The Plight of American Municipal Archives: Baltimore, 1729–1979

RICHARD J. COX

FEW MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES ARE ADEQUATE. Various causes of the problem have been cited, including municipal apathy, emphasis by archivists on state and national levels, lack of support from the historical community, the failure of records management programs, and the lack of public support.[1] Despite recognition of the problem, there has been no systematic study of the historical development of American municipal archives; and such study is necessary for a full understanding and resolution of their plight. The following sketch of the Baltimore City Archives portrays the vicissitudes of municipal archival development in one city.

Baltimore was laid out as a town in 1729 and developed slowly until the Revolution. A 1752 sketch by John Moale showed a single hotel and a church, two taverns, a barber shop, a theater, a tobacco warehouse, a financial firm, a brewery, and private dwellings for about two hundred residents. By the end of the Revolution, Baltimore, stimulated by manufacturing and trade, was Maryland's principal city. It doubled its population between 1790 and 1800 (to 26,000), becoming America's third largest city. From then on, Baltimore has remained a major American city.

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[1] Charles E. Hughes, Jr., "Philadelphia Program," *American Archivist* 21 (April 1958): 131–42; Dale A. Somers, Timothy J. Crimmins, and Merl E. Reed, "Surveying the Records of a City: The History of Atlanta Project," ibid. 36 (July 1973): 353–59; James B. Speer, Jr., "Houston Metropolitan Archives and Research Center," *Rice University Review* 9 (Summer 1974): 11–15; L. H. Butterfield, "Bostonians and Their Neighbors as Pack Rats," *American Archivist* 24 (April 1961): 141–59; Leon de Valinger, Jr., "Municipal Archives in the United States," *Archivum* 13 (1963): 3–12; Richard Ruddell, "Recent Developments in Municipal Records," *American Archivist* 18 (July 1955): 255–66; Sam Bass Warner, Jr., "The Shame of the Cities: Public Records of the Metropolis," *Midwestern Archivist* 2, no. 2 (1977): 27–34; Thornton W. Mitchell, "Municipal Archival Programs," *American Archivist* 23 (April 1960): 181–83; M. L. Carr, "The Protection of Public Records," *American City* 25 (July 1921): 5; and Patrick M. Quinn, "Windy City Blues: An Archival Profile of Chicago," *Midwestern Archivist* 2, no. 1 (1977): 3–13.

Figure 1
Baltimore Town in 1752. Original sketch by John Moales.

Baltimore's transition from a rural village to a major urban center brought an increase in the size and complexity of government. During the eighteenth century the town was directed largely by the state legislature and had only the slightest taste of self-government. Beginning in the 1780s the residents began to seek more self-government, culminating in the 1796 incorporation of the town and establishment of a city council, mayor, and several city agencies. Only after the War of 1812 did the municipal government begin an expansion that eventually created the modern bureaucracy; until then private individuals and voluntary associations performed the bulk of municipal services.[2] A century later, the new city charter of 1898 represented a complex municipal government. In the same period, the quantity of records increased, and problems relating to their storage and access were compounded.

Before 1874 the care of municipal records was minimal. In the state and county governments, as with the municipal government, care of records extended no farther than fireproof safes and closets, rebinding, and indexing. In 1791 the clerk of Baltimore's Special Commissioners was ordered to "procure a Mohogany Chest to contain the records and the Platts of the Town with two keys to the lock."[3] In 1817 a "fire proof closet" for selected records was constructed in the mayor's office. A decade later an ordinance instructed the city register, the official mainly responsible for the records, not to allow the removal of records from municipal offices.[4] The 1796 incorporating charter stipulated the care of the rec-

[2] Dennis Rankin Clark, "Baltimore, 1729–1829: The Genesis of a Community" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1976).

[3] *First Records of Baltimore Town and Jones' Town, 1729–1797* (Baltimore: [Mayor and City Council], 1905), p. 75.

[4] Baltimore, Ordinance 32 (1817); Ordinance 5 (1826).

Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore

ords, and the new city's second ordinance, in 1797, directed the appointment of persons responsible for their safekeeping.[5]

Baltimoreans established their best early records guidelines in the face of catastrophe, the burning of the Baltimore City Courthouse in 1835. Although nearly all the records were saved, the city officials, "being deeply impressed with the importance of the public record . . . upon which the titles to their property depend, and warned by the great danger to which these records were recently exposed," made a successful appeal to the Maryland legislature for the design and speedy construction of a fireproof record office.[6]

A commission was appointed to supervise the design and construction of both courthouse and record office, with Solomon Etting as chairman and Robert Cary Long as architect. Under Long's direction the work moved forward rapidly. The cornerstone for the Record Office was laid on 29 June 1836, and the building was completed in August 1839. The building, done in the "Egyptian Style" according to the commissioners, was a large, graceful three-story building of 54 by 68 feet situated next to the new courthouse on St. Paul and Lexington Streets. The main provision of the Record Office was for the records of the Orphans Court and Baltimore County Court, with large vaults and cases and other storage space. Only a few months later, however, architect Long was cautioning the commission about the future inadequacies of the structure. He was dismayed to learn that records had already appeared that were not considered when the structure

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[5] *An Act to Erect Baltimore-Town, In Baltimore County, Into a City, And to Incorporate the Inhabitants Thereof* (Baltimore: John Hayes, 1797), p. 13; Ordinance 2 (1797).

