the fact that the record-making agencies were centralized throughout the colonial period, in St. Mary's City until 1694 and after that in Annapolis. They were ever under the watchful eye of the General Assembly whose proceedings bear witness of the concern felt for those records which protected the property rights of Marylanders. Except for one early incident which accounted for minor losses, these records have escaped the perils of warfare, civil and foreign. They have not been decimated by fire or theft, nor suffered seriously from the other hazards of peace which have caused such grave losses elsewhere. They are all now to be found in the modern fireproof vaults of the Hall of Records building where they receive the best care which a generous State can provide.

All the records considered in these studies are well known to students of Marylandiana. They have been used and cited by specialists for several generations. It is the hope of the authors that this study will widen their usefulness. In the case of the Land records there has never before been a comprehensive list, or catalogue, or finding medium of any kind which might serve to orient the student. It has been fortunate that for the last forty-five years the present Chief Clerk of the Land Office, Mr. Arthur Trader, has been a member of its staff. A generation of students has profited from his interest in, and his knowledge of, these records. Justification for a published list is twofold: the quality of record custodians is certain to vary and students not resident in Annapolis are enabled to prepare themselves in advance for studies here.