

"May these be perpetual"

Maryland State Archives S465-D012242A.TIF



On the Sustainability of Archives

Opening Remarks

Before the House and Senate Budget Committees

of the Maryland State Legislature,

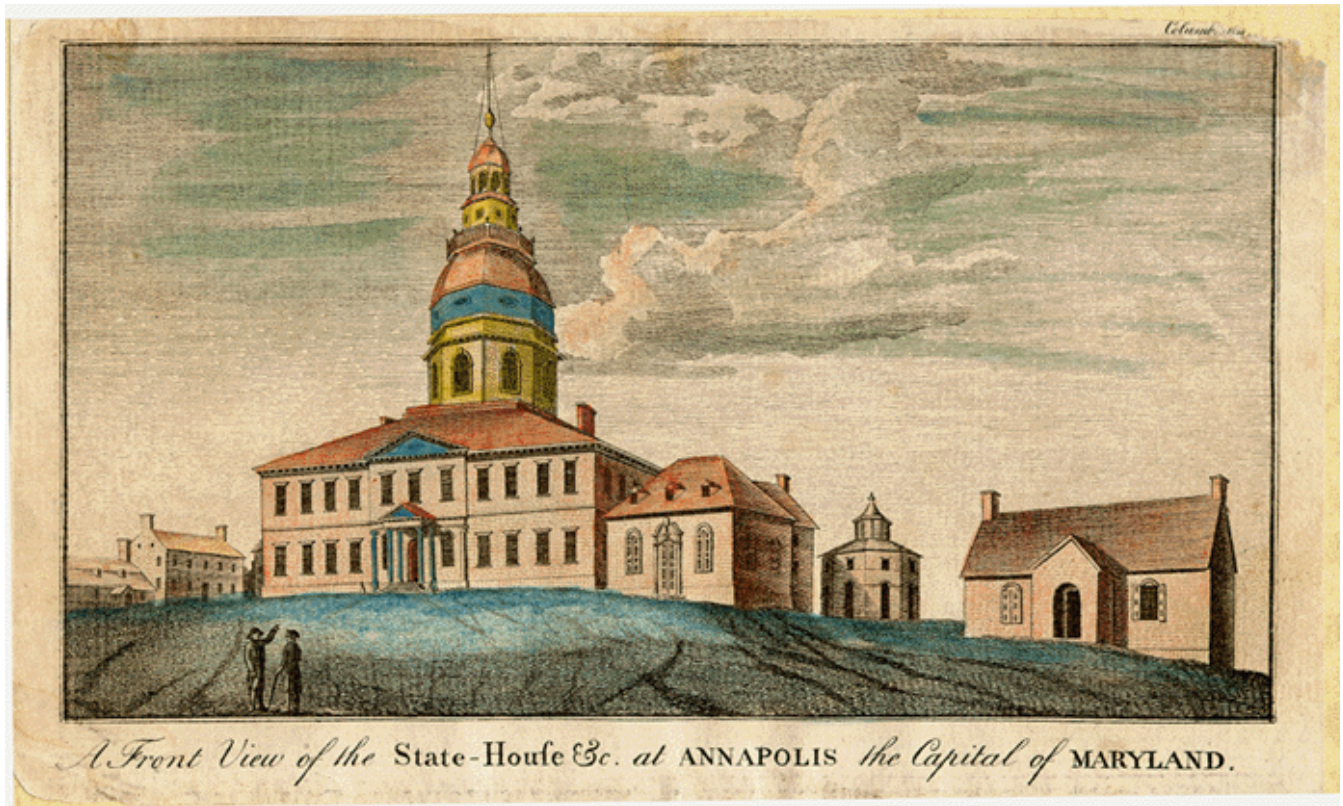
February 17-18, 2010

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Ed Papenfuse, State Archivist and Commissioner of Land Patents. With me today are my Deputy, Tim Baker, and Nassir Rezvan, Director of Administration for the State Archives.

Once again, we would like to thank the analyst, Ms. Flora Arabo, for a very fine [presentation](#). As always she accurately and fairly presents an analysis of the budget numbers.