[6] A copy of the petition is in the Baltimore Court House Commissioners' Minutes, MS. 69, Maryland Historical Society (hereafter cited as *Minutes* and MdHi).

was designed. Long prophesied that in less than fifty years the current record office would be heavily burdened.[7]

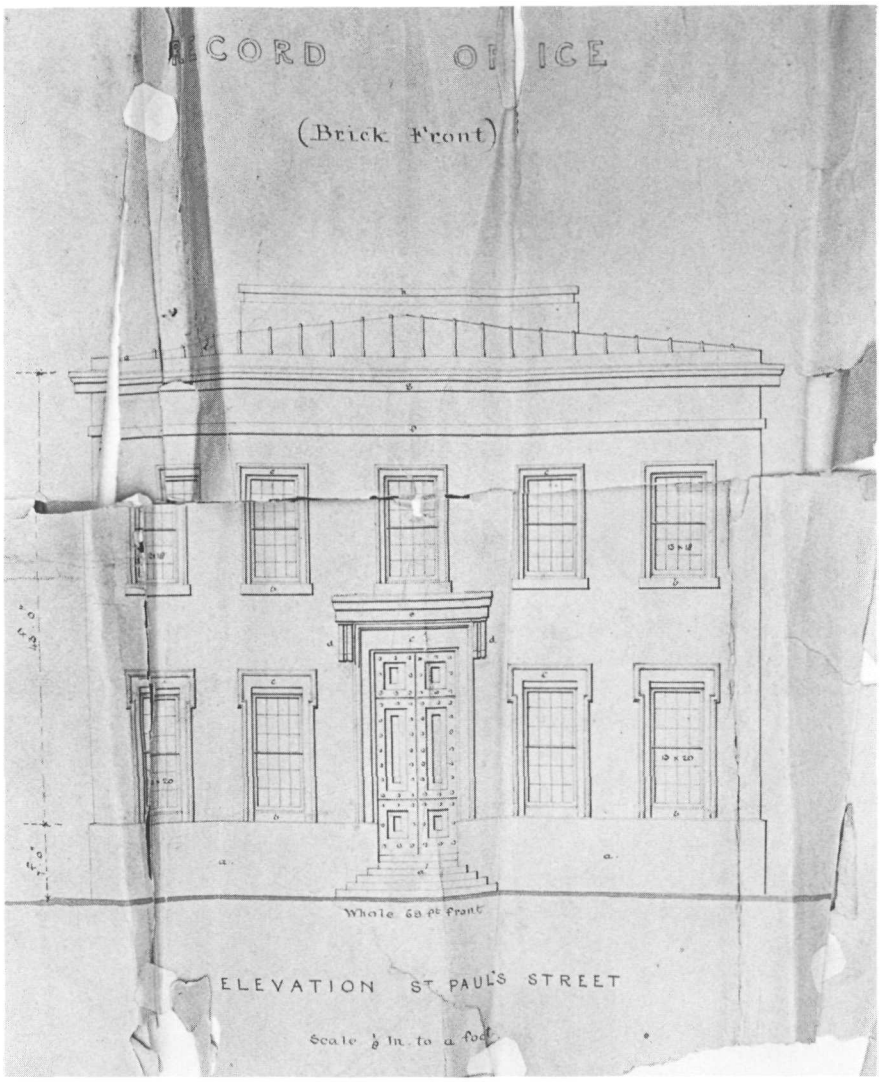

Figure 2 *Baltimore City Archives*
Front elevation of the "Egyptian style" Baltimore Record Office, by Robert Cary Long, 1837.

The city's investment of nearly $75,000[8] for the building revealed a concern for the preservation of the records. Until after the Civil War the construction of the Record Office represented the single major manifestation of this concern. In the 1840s the extent of new records legislation involved the recopying of some

[7] *Minutes,* 25 March, 3 July, and 7 July 1835, and 6 August 1839, MS. 69, MdHi. Robert Cary Long to the Commissioners for Repairing the Court House, 16 December 1839, MS. 69, MdHi.
[8] *Minutes,* 1 June 1840, MS. 69, MdHi.

worn volumes, the sale of "all the waste and useless papers about the City Hall," and the hiring of watchmen to safeguard the Record Office.[9] John B. Seiden-Stricker, president of the Second Branch of the City Council, in 1853 labelled the City Hall a "miserable shanty" and noted further that the "accumulation of documents, now largely increased every year, are altogether unsafe, for so poorly constructed are the walls of the building that they offer but a trifling means of protection against fire."[10]

