

# Morris Leon Radoff: The Man and the Monument

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IN JUNE 1974, MORE THAN eighty historians converged on Annapolis, summoned to the campus of St. John's College by the Maryland Hall of Records to participate in the first Conference on Maryland History. Few came only to hear the twenty-five conference papers read and discussed. They were there also to hail Morris Leon Radoff, whose remarkable thirty-five year tenure as Archivist of Maryland—what one writer called the “Radovian Regime”—was coming to an end.<sup>1</sup> When he arrived in Annapolis in 1939, his domain consisted of a fairly new building, a tiny nucleus of records, and a handful of employees. When he retired, the Hall of Records had become a “small and valuable empire—a model, energy-charged, over-crowded monument to its long-time head man.”<sup>2</sup>

Leon Radoff was born 10 January 1905. “In Yew-ston,” he would have added in the broad, slow accent he deliberately retained for the rest of his life.<sup>3</sup> His father, Harry, ran a successful dry goods store. A Jewish immigrant from Russia, the senior Radoff had settled first in Pennsylvania, where a marriage was later arranged for him with Goldie Rabinovich, an intelligent young girl who was an

orthodox Jew and the daughter of a rabbi. Jewish customs were faithfully observed at home. Radoff inherited from his mother his love of learning and his wry wit, but he did not share her religious convictions. In fact, he began early to draw away from the Jewish faith, and later became an unabashed agnostic. One might trace this change to the persecution he felt as a child; he was later to relate bitter stories about having rocks thrown at him as he walked to school through Irish-Catholic neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup>

Radoff attended public school in Houston, did well academically, and enrolled at the University of Texas. He took his junior year abroad, first at the University of Grenoble and then at the Sorbonne. Travelling widely and displaying remarkable linguistic talents, he quickly learned French and Italian. He spent his final undergraduate year at the University of North Carolina, receiving his B.A. in 1926. At the urging of Howard Mumford Jones, another 1925 emigré from Texas, Radoff stayed on at Chapel Hill as a junior instructor and to study for his M.A., granted in 1927.

In 1929, attracted by Johns Hopkins University's distinguished faculty and

<sup>1</sup>James H. Bready, “Honoring Morris Radoff,” *Baltimore Evening Sun*, 10 June 1974.

<sup>2</sup>“Morris Leon Radoff,” *Baltimore Evening Sun*, 4 December 1978.

<sup>3</sup>Aubrey C. Land. Interview.

<sup>4</sup>May Conkling Radoff. Interview.

graduates, Radoff went to Baltimore to further his career in romance languages and literature. Years later he committed his memories of his university days to paper in “half a dozen sketches”; although unpublished, these sketches are “a delight to those who have seen them in manuscript form.”<sup>5</sup>

He received his Ph.D. in 1932, taught, and published articles in professional journals—all the usual prerequisites for obtaining tenure. In 1936, however, he was let go. Friends said he had been a victim of Depression economics; but Radoff always believed himself to have been a victim of anti-semitism. Johns Hopkins was looking for ways to cut back, Radoff recalled, so they fired all the untenured Jews.<sup>6</sup> We will never know whether or not his suspicions were justified; but many promising young men left Hopkins at that time. Jobless, Radoff ate ketchup soup and applied for all manner of work, eventually finding “refuge against unemployment,” like so many of his future colleagues, in the Historical Records Survey.<sup>7</sup> Working under the direction of Robert Morris, Radoff soon became an editor and, with untrained clerical help, prepared inventories of the records of Alleghany, Garrett, and Washington counties in western Maryland.

Radoff probably always intended to return to teaching, but on 16 June 1939 he became director of the Maryland Hall of Records, after the death the previous March of its first director, James Robertson, who knew Radoff and would have been pleased with the choice.<sup>8</sup>

The following October, Radoff married May Conkling, a shy, Titian-haired beauty, described by many as the “Belle of Baltimore.” The newlyweds moved first to a rented house in St. Margaret’s, near Annapolis, and two and a half years later

to the farm Radoff had always dreamed of in nearby Cape St. Claire. Although he would be tempted several times by prestigious job offers, Radoff had come to Maryland to stay.