For your reference and further reading, our annual report is provided on our website in the form of the minutes and agenda of the Hall of Records Commission, which we publish electronically following each meeting at <http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa/intromsa/hrc/html/hrc.html>. This budget testimony and accompanying documents of interest are posted on our website at <http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/intromsa/html/budget.html> and on my blog, <http://marylandarchivist.blogspot.com>.



Our major new outreach efforts this past year have been the collaboration with the Maryland Historical Trust on the [reinterpretation and restoration of the Old Senate Chamber in the State House](#), our assumption, without funding, of the State House Tour Office, and an exhibit with the Maryland Historical Society of some of the most valuable artwork owned by the State.



Burt Kummerow, director of the Maryland Historical Society, with the three paintings by Charles Willson Peale

owned by the State of Maryland that are part of the "Maryland's National Treasures" exhibit.

(Baltimore Sun photo by Amy Davis / February 9, 2010)

As we struggle with one of the worst budget crises in our history, it is time to address directly the reasons and means for sustaining the public memory in a permanent, well-protected environment, forever accessible and perpetually useful to future generations.

There are not enough resources for government to do all that the public and those in public office think it ought to do, from providing public safety, education, and health care to maintaining the infrastructure of our roads and public buildings. We live on borrowed time and massive loans from abroad. Optimists argue that if we can only get our economy growing again, it will outpace our debt. Pessimists tell us that poverty is too widespread and there are too many mouths to feed in a world of massive income disparity and a pervasive lack of personal self discipline.

It is likely that truth lies somewhere in between, that to weather the crisis, expectations need to be scaled back, belts tightened, and the American ideal of self-reliance redefined in a collective spirit of entrepreneurial activity that produces jobs and a renewed optimism that together we can both maintain and improve our standard of living.

In 1916, on the eve of the first Great War to End Wars, George Creel wrote a flattering piece about Douglas Fairbanks Sr., who along with Enrico Caruso was one of America's first great superstars. He argued that the country should hire Fairbanks and send him over the country as an agent of the *Bureau of Grins*. "Think what would happen" he wrote, "if we learned the art of joyousness and gained the strength that comes from good humor and optimism!"¹

What he wrote then, holds true today, as we cope with budget hearings and snow removal:

*We are a young nation and a great nation. Judging from the promise of the morning, there is nothing that may not be asked of America's noon. A land of abundance, with not an evil that may not be banished, and yet there is more whining in it than in any other country on the face of the globe. If we are to die, "Nibbled to Death by Ducks" may well be put on the tombstone. Little things are permitted to bring about paroxysms of peevishness. Even our pleasures have come to be taken sadly. We are irritable at picnics, snarly at clambakes, and bored to death at dinners.*²

To avoid being nibbled to death by ducks, we need to remember that sensibly investing in the entrepreneurial activities that sustain our memory of the past, can be one of the greatest contributions we make to the future success of the nation, whether it be to help improve our sense of humor or inspire us to re-invent ourselves rather than repeating the sins of the past. With Archives as the central cortex of our public memory, providing the cultural and informational inspiration to explore in meaningful ways what we have done right and wrong, we have a good chance of rising above our current misfortunes. Stifle that entrepreneurial spirit and we are likely to be condemned to repeat forever the same meaningless task of pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll down again.

In 1796, on the eve of his retirement from the Presidency, George Washington was presented with some mementos of the role the French played in the American Revolution. They will, he wrote, "be deposited with the archives of the United States, which are at once the evidence and the memorials of their freedom and independence. May these be perpetual!"³ On another occasion when pestered by historians to make his private papers available, and after agreeing that he would do so at some point, he cautioned:

It ever has been my opinion ... that no Historian can be possessed of sufficient materials to compile a perfect history of the revolution, who has not free access to the archives of Congress, to those of the respective States; to the papers of the Commander in chief, and to those of the

officers who have been employed in separate Departments. Combining and properly arranging the information which is to be obtained from these sources must bring to view all the material occurrences of the War. 4

Beginning in the 1990s, the Maryland State Archives launched a program of self-sustainability for the public records of the State that was premised on two fundamental principles:

1. that the capital resources of the State would provide proper housing for the Archives to prevent their being destroyed by environmental neglect
2. that the operational budget of the State would provide salaries for key archival personnel sufficient to not only care for the records as responsible custodians, but also to engage aggressively in seeking out sources of funding that would not impact the General Fund.