The problem was a restriction of the concept of record care to merely "security and safety," as stated in the 1835 petition. There was little thought about the need for systematic collection, cataloging, and publication, or about the historical significance of the documents. The city register complained to the mayor that "many important papers were indiscriminately united with others of no importance," that there was neither staff nor funds to care for the records adequately, and that the records although "securely deposited" were in a "delapidated condition."[11]

The creation of the city librarian's office in 1874 was a significant move toward records preservation. The importance of that office's responsibility was underscored by a bloom of interest in the city's history, gaining the attention even of the urban bureaucrats. Mayor Joshua Vansant, at the formal dedication of Baltimore's new "fireproof" City Hall in 1875 belabored the point with a politician's flair:

> The erection of this new and splendid structure, which we this day dedicate, and the collection and depositing therein of the musty records of the city which had passed from garret to garret of the various buildings which the corporation of Baltimore had from time to time occupied, and much of which was covered in piles of dirt and rubbish because there was no proper depository for them, nor any one whose especial duty it was to protect them, has enabled the excellent Librarian of the city to collect many records that are, at least, interesting as matters of history.[12]

But the city library was created primarily for administrative and legislative reference, and in addition the librarian was to "take under his charge and keeping all the books and documents of every description, and the archives, records, papers and proceedings of the corporation."[13] The city librarian was overworked. It was not until 1876 that he was granted an assistant, whose main responsibilities involved bookkeeping, not archival projects.[14] The librarian spent much of his time on special assignments, such as an inventory of municipal property.[15] For both 1876 and 1877 the librarian described the records as "a confused mass" and noted his futile efforts to cope with the situation.[16]

Nonetheless, an increased usage of the records by the "various departments of the City Government and citizens generally" was noted.[17] In 1879 the librarian suggested the levying of a fee: "If the information is valuable to a person, there

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[9] Baltimore, Resolution 34 (1845); Resolution 88 (1846); and Resolution 13 (1847).

[10] *The City Hall, Baltimore: History of Construction and Dedication* (Baltimore: Mayor and City Council, 1877), p. 11.

[11] Jesse Hunt to James O. Law, 14 March 1844, Document 1844–268, Baltimore City Archives.

[12] Ordinance 129 (1874). [13] *The City Hall, Baltimore,* p. 97.

[14] Ordinance 112 (1876). [15] Resolution 269 (1876).

[16] *Mayor's Message,* 1877, pp. 803–8, and 1878, pp. 768–69. [17] Ibid., 1879, p. 93.

can be no objection to paying a fee; and it will furthermore prevent many who, from idle curiosity, consume time."[18] Samuel S. Smith, the librarian in 1882, aptly depicted the daily routine of his office:

> During office hours, almost all the time of myself and assistant is taken up with the active duties pertaining to the library, filling orders for stationery, etc., searching for papers and documents that are called for from time to time, and giving information to city officers and the general public whenever required to do so. While not thus actively engaged, our spare time is devoted to arranging, indexing, and carefully filing away, in chronological order, all papers and documents in my charge, so that they may be quickly and easily referred to at any time.[19]

By 1889 over five thousand persons a year visited the library, and the librarian succinctly stated that its "growing business . . . makes it out of the question to properly arrange and store away many valuable documents."[20]

Despite the seriousness of the problem, the city officials responded slowly. In 1878 and 1879 small sums were allocated for repairs to a few records, but no funds were earmarked for the use of the librarian.[21] Several years later librarian Smith received more than enough money for stationery, but still not one cent for the most basic record repair—rebinding.[22] But in 1883 he asked for $2,000 to buy a collection of maps because of their significance "in many questions so constantly arising concerning old boundaries, names, drainage, etc., to say nothing of the question of good taste, in preserving these successive footprints of our city's march along the path of progress, civilization and wealth."[23] The librarian's appeals to both the political value of the documents and to civic pride were propitious, for he was able to purchase the collection and had little difficulty thereafter in acquiring needed, albeit modest, funding.[24]

In 1890 George C. Wedderburn, journalist and businessman, became city librarian. He had had a bit of pertinent experience as assistant doorkeeper and superintendent of the Document Room of the United States House of Representatives from 1880 to 1882.[25] He immediately opened fire on his predecessor, noting angrily that "there has never been otherwise a catalogue, record or index of any of the . . . books and papers in the custody of this department." He began to rectify this at once and requested two additional assistants to enable him to accomplish the task.[26]

Improvements soon became noticeable in the librarian's office. The city approved the then-huge sum of $3,850 for record repair after the report of Wedderburn that "many old and valuable original historical documents . . . are going to wreck."[27] During 1891 he was able to preserve nearly five hundred municipal maps by "mounting them upon muslin, nearly every one of which were in a dirty and dilapidated condition, while many were in several pieces and unfit for reference."[28]

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[18] Ibid., 1888, pp. 495–98. See also ibid., 1880, pp. 1047–48. [19] Ibid., 1883, p. 488.
[20] Ibid., 1890, p. 1073. [21] Ordinance 225 (1878); Resolution 16 (1879).
[22] *Mayor's Message,* 1882, pp. 836–64. [23] Ibid., 1884, pp. 1105–6.
[24] Ibid., 1885, pp. 1409–11; Resolution 29 (1885); Resolution 185 (1886); *Mayor's Message,* 1886, pp. 1409–12, and 1888, pp. 309–11.
[25] Biographical sketch in the Dielman File of the MdHi. [26] *Mayor's Message,* 1891, pp. 372–76.
[27] Ibid., p. 376; Resolution 180 (1891). [28] *Mayor's Message,* 1892, pp. 388–89.