The state of Maryland, since the seventeenth century, has been concerned about the care and preservation of its records. However, before 1935 one went to the Maryland Historical Society, the Land Office, or the Court of Appeals to study the history of Maryland, or to the county seats where records were often “ill-housed, and subject to every kind of destructive agent—including disastrous fire.” In 1882, the Assembly ordered that all colonial and Revolutionary War records be transferred to the Historical Society, in Baltimore, effectively making that society the state’s archival agency. Nearly fifty years passed before anything further was done toward establishing a central archives, and even then there was great opposition, primarily from county officers opposed to sending their records to Annapolis, and from the Land Office and the Historical Society who were reluctant to relinquish their records. Nevertheless, the Hall of Records Commission was created by Chapter 18 of the Acts of 1935 as “an *ex officio* body to collect and preserve the historical records of Maryland and to encourage research and investigation in the history of the Province and State.”<sup>9</sup> A site in Annapolis was chosen, on a corner of the St. John’s College campus; the building was opened for business in 1936.

Robertson, the first archivist, was enormously proud of the Hall of Records. A charter member of the Society of American Archivists, he was elected its vice-president and was busily preparing for its third annual meeting (in Annapolis in October 1939) when he died. During his short tenure, the Hall acquired many

<sup>5</sup>Aubrey C. Land, et al., *Law, Society and Politics in Early Maryland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), p. xi.

<sup>6</sup>Land, interview.

<sup>7</sup>Land, *Law, Society and Politics*, p. xi.

<sup>8</sup>Gust Skordas, interview.

<sup>9</sup>*First to Fourth Annual Reports of the Maryland Hall of Records*, covering 1935–39. These reports, written by Radoff in 1946, contain an excellent summary of the early history of Maryland’s archives.

valuable and ancient records from the Historical Society and the Land Office. Although of prime interest, these records formed only a small collection occupying altogether no more than a single stack level. Moreover, except for some from Anne Arundel and Baltimore County, the records had been collected from depositories rather than from their offices of origin. So, as his fourth year began, Robertson turned his attention to the counties that had the only substantial collections of early records still outside the Hall of Records.<sup>10</sup>

In that fourth year of the Hall of Records, no public records had been transferred. This was the situation on Radoff's arrival. Coming as he did, virtually at the start, his history and that of the Hall of Records coincide so closely that one can hardly be considered without the other. In addition to the building and the collection, Radoff inherited a valuable asset from the Robertson days in the person of Gust Skordas, who had come to the Hall of Records in August 1937. The two formed a team that worked closely together for thirty-one years. John Hemphill compared their relationship to that of the Army football duo, Blanchard and Davis. Radoff, said Hemphill, was *Mr. Outside* and Skordas *Mr. Inside*. The comparison was apt. Radoff attracted the scholars, and Skordas knew the collections. Radoff had the ideas, and Skordas implemented them.<sup>11</sup>

Through Skordas, the assistant archivist, we learn much about the early days of the Hall of Records. He remembers Robertson as a scholarly, elderly gentleman, very near-sighted, who for some reason had trouble establishing rapport with county clerks. Here Radoff had an advantage, and it may have been the reason he was hired. A letter from W. Stull Holt says that

"he is, moreover, a master in the art of human relations. In Anne Arundel County, where he fishes and hunts, he knows personally nearly all the farmers in large sections. This quality enabled him to secure the warm cooperation of county clerks throughout the state when the Survey was doing its field work."<sup>12</sup> Skordas, who accompanied Radoff on many of these trips, reports that Radoff charmed the records out of the clerks by promising to replace the originals with high-quality photostats. But local researchers were distressed because, with the records in Annapolis, they would have to travel by ferry across the Chesapeake Bay to consult them. The county clerks had more than a proprietary interest in their records. They were elected officials who could not afford to alienate voters by relinquishing custody of reference materials.

Gradually, however, through what Radoff called his "regular propaganda visits," they brought the records in, hampered only by wartime shortages of gasoline and tires, which sometimes made use of their station wagon impossible. Then, the records were moved a volume or two at a time by public conveyance.<sup>13</sup> In 1943, when Radoff's back gave him trouble, his wife drove until Skordas, under Radoff's tutelage, learned to drive.<sup>14</sup>

Radoff repeatedly visited all Maryland depositories of archival materials to examine their holdings and study possible division of functions. Some record custodians later accused him of "casing the joint" to locate records that he would subsequently attempt to acquire. By 1951, his reputation was such that David Mearns (then director of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress) remarked that should he disclose the actual identity of a manuscript he was discussing, "the predatory

<sup>10</sup>"Dr. Robertson, Archivist of State, Is Dead," *Baltimore Sun*, 21 March 1939; *First to Fourth Annual Reports*, pp. 36–37. Hereafter, these reports will be referred to as AR1–4; other annual reports of the Hall of Records will be referred to as AR, with the number of the report.