To date the capital resources of the State have not provided for the proper housing of over half of the archival collections of the State. They are currently housed in flat roofed commercial warehouses lacking in temperature and humidity controls, easily subject to fire and weather related disaster. Plans for proper facilities are on the drawing board, but have been stalled by the recession. To correct the problem and provide for the future may cost as much as \$70 million in capital improvements, but the consequences of the loss of that public memory both in dollars and in future inspiration are far greater.

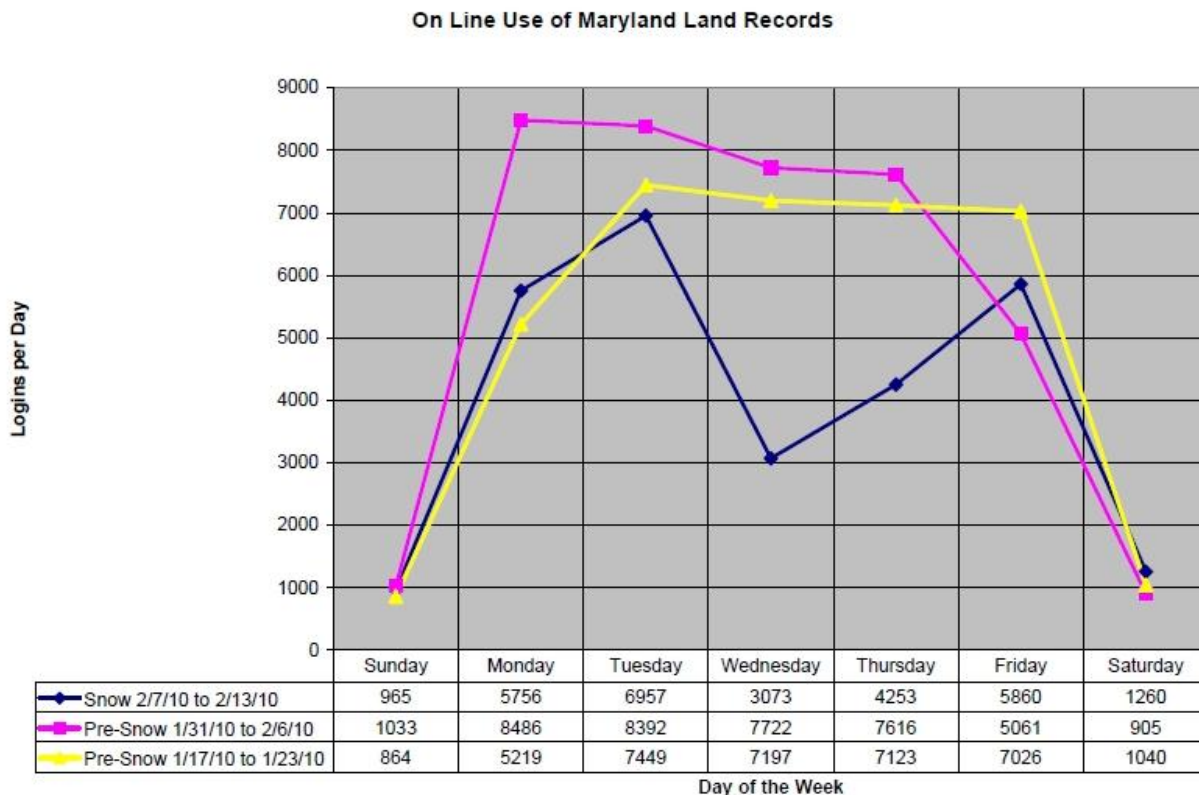
As to the entrepreneurial spirit of the Archives, we have managed to work with the Judiciary to preserve and make accessible on line one of the most important of our archival responsibilities, the records of private property ownership and sale throughout the State reaching back to the 17th century and the founding of Maryland. We have done so on initiative of the staff of the Archives, developing a web-based service and electronic archives encompassing 170,000,000 images of land records that are added to daily through the course of real estate recordings at the courthouses throughout Maryland. The service is paid for and maintained up front by those who buy and sell land through a modest fee placed in a dedicated fund generally referred to as the Land Records Improvement Fund, only a small portion of which goes towards the care and maintenance of the records on line at the Archives. In creating the service, with the permission of the Governor and the Legislature, we incorporated an overhead and investment charge designed to partially offset the general reference and research costs of the Archives which enabled us to develop the service in the first place, on the assumption that core management and entrepreneurial staff would continue to be the contribution of the State Government.