Soon Wedderburn's primary goal became the arousal of the local government's conscience regarding the care of its historical records. In summing up a previous year's work, he requested the division of responsibility between the more mundane administrative burdens such as printing and stationery supply and the care of the archives. "The archives and records are public property," he declared, "and I most respectfully ask that their condition be looked into, or else that a special committee upon the library be appointed."[29] In succeeding years he further requested the publishing of the early records[30] and the establishment of a fund for the purchase of books and manuscripts important to the city's history.[31] Probably due to Wedderburn's influence, the new city courthouse had its largest single allotment of space set aside for record storage.[32] Wedderburn's final report of 1895 carefully summarized his efforts of the previous six years in the direction of better record care and, once again, he requested firmly that some substantial action be taken by the municipal government; it was obvious by this time that he believed little had been accomplished.[33]

Wedderburn's successor agreed that little had been done. The new librarian, George W. McCreary, was shocked to discover the absence of a catalog, permitting access only by "a number of lists or by relying on the memory."[34] For the next seven years he devoted himself to establishing a catalog for as many of the records as possible.[35] The wider vision of a full archival program, such as Wedderburn had pushed for, was lost. McCreary emphasized the purely administrative functions of his office.[36]

The city library began a dramatic transformation in 1903 when a young city journalist, Wilbur F. Coyle, assumed the post of librarian. In his first report he announced his intention to fight for better preservation of the archives of the city. "The 'carnival of confusion' is being added to and aggravated yearly," Coyle wrote, "and the problem just how to attack the dirty heap is becoming more vexed."[37] Coyle did not hesitate. He began with the purchase of filing boxes—6,500 in 1905 alone—steel cabinets, and historical reference works, and he undertook the systematic ransacking of all the offices of the government for historical treasures.[38] And treasures he discovered. In 1908, in a closet "designed as a repository of overcoats and hats," he found papers of George Washington, John Adams, and James Madison.[39]

Coyle's major contributions to the evolution of the city library was his stress on its value as an historical repository. "The City Library is unique," he wrote. "It is a historical library of Baltimore for Baltimoreans, of Maryland for Marylanders,

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[29] Ibid., 1893, p. 361. [30] Ibid., 1894, p. 388. [31] Ibid., 1895, p. 357.

[32] This was 13,080 of 79,889 square feet. See *Instructions for Architects in Preparing Plans in Competition for a New Court House to be Erected in the City of Baltimore, Maryland* . . . (Baltimore: Guggenheimer, Weil and Co., 1893).

[33] *Mayor's Message,* 1896, pp. 171–74. [34] Ibid., 1897, pp. 207–8.

[35] Ibid., 1898, p. 1067–8; 1899, pp. 850–51; and 1901, p. 4.

[36] Ibid., 1900, p. 7. This sort of perspective was generally reflected in the description of the office as found in the city's new charter of 1898. Although his archival duties were listed first, they consisted mostly of seeing that a full set of records were available and information from them generally available. Thomas G. Hayes, ed., *The New Charter of Baltimore City* (Baltimore: Guggenheimer, Weil, and Co., 1898), pp. 111–14.

[37] *Reports of the City Officers and Departments Made to the City Council of Baltimore* (Baltimore: Public Printer, 1904), City Librarian's Report, p. 3.

[38] Ibid. (1906), p. 6; (1907), p. 6; and (1908), pp. 3, 6. [39] Ibid. (1909), pp. 3–4.

and it should never be anything else." He was convinced that Baltimore knew little of itself, and he was determined to correct this. To that end he installed a permanent print gallery of Baltimore scenes, saying, "This collection is not art; it is history. It represents the 'Baltimore of yesterday,' not the Baltimore of today; just a glimpse through the spectacles of the past."[40]

