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T H E N E E D F O R A N O F F I C I A L S Y S T E M
O F H I S T O R I C A L H I G H W A Y M A R K E R S
T H R O U G H O U T M A R Y L A N D

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE CASE
FOR STATE PARTICIPATION IN AND CONTROL OF
THE ERECTION OF HISTORICAL PLACE MARKERS ON MARYLAND'S HIGHWAYS,
DESIGNED TO STIMULATE LOCAL INTEREST IN MARYLAND'S HISTORY AND
TO FURNISH INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE TO VISITORS.

Submitted to His Excellency,
The Honorable Albert C. Ritchie,
Governor of Maryland

On Behalf of:

The Committee on County Celebrations, Routes & Houses,
Maryland Commission on the Celebration of the 200th
Anniversary of the Birth of George Washington.
Maryland State Game & Fish Protective Association.
Sportsmen's Luncheon Club of Baltimore.
The Southern Maryland Society.
The Automobile Club of Maryland.
The Advertising Club of Baltimore.
The Rotary Club of Baltimore.
The Gavel Club of Baltimore.
The Traffic Club of Baltimore.
The Sovereign Club of Baltimore.
Baltimore Export Manager's Club.
The Baltimore Association of Commerce.

To the Honorable Albert C. Ritchie, Governor of Maryland:

There is growing throughout Maryland a realization that many of the most attractive features and finest traditions of the State are not properly appreciated either by visitors or by the newer generations of Marylanders. Our investigations into this matter, coupled with comparisons of similar situations in neighboring states and the methods adopted in those states to improve the condition, lead us to urge upon you the serious consideration of the discussion and proposal contained in this brief.

Maryland's History - A Splendid Asset - Should be
Kept Before the Public Eye.

Maryland - rich in its three hundred years of romantic history - is often unappreciated by visitors because hundreds of points of historic interest are unmarked and unnoted and so remain largely unknown to the stranger. For generations, these shrines of early American history have been customarily taken as a matter of course by the native, hardly worthy of frequent comment, even if he is thoroughly familiar with these interesting features of his neighborhood. Worse than this, we find that much of our State's history, recorded only in musty tomes, is passing into legend and becoming distorted in the public mind or is forgotten and ignored even by our own people.

A Promising Beginning

In preparation for the Maryland State Celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of George Washington, the Committee on County Celebrations, Routes, and Houses of the official Commission for that cele-

bration came to realize fully the importance to the State of awakening and refreshing a new public interest in her history, her shrines and her natural beauties. Accordingly, under the leadership of Mr. J. Alexis Shriver as Chairman, this committee, which included Mrs. Edward Shoemaker, Dr. Arthur B. Bibbins, Messrs. J. Spence Howard and Ernest J. Clark, began work in July, 1931 and has devoted much effort to a campaign, conducted through carefully selected county committees and eminently successful within its limits, to appropriately mark some of the leading points of historical interest throughout the State.

By interesting local groups and individuals in nine counties, namely, Allegany, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Frederick, Harford, Kent, Montgomery and Prince George's, subscriptions and contributions were secured for the erection of fifty-one iron-aluminum alloy roadside "place" markers of a uniform and attractive design, each bearing an appropriate inscription commemorating some place or incident of historical significance in the neighborhood, and surmounted by the Maryland coat-of-arms in colors.

In addition, forty-nine small metal markers bearing the inscription: "GEORGE WASHINGTON TRAVELED THIS ROAD" and surmounted by an equestrian figure of Washington in gilt, have been erected at various points along the more than five hundred miles of Washington's "trails" throughout Maryland.

While pleased with the response secured by this movement, Mr. Shriver states that his investigations have convinced him that Maryland should have a minimum of 500 standard roadside iron historical "place" markers of approved official design and not less than one hundred additional smaller markers indicating Washington's journeys over Maryland's highways.

Virginia's Experience.

In planning this work, Mr. Shriver visited Virginia and conferred with Mr. William E. Carson, Chairman of the Virginia State Commission on Conservation and Development, which, through its Division of History and Archaeology, has been for five years engaged in a carefully organized work of adequately "writing Virginia's history in iron" for the benefit of the native population, of the visitor and of posterity.

A review of what Virginia has done in this matter is apropos and interesting.

According to Mr. Carson:

"Three centuries of history, since the first landing at Jamestown, years before the arrival of the tardier but more efficiently press-agented Pilgrim Fathers at Plymouth Rock, have richly endowed every section of Virginia, North, South, East, and West, with a wealth of historic associations and a background of historic names and deeds. But, many of these through the lapse of time and for lack of permanent, authentic, and localized monuments and records, have begun to take on the form of shadowy legends; and, day by day, and year by year, some of them, at least, are losing their well defined outlines as actual historic events, incidents, characters, localities, and names, vitally significant in the history of the State and Nation.