<sup>11</sup>Phebe Jacobsen. Interview.

<sup>12</sup>W. Stull Holt, Letter to Judge Carroll Bond, 27 March 1939. St. John's College, Annapolis, Stringfellow Barr Papers.

<sup>13</sup>AR 8, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup>May Conkling Radoff. Interview.

Radoff would surely find a way to carry it off."<sup>15</sup>

But confidence and cooperation were not earned overnight, Radoff observed; they had to be earned by good deeds. Radoff spoke at meetings of historical societies, before women's and men's groups; and he granted interviews to anyone who would listen. He was a popular speaker. Only once was an engagement cancelled—because of a war order prohibiting the use of automobiles for purposes of pleasure. "The members of the club," said Radoff, "held that the archivist's speech would fall into the category of pleasures specifically banned."<sup>16</sup>

In May 1940 he spoke before the Carroll County Historical Society, emphasizing the Hall's restoration and repair work and mentioning that the Hall of Records provided space for records without cost—the counties still had title and could have them returned at any time.<sup>17</sup> When, in July 1940, one of the original sponsors of the Hall of Records project organized a fight to keep valuable Frederick County records from being moved to Annapolis, Radoff went into high gear.<sup>18</sup> A two-column reply in the *Frederick Daily News* refuted her objections point by point and appealed to the patriotic sentiments of the people of Frederick County.<sup>19</sup> In November, Radoff held for them a demonstration of repair and crepe-lining techniques,<sup>20</sup> and by December all records (with the exception of the one containing the Stamp Act Repudiation) were sent to Annapolis.<sup>21</sup>

In 1944, after several articles and editorials had appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* deploring the condition of the Baltimore City Courthouse and its records, Radoff

wrote to remind everyone of the generous provisions which had been made by the state of Maryland to care for and preserve its records.<sup>22</sup> There were still holdouts, however, and in 1945, to overcome the inertia or indifference of local officials, a bill was passed making it mandatory to turn over all records created before the adoption of the Federal Constitution by the Maryland Convention, 28 April 1788. The bill was sorely needed. Not all the counties kept their records safe or even knew where they were. Radoff and Skordas often found them in deplorable condition—in attics or, in one case, under several feet of water.

But the records continued to come in, and by 1964 Radoff was able to say in his 27th annual report that every old (in fact, almost every non-current) record of the provincial and state governments was in Hall of Records custody. In 1955, under the direction of Phebe Jacobsen, the Hall of Records stepped up its efforts to acquire church records also, especially those of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

With such an aggressive acquisitions policy, it is no surprise that a major consideration at the 9 April 1958 meeting of the Hall of Records Commission was the lack of space. It was agreed that a solution might lie in the removal of the Land Office to the new State Office Building just two blocks away. The Land Office had been assigned one-fourth of the total stack area in the Hall, and the choicest part: the entire first deck and half of the second. There was no stack elevator, and the storing on higher levels of more frequently used records was always inconvenient.<sup>23</sup> Plans for the removal of the Land Office went forward until a taxpayers' injunction

<sup>15</sup>David C. Mearns, "The Nitid Crimson," *American Archivist* 15 (April 1952): 141.

<sup>16</sup>AR 8, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup>"Plaque Is Unveiled by Historical Society," *Westminster Times*, 11 May 1940.

<sup>18</sup>"Leads Fight to Curb Removal of Frederick County Records," *Baltimore Morning Sun*, 11 July 1940.

<sup>19</sup>Morris L. Radoff, letter to the editor, *Frederick Daily News*, 15 July 1940.

<sup>20</sup>"Demonstrations at Library," *Frederick News Post*, 12 November 1940.

<sup>21</sup>"Oldest Court Records to Go in State Files," *ibid.*, 13 December 1940.

<sup>22</sup>Morris L. Radoff, "Care of State Records," *Baltimore Evening Sun*, 19 September 1944.

<sup>23</sup>AR 23, p. 4; AR 24, p. 5.

to prevent it was granted. Radoff had advertised the virtues of the Hall of Records too well, and Louise Magruder, the local genealogist heading the movement, cunningly turned his own arguments against him. The ensuing (and quite colorful) controversy can be followed as it unfolded in almost daily articles in the *Annapolis Evening Capital*.<sup>24</sup> Despite the injunction, Radoff ordered the move continued pending service of the official documents on members of the Hall of Records Commission, who had conveniently left town. They were enjoined from using the space vacated by the *Land Office*, however, pending a court decision.