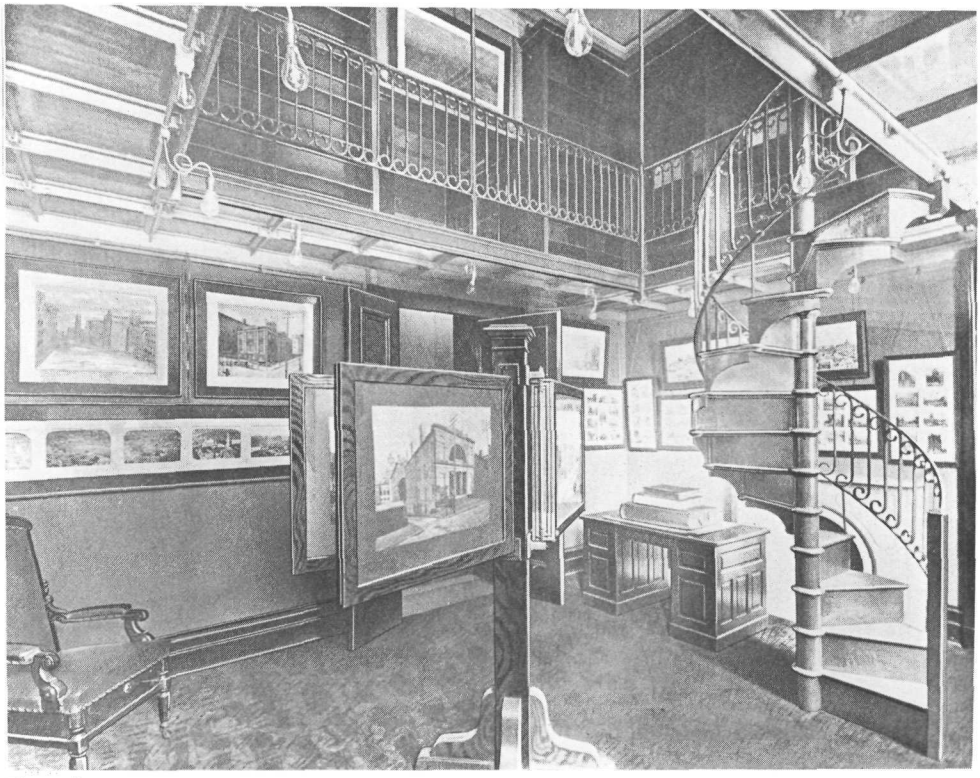

Figure 3
Exhibition at the City Library, 1908, from Catalogue of Exhibits at the City Library, City Hall, Baltimore *(n.p., 1908).*

Coyle succeeded even in bringing the municipal archives to the public. In 1916 he published an article in the *Municipal Journal* entitled, "Preservation of Historical Data and Official Records of the City a Function of City Library," and outlined the importance of the institution for understanding the city's past. In his article he congratulated himself on his own success in persuading publishers to devote more space to Baltimore in school histories and geographies, and his steady supplying of facts and illustrations to publishers.[41] Even more significant was his overseeing the editing of four volumes of early city records between 1905 and 1909. Their purpose was to preserve the records and to make them far more accessible to the increasing research demands.[42] Even today these volumes remain the only systematic effort at the publication of Baltimore's archives.

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[40] Ibid. (1910), pp. 3,6. [41] This article was reprinted in ibid. (1916), pp. 4–10.

[42] *First Records of Baltimore Town and Jones' Town, 1729–1797* (1905); *Records of the City of Baltimore (City Commissioners) 1797–1813* (Baltimore: City Library, 1906); *Records of the City of Baltimore Eastern Precincts Commissioners, 1812–1817; Western Precincts Commissioners, 1810–1817* (Baltimore: City Library, 1909); *Records of the City of Baltimore (Supplement), 1729–1813* (Baltimore: City Library, 1909).

In 1920 Wilbur F. Coyle resigned as head of the city library after having established it as a strong, efficient operation. An article in a local newspaper just before his retirement lavished praise on him, noting his energetic style and ability to establish standards in the office.[43]

The new librarian, John A. Slowik, was not the equal of his predecessor.[44] In 1926 a controversy erupted over the need for the office, the argument being that the position had been since its creation a "fat piece of political pie," normally given to political allies. As a result, the Bureau of Archives was created in the following year, relegating the city library (finally abolished in 1932) to a secondary administrative position within the Department of Legislative Reference. The purchasing and maintenance of stationery and printing was placed in a separate division, allowing the restoration of the library to the "main purpose for which it was originally established[:] . . . to keep under the control of this department books, documents, pictures, plats, maps . . . pertaining to Baltimore from its inception." The Bureau of Archives had as its objective the preservation of the city's records.[45] An archives expert was brought in for a preliminary study to establish an effective program.[46] Baltimore, seemingly, had entered the modern period. Such was not the case. The Baltimore city archives disintegrated into a morass through mishandling and lack of direction, until by the 1970s it was an archives in name only.

The process of decline was by no means even or rapid. In the late 1930s the regular staff of the archives was assisted by as many as six workers of the Historical Records Survey of the Works Progress Administration.[47] The result of this work was about twelve hundred detailed worksheets completed by 1942, when HRS ended.[48] These worksheets, representing the efforts of at least twenty different catalogers, clearly picture a vast, disorganized mass of records. There were over two hundred boxes of cancelled checks for only one decade (1917–26), indicating that these records had not been weeded or examined for historical and administrative values.