"To conserve the memory of the great deeds and names of the past, to nurture State pride, to educate the children of the Commonwealth, and to add very materially to the interest and attractiveness of our public roads, every place of historic note in Virginia is now being sought out by the Archaeological Bureau of our Commission, and its story is being told on near-by roadside markers in pursuance of a carefully developed plan adopted by the Commission about three years ago.

"When we first announced our somewhat unique proposal of a State wide project for the erection, at the expense of the State, of roadside markers carrying records, chronicles, and narratives of local, state, and national history, we were subjected to the usual fire of adverse criticism, and we were charged with the wasteful and useless expenditure of public funds on a purely sentimental undertaking of no practical benefit to the taxpayer or the State.

"But as the work unfolded and progressed, many of our sharpest critics became our warmest advocates; and, so far as I know, there is not a dissenting voice in Virginia today. In fact, I know of no recent movement or undertaking in Virginia which has earned such widespread and enthusiastic approbation or such generous and popular support and endorsement from men of all kinds and conditions, and of every class and trade and profession.

"This work is being done through what is known as the Historical and Archaeological Bureau of the State Commission on Conservation and Development, created expressly for this purpose. And the results thus far secured have been so altogether worth while, and the work has been done with such efficiency and sympathetic understanding of our objectives, that it is now proposed to make this Bureau a permanent branch of the State Government.

"We have become thoroughly convinced that there is no more fruitful activity in the field of State Conservation than the faithful compilation and preservation of the annals of the history of the State, and the promotion of public and private plans for the conservation and the restoration of her historic shrines, so many of which fell into ruin and decay in the fifty years of straitened public and private finances following the ravages of the Civil War.

"The South stands today on the threshold of a great industrial movement; and her ablest leaders are bending every effort toward the natural and logical development of her great material resources, and the exploitation, long delayed, through adventitious and artificial causes, of her unequalled climatic and geographic advantages in the race for industrial empire.

"But in the struggle for commercial and industrial supremacy there is a very real danger that with the advent of the ubiquitous Babbitts and irrepressible Go Getters of modern business, our people and their leaders may lose sight of one of the South's chiefest assets - unique and invaluable from a spiritual, and in many unexpected ways also from a material point of view - her great historical background, and the traditions of the colonial, revolutionary, and civil war periods of her history.

"To guard against this threatened danger there is a very real need for firmly anchored agencies with the prestige and dignity of your own great Historical Societies; and we have become convinced that all such patriotic associations should have the support and cooperation of a permanent Bureau or Department of the State, adequately financed by the State, to serve as an every day working agency to develop and maintain carefully worked out programs for the conservation, preservation and restoration of the historic treasures of the state.

"Just a word about the type of markers we have adopted. When the question arose as to what type of marker we should use, we studied

the problem as we would any other difficult business proposition; and we made a most careful and exhaustive survey and study of the different types of markers in use elsewhere, and the arguments in favor of each. We felt that our purely historical markers should be informative rather than monumental. The purpose of these markers should be, primarily, to convey the information to the public. The markers will usually be located on public highways, and they should be adapted to the need of the highways, that is to say, to automobile traffic. They should, therefore, be legible for a substantial distance. Reasonably legible from moving automobiles for a distance of from seventy-five to two hundred feet. And the headline or caption, at least, should be readable from an automobile moving at 25 miles per hour. We found that legibility depends upon the size and shape of the lettering; the color contrast between letter and background; the spacing and height of inscription. We made a study as to color, spacing and height; we felt that we should have a design wherein competition with advertising signs and billboards would be minimized by the character and design of the marker.

"The material for the marker should be durable, both as to the tablet and the legibility of the inscription; we are spending too much money on our historical research and the physical set-up of these markers to permit them to fall quickly into decay, become illegible or lost. They should also be able to stand rough, and at times malicious treatment without serious damage.

"We carefully considered the materials to be used, and we examined proposed markers of wood, vitrified iron, molded iron with painted letters, molded aluminum alloy with raised letters, bronze, concrete and stone.

"Wood, we promptly eliminated. Stone we next considered but found its cost and lack of legibility make it impracticable. We discarded vitrified iron because of the ease with which the enamel may be chipped off; it seems to be essentially a short-lived marker. Molded iron with painted letters we found very serviceable.

"After careful consideration from every angle we adopted the molded iron with raised and painted letters as the best all round marker. These metal markers stand on a very stout iron post or support, and have the same wording on each side. They are placed at right angles to the highway so as to be read by travelers moving in either direction. This position presents the largest surface of the marker to the traveler and gives him the largest and longest possible view of the inscription. Markers parallel to the road are of low visibility and can only be read from a standing position. The difference in visibility is so great as to eliminate consideration of any but the double-faced markers.

"The tablet and post must be permanently united and practically inseparable. A swinging tablet, erected as an experiment, disappeared almost overnight, sunk without a trace. We have never discovered what became of it. All we know is that several automobile parties of students, on the way to or from a football

game, passed by the site of our swinging marker on the evening of its disappearance - and we suspect that it now occupies a place of honor among the trophies, or perhaps in the mystic chamber of horrors, of some college fraternity house."