Instead, the more we have been able to earn, the less we have been permitted to do, as Special Fund income was siphoned off to pay for what should be General Fund expenditures, and what was earned above and beyond the immediate cost of service, was drained from our ability to develop additional sources of revenue outside the General Fund. For example, instead of providing adequate housing and maintenance of our collections, including the preventative maintenance of a valuable State art collection, we have been charged rent for the current Archives building and been forced to pay rent for the commercial space housing over half of our archival collections. In addition not only have our general fund allocations been reduced to paying *only* for salaries, the amount available for salaries has been persistently reduced, making it increasingly difficult to even maintain the services we currently provide, let alone think creatively about providing more efficient ways of preserving and accessing the public memory. In effect, we are being nibbled to death by ducks, instead of being provided with the life support necessary to help educate and inform a public that sorely needs to reflect with good humor and creative spirit on what we can do collectively to solve the problems of today and tomorrow.

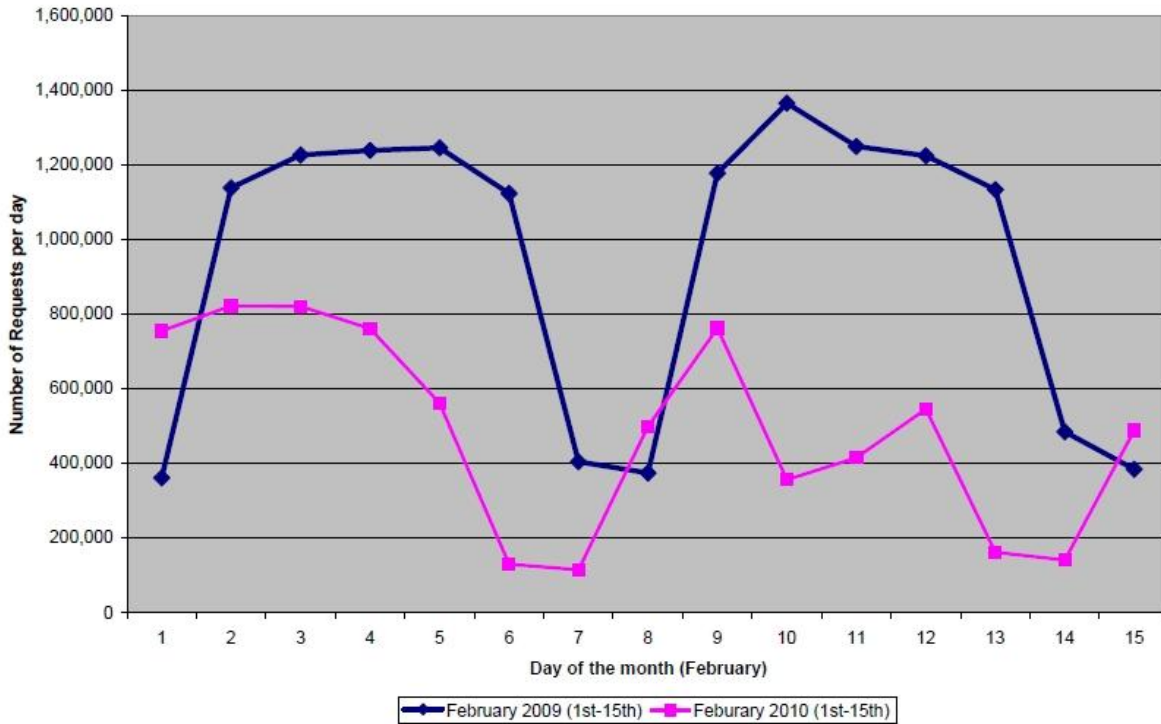
Rather than take a further \$70,000 from our general fund appropriation, I would request that attention be given to restoring our general fund appropriation for salaries to a level that actually sustains our management staff (approximately \$5 million dollars) , removes the burden of rental of substandard space by