During World War II, the primary concern was to safeguard the records from air raids, but the shuffling of records from warehouse to warehouse did attract attention from the press.[49] A caustic editorial summarized ably the problem:

> The preservation of these records is due as much to luck as to good management. The city has had a Bureau of Archives only about fifteen years, and it leads a piteous; Cinderella-like existence. Its drab life is spent in the cellar of the Courthouse, the attic and cellar of the City Hall and (unhappiest part of all) the Ridgely Street garage of the Bureau of Street Cleaning. As permanent staff it has a lone archivist, whose solitude is broken only by the visits of municipal laborers when someone decides that records shall be moved from cellar to attic or back again to cellar.[50]

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[43] Baltimore *Sun,* 1 October 1919, in City Library File of the Maryland Department, Enoch Pratt Free Library (hereafter cited as EPFL).

[44] *Mayor's Message,* 1925, p. 152; and 1927, p. 191.

[45] Augustus C. Binswangler, ed., *Facts and Figures, Maps, Charts, and Graphs, and VIIth Quadrennial Message from Mayor William F. Broening to IInd Unicameral City Council, With Reports from All City Agencies* (Baltimore: n.p., 1932), pp. 38, 40.

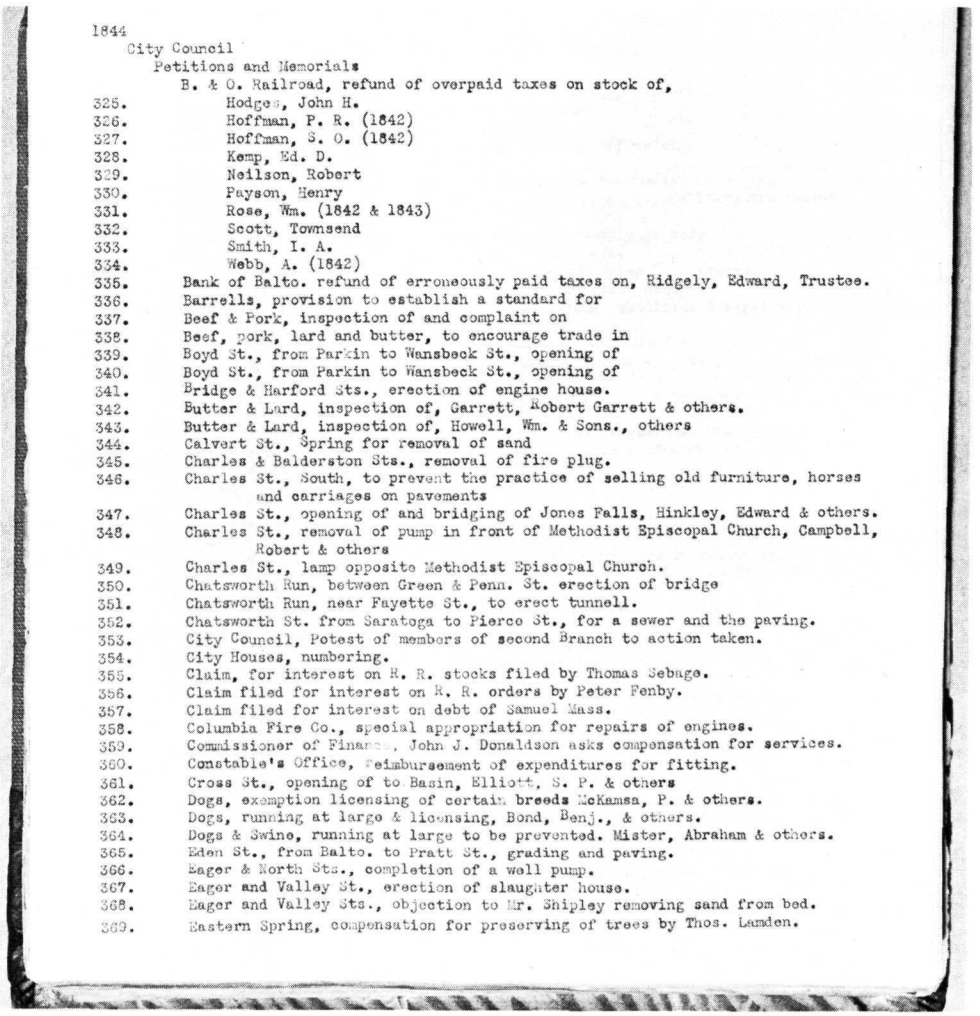
[46] Baltimore Archives File, EPFL, Baltimore *Sun,* 1927.

[47] Baltimore *Sun,* 22 April 1937.

[48] These worksheets are in the Hall of Records in Annapolis.

[49] Baltimore *Evening Sun,* 12 March and 25 May 1942; Baltimore *Sun,* 26 May 1942.

[50] Baltimore *Sun,* 13 February 1944.