With the change in methods of travel and the substitution of automobiles for slower vehicles, the Civil War period bronze tablet placed close to the ground does not attract the attention of travelers as do the markers evolved by the State of Virginia.

Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey and Massachusetts have already adopted plans similar to Virginia's and are at present engaged in marking, for historical purposes, their historic highways.

Mr. Shriver also visited Mr. Edward Cooch, of the Delaware Highway and Marker Commission, in reference to the work which they are accomplishing during the present and coming year, as a result of the Delaware law for marking the historic spots in that State.

The Case Against Private Control

The good work already done by the Maryland Commission on the George Washington Bi-Centennial Celebration has brought out three important facts to be considered, viz.:

- 1 - The expense of securing the adequate marking of Maryland's historic points by private subscriptions is prohibitive. Those in charge of the work state that they could have better afforded to have personally paid \$100.00 each for the markers erected than to have invested the time, labor and travel necessary to secure the necessary subscriptions of local groups.

- 2 - From the standpoint of time consumed, the method of seeking private local contributions for this purpose is undesirable. Such methods are very slow and uncertain, in addition to being very expensive.

- 3 - From the standpoint of historical accuracy and clarity, it is not desirable to assign the responsibility for the location of the markers and the wording of the inscriptions to local groups, but this is unavoidable if the local people have charge of the project and themselves pay for the markers.

The Present Need

The work already done by the Committee on County Celebrations, Routes and Houses and their allied county groups has clearly demonstrated the value of arousing a general public interest in Maryland's history by this means and has no less clearly indicated the great need of an official, central body, with State authority behind it, to control the important process of thus re-writing Maryland's intensely interesting history in iron words along her highways, "that he who runs may read."

Mr. Shriver has listed 39 points of great historical interest in ten Maryland counties which are in urgent need of markers, but which his committee has not been able, as yet, to serve. His observation of these points has necessarily been limited, but he estimates a minimum total of 500 place markers as necessary to adequately present Maryland's history in this form to the public. Virginia has already erected a thousand such markers.

Proposal of a Plan for Maryland

We submit that an official Division of History and Archaeology, operating in close alliance with the State Roads Commission and composed, possibly, of the same excellent group who have already given much personal study, time and effort to this work, is essential to its successful completion.

As to its formation and operation, Virginia offers a ready-made plan which has been eminently successful.

In addition to the Division of History and Archaeology of the Virginia State Commission on Conservation and Development, which is actively in charge of this work, there is an advisory committee of fourteen historians located throughout the State, to whom all suggestions, for marking historic spots are referred before final adoption.

With the appointment of such an advisory group of Maryland historians and with the assistance of Mr. J. Alexis Shriver's Committee and the Convention & Visitors Section of the Baltimore Association of Commerce, all on an unpaid basis, an appropriation of \$15,000.00 per year, made to the State Roads Commission for the purpose of marking historic localities on highways in Maryland for the public information, would serve to purchase and erect approximately 200 such markers at an average cost of \$50.00 each, during each year the appropriation would be granted.

These markers, of heavy cast iron-aluminum alloy, constructed to last for many years and only needing an occasional coating of paint in order that their inscriptions, in large black type on a white background, might remain clear, distinct and arresting to the eye, would undoubtedly awaken

a finer, deeper sense of loyalty, patriotism and responsibility in the hearts of Marylanders and would greatly increase the interest and respect of all visitors for Maryland and its splendid history.

From the purely economic standpoint, if Virginia may serve as an example, the greatly increased interest of the tourist visitors would result in a handsome return on the investment. On the side of the eternal and more important intangibles, this constant reminder to our own people of the glorious traditions and records of our forefathers during the past three centuries would undoubtedly stimulate a fervor of State patriotism and pride and a heightened morale among native Marylanders that would be valuable beyond any measure of dollars and cents.

We, therefore, respectfully submit that the time is appropriate, - particularly in view of the approaching Tercentenary Anniversary Celebration of the Founding of Maryland - to expedite the proper, accurate and effective marking of the hundreds of historically important and interesting places in our State. The inaccuracy, local bias, delay, undue expense, lack of uniformity and possible trend toward the commercialization of historic shrines - which might accompany the private or community financing and control of these matters - may be avoided if the official recognition and authorization of the Governor is given to a definite, state-wide and state-sponsored plan for the proper placing of an official and uniform type of marker, (through the well-qualified agency of the State Roads Commission, aided by the enthusiastic cooperation of Maryland's leading historians and the organizations undersigned) in such numbers as seem adequate to the purpose, and if the State budget for the years

1933-34 provides an appropriation of \$15,000.00 a year for those two years to the State Roads Commission to cover the cost of purchasing and erecting the said markers.

Respectfully submitted:

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