pushing forward the capital investment in adequate storage, conservation, and educational facilities on site (a capital investment of about \$70 million dollars from triple A bonds), and permits us to continue to use the income we generate from fee based services to further support through scanning and placing records on line, employment of a community of challenged individuals that was the hallmark of our land records project. By offering scanning and web-based services to State Agencies, we help economize in the expenditure of public dollars on the creation, storage, and accessibility of public records, employ people who otherwise must struggle for their very existence, and make more readily available the public memory so necessary to the recovery of our economy and the re-inventing of America. By not allocating investment in these goals, we suppress our ability to learn the truth and be inspired by the past, doomed to repeat our mistakes and consigned to a bleak future.

I admit it is one thing to ardently assert the value of an Archives to the future course of our State and nation, and another to prove it. Are we indeed able to reach the public in meaningful ways that can be measured? When given the ability to hire and reward with benefits a core entrepreneurial staff, the answer is yes. Take the Maryland Archives designed service perpetually maintaining and providing access on line to land records. Even in the midst of the worst snowstorm in our history up to nearly 6,000 patrons a day logged into <http://mdlandrec.net>, although I will admit that on Wednesday when most of us could not make it to work and the State closed down, only 3,073 were on line that day. The rest were probably shoveling snow.



On Line Use of Maryland Land Records



With adequate management/entrepreneurial staff supported by the General Fund, there is much that we could do to economize State resources while providing additional employment for a large segment of our population that currently finds it very difficult to obtain work.

What this State and this Country needs is a revival of the best elements of the Works Progress Administration focused on its archival heritage. Through law and executive mandate, all State agencies should be required to adhere to records retention and disposal schedules developed by the Archives working with the agencies. Those schedules should require each agency to budget a charge similar to that collected by the Department of Budget and Management for communication that would be paid directly to the Archives for the perpetual care of and access to permanent records from the moment of their inception. In addition, all State agencies would be required to relinquish all scanning of paper and microfilm records to the management of the State Archives, along with any funds appropriated for that purpose. Such centralization of paper and microfilm scanning would reduce by at least 20% the cost of all State agency scanning projects (the amount actually saved during the creation of <http://mdlandrec.net>) and provide a source of fee derived income for the sustainability of the whole Archives program.

With up to date records retention and disposal schedules, with the Archives as the mandated disaster recovery and security back up for all permanent records of the State, and with the costs of maintaining those records for public access in a pay as you go system, considerably less expensive office space would be required for State Agencies, and the overall costs of managing and delivering records for public and

governmental purposes could be drastically reduced.

In these dark days of economic turmoil and recession it is time to think differently about how to move ourselves forward. "Judging from the promise of the morning, there is nothing that may not be asked of America's noon," as long as we do not neglect the very sources of information that help us to think and act wisely. The Archives stands ready to help with recovery and growth, but it cannot without a secure baseline of appropriated funds allocated to a core staff leading the way, adequate archival storage space, and enforcement of new scanning and records management guidelines that generate special fund revenue sufficient to sustain the Archives.

At day's end, setting aside the statistics and the rhetoric of advocacy, preserving our record heritage and conserving with loving care our treasures, are much like the vision of our founding fathers and mothers for this nation. They are acts of faith in the future for those who come after us. Be assured, we will do the very best we can with what we are given in the belief that better times will come. All I can ask of you today is that you turn aside the recommendations to cut further into our General Fund budget, and approve the Governor's allowance as it now stands.

Notes:

1 *Everybody's Magazine*, 1916, p. 730 ff. Available from Google Books: <http://books.google.com/books?id=nazNAAAAMAAJ&dq=everybody's%20magazine%20george%20creel%20douglas%20fairbanks&pg=PP11#v=onepage&q=everybody's%20magazine%20george%20creel%20douglas%20fairbanks&f=false>

2 *Ibid.*

3 <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field%28DOCID+@lit%28gw340313%29%29>

4 <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field%28DOCID+@lit%28gw270422%29%29>