1844
City Council
Petitions and Memorials
B. & O. Railroad, refund of overpaid taxes on stock of,
325. Hodges, John H.
326. Hoffman, P. R. (1842)
327. Hoffman, S. O. (1842)
328. Kemp, Ed. D.
329. Neilson, Robert
330. Payson, Henry
331. Rose, Wm. (1842 & 1843)
332. Scott, Townsend
333. Smith, I. A.
334. Webb, A. (1842)
335. Bank of Balto. refund of erroneously paid taxes on, Ridgely, Edward, Trustee.
336. Barrells, provision to establish a standard for
337. Beef & Pork, inspection of and complaint on
338. Beef, pork, lard and butter, to encourage trade in
339. Boyd St., from Parkin to Wansbeck St., opening of
340. Boyd St., from Parkin to Wansbeck St., opening of
341. Bridge & Harford Sts., erection of engine house.
342. Butter & Lard, inspection of, Garrett, Robert Garrett & others.
343. Butter & Lard, inspection of, Howell, Wm. & Sons., others
344. Calvert St., Spring for removal of sand
345. Charles & Balderston Sts., removal of fire plug.
346. Charles St., South, to prevent the practice of selling old furniture, horses and carriages on pavements
347. Charles St., opening of and bridging of Jones Falls, Hinkley, Edward & others.
348. Charles St., removal of pump in front of Methodist Episcopal Church, Campbell, Robert & others
349. Charles St., lamp opposite Methodist Episcopal Church.
350. Chatsworth Run, between Green & Penn. St. erection of bridge
351. Chatsworth Run, near Fayette St., to erect tunnell.
352. Chatsworth St. from Saratoga to Pierce St., for a sewer and the paving.
353. City Council, Potest of members of second Branch to action taken.
354. City Houses, numbering.
355. Claim, for interest on R. R. stocks filed by Thomas Sebage.
356. Claim filed for interest on R. R. orders by Peter Fenby.
357. Claim filed for interest on debt of Samuel Mass.
358. Columbia Fire Co., special appropriation for repairs of engines.
359. Commissioner of Finances, John J. Donaldson asks compensation for services.
360. Constable's Office, Reimbursement of expenditures for fitting.
361. Cross St., opening of to Basin, Elliott, S. P. & others
362. Dogs, exemption licensing of certain breeds McKamsa, P. & others.
363. Dogs, running at large & licensing, Bond, Benj., & others.
364. Dogs & Swine, running at large to be prevented. Mister, Abraham & others.
365. Eden St., from Balto. to Pratt St., grading and paving.
366. Eager & North Sts., completion of a well pump.
367. Eager and Valley St., erection of slaughter house.
368. Eager and Valley Sts., objection to Mr. Shipley removing sand from bed.
369. Eastern Spring, compensation for preserving of trees by Thos. Lamden.

Figure 4
Page of the index of the Baltimore City Archives by the Historical Records Survey.

This editorial was but the first in a series. A 1947 editorial in the Baltimore *Evening Sun* complained of "shocking neglect" of the records, urging that something be done. The editorial was in part a reaction to a lengthy article of the same day in the *Sun* describing the "dirt-covered, water-soaked, tattered and in many instances completely illegible" records of the municipality.[51] The Maryland Historical Society or Maryland Hall of Records were suggested as proper agencies to take care of the city government's historical records. At least one supporting resolution came from the Old Town Merchants and Manufacturing Association.[52] The mayor responded within six months by appointing a Committee for Safeguarding City Records, a committee which emphasized the microfilming of vital

[51] Baltimore *Evening Sun* and Baltimore *Sun,* 18 November 1947.
[52] Baltimore *Sun,* 19 November 1947; Baltimore *Evening Sun,* 20–21 November 1947.

documents for security, essentially, and to reduce the vast bulk of paper.[53] Funds were shifted from other areas, primarily from the area of civil defense, to support this work.

Nonetheless, by 1952 it was obvious that the program was not keeping pace with record accumulation. In 1953 a private firm, Records Engineering, Inc., was hired at the cost of $55,000 to establish specific guidelines for solving the records problem.[54]

The immediate result of this study was an immense report, and the creation in 1954 of a records management program modeled partly on state practices. The enabling legislation of this program suggested a heavy emphasis on the resolution of the current records problems and a minor caretaking program for historical records.[55] The new records management officer, C. Frank Poole, stated that the purpose of this new program was "the orderly and systematic disposal of departmental records in accordance with approved retention schedules," and that the major value of the new bureau was the "reduction of accumulated records which are of no further use and the proper retention for necessary records."[56] The published reports of the records management officer, 1955 to 1972, show virtually an identical emphasis year after year—microfilming, the destruction of unneeded documents, and the completion of retention schedules. Thus the single major innovation in the city archives since its creation hardly included the municipal historical records.

