

## 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.