What was accomplished with the archives was probably due to the influence of Wilbur H. Hunter, the director of the Municipal Museum (commonly known as the Peale Museum) since 1946. His signature was required on retention schedules adopted by the records management staff to insure that valuable historical records were not discarded. Hunter served also as consultant on a 1961 project, employing two graduate students to weed and organize the mayoral records of the city.[57] Nothing comparable to the work of the HRS program of 1935–42 was undertaken. In the late 1970s newspaper articles were still lamenting that the "historical archives are in a mess."[58]

The greatest reason for the aborted development of the Baltimore city archives was that until the most recent years no interest was generated from outside the municipal government. Elected public officials cannot be totally blamed for the plight of municipal archives. Professional archivists and historians generally do not run for public office, and before 1976 there was a consistent pattern of apathy, broken by periodic waves of concern, on the part of historians, antiquarians, archivists, and the general public. It was not accidental that the founding of the city library and the beginning of the evolution toward a municipal archives coincided with the first awakening of Baltimore's historical consciousness during the 1870s. In that decade John Thomas Scharf wrote two mammoth histories (which

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[53] Baltimore *Sun*, 8 June 1948.

[54] Minutes of the Board of Estimates, Baltimore City Archives, 19 September and 17 October 1951; 7 May and 4 June 1952; and 13 May, 22 May, 10 June, and 26 August 1953.

[55] The Maryland Department of the Enoch Pratt Free Library has the thirty-one reports of Records Engineering, Inc., 1953–54. The enabling legislation was Ordinance 1096 (1954).

[56] *Records Management Annual Report*, 1955 (n.p., n.d.), p. 1.

[57] C. Frank Poole, "Screening the Papers of Baltimore's Mayors," *American Archivist* 25 (April 1962): 219–22.

[58] Baltimore *Sun*, 30 January and 1 February 1976, 1 March 1977, and 4 January 1978.

have remained the standard works) and initiated the week-long historical festival of 1880 honoring the city's first century and a half.[59] The sesquicentennial mood stimulated the production of special commemorative histories, festivals, monuments, and murals. However, it failed to produce serious scholarly historical works, nothing, at least, that would encourage more than sporadic articles and editorials about the poor condition of the municipal records. Even the existence of the Maryland Historical Society and the Maryland Hall of Records, and the pioneering of the history graduate school of the Johns Hopkins University failed to provide much assistance in this regard.

A renewed interest in Baltimore's history has surfaced in the 1970s. An outpouring of genealogical articles and books; a strong concern for historic preservation (led by the city's Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, created in 1954 and supported by the excellent homesteading program); conferences in 1975 and 1978 at the Maryland Historical Society devoted exclusively to the city's history; numerous dissertations on the subject; and the formation of such groups as the Baltimore History Research Group (1975) and the Baltimore Congress for Local Records and History (1976), all attest to this.[60] There is now a large and strong community to support and use the Baltimore city archives.

The creation of the position of city archivist in 1978 was an outgrowth of this new historical awareness. A grant proposal submitted in early 1977 to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission was rejected because the city lacked a trained archivist to administer the program requested.[61] After my own appointment the following year, a grant was obtained from the NHPRC to arrange and inventory the mayoral and city council records. Besides this, changes in the original enabling legislation have been made to strengthen the archival program,[62] a student intern program has commenced, and other grant requests have been formulated.

Whether or not the Baltimore city archives will ever be a significant success is, of course, undetermined. The signs are positive at this time. At least, steps are being taken to resolve the plight of one municipal archives.

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[59] Thomas Waters Griffith, *Annals of Baltimore* (Baltimore William Wooddy, 1824); Robert Purviance, *A Narrative of Events Which Occurred in Baltimore Town During the Revolutionary War* (Baltimore: Joseph Robinson, 1849); John Thomas Scharf, *The Chronicles of Baltimore; Being a Complete History of "Baltimore Town" and Baltimore City from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Baltimore: Turnbull Brothers, 1874) and *History of Baltimore City and County from the Earliest Period to the Present Day: Including Biographical Sketches of the Representative Men* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881); and Edward Spencer, ed., *An Account of the Municipal Celebration of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Settlement of Baltimore, October 11th–19th, 1880, With a Sketch of the History, and Summary of the Resources of the City* (Baltimore: Mayor and City Council, 1881).

[60] The vast new interest in Maryland and Baltimore history can be seen in my annual bibliographies, "A Bibliography of Books and Articles on Maryland History, 1974," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 70 (Summer 1975): 211–23; " . . . 1975," ibid. 71 (Fall 1976): 449–64; " . . . 1976," ibid. 72 (Summer 1977): 288–314; " . . . 1977," ibid. 73 (September 1978): 280–90; and "A Selected List of Recent Dissertations on Maryland History, 1970–1976," ibid. 73 (June 1978): 180–85. A number of the papers of the 1975 Baltimore conference were published in the Fall 1976 issue of the *Maryland Historical Magazine.* For the CHAP legislation, see Ordinance 229 (1964), and for a description of the homesteading program refer to James W. Hughes and Kenneth D. Bleakly, Jr., *Urban Homesteading* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers University, 1975), chapter 4.

[61] Frank G. Burke to Mayor William Donald Schaefer and H. Mebane Turner, 29 June 1977; copy in author's possession.

[62] Ordinance 916 (1978).