By September, the *Land Office* was ensconced in its new quarters, but the move had been undertaken so hurriedly that no time had been allowed for the purchase and delivery of shelving, so records were heaped on the floor. Magruder called for all citizens to “come see what they have done to all the old records,” but Radoff anticipated her next move. The delegation was turned back at the door, which stayed locked, under orders from Governor McKeldin, until the records were in proper order. Things were relatively quiet until the following July when, because of a faulty air conditioning system, the humidity in the *Land Office* rose to 90 percent and Magruder found mold growing on the records. Back on the warpath, she continued to seek a contempt citation and tried unsuccessfully to influence the newly elected Governor Tawes. The court eventually decided in favor of the *Hall of Records*, and Radoff was able to transfer many historical county records that he had previously been obliged to refuse.<sup>25</sup> Radoff always claimed that he regretted the necessity of the move, but compared the division to that of the *Public Record Office/British Museum*, or the *National Archives/Library of Congress*. Even though one might want all the rec-

ords in one place for convenience, it is not always possible.

In the twenty-seventh year of the *Hall of Records*, now fairly bulging with material, Radoff turned to a problem that had concerned him for the past twenty years: estrays. In 1948 he had written:

We are used to finding our records in every possible place. . . . We have learned in Maryland to face the bitter truth that early records have become a commodity for which there is active demand—they go to the highest bidders. . . . In any case, there is little to be gained by deploring the past. Let those institutions which have records of their neighbors return them if they wish, but let us remember that they were bought with hard money, raised with difficulty, or were bequeathed along with provisions that they be kept perpetually. Ask for photocopies or microfilm copies and fill as many gaps as possible. Does it make any real difference where the original is to be found?<sup>26</sup>

By 1961, however, Radoff was not following his own advice. Perhaps he was goaded into action by letters containing remarks like this: “Maryland records are certainly well-represented in autograph collections up and down the East Coast. Looking at them I often visualized where they once must have fitted in among your records.”<sup>27</sup> Radoff was well aware that Maryland records, such as those in the custody of the *Library of Congress* and the *Maryland Historical Society*, had been stolen or carried away from unguarded depositories, often under the eyes of indifferent custodians. Some of the thefts were actually the work of the custodians themselves. Nevertheless, he felt personally responsible for all Maryland records and was sensitive to the implied criticism in such letters, feeling that they reflected negatively on his stewardship. Radoff always maintained that the records of a

<sup>24</sup>*Annapolis Evening Capital*, 23 and 30 August, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, and 13 September 1958; 21, 22, 29 July and 25 November 1959.

<sup>25</sup>AR 24, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup>Morris L. Radoff, “Maryland Protects Records,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 10 October 1948.

<sup>27</sup>AR 27, p. 5.

government belong to that government; unless it voluntarily divests itself of title, it is still owner of the records no matter how far and for how long they have strayed. What was needed, he thought, was a clear decision in a precedent-setting court so that the thousands of state and federal manuscripts, still at large and destined to be fought over one by one, could come home quietly.<sup>28</sup>

For years Radoff had threatened Quincy Mumford, Librarian of Congress, with a friendly suit, or worse yet, "publication of our exchange of correspondence."<sup>29</sup> Finally, he proposed to sue the Library for return of certain Maryland papers in the Peter Force Collection. The Hall of Records Commission recommended, however, that a suit be saved as a last resort and that another effort be made to persuade the federal authorities to renounce the papers willingly. That failing, the archivist was authorized to seek their return through a joint resolution of Congress. Predictably, Radoff refused to consider either buying back the documents or trading other records for them. He was in no case willing to alienate the state's title to any of its records.<sup>30</sup> The Library of Congress, on the other hand, had paid over \$100,000 for the Peter Force Collection in 1856 and had no intention of giving up any part of it just because someone in Maryland had been careless years before.<sup>31</sup> Mearns recalls that Radoff had a fixation, as if he had taken an oath to regain those records. And of Mumford, Radoff lamented that it was disheartening to be confronted by an individual who continued to deny what was obviously the truth about those records. "I do not think that reason, logic, or persuasion will ever shake his determination to keep these records, although they are obviously Maryland's."<sup>32</sup>

Initial attempts to get Congress to act failed. In 1969, however, a Marylander became chairman of the Joint Committee on the Library. A hearing was promptly scheduled for 20 May and was attended by Skordas, Mumford, and Elizabeth Hamer. The point was made that the papers were part of a series of the Treasurer of the Western Shore, of which the Hall of Records possessed the major share. Although Mumford considered Radoff's appeal to Congress "dirty pool"—he knew it would be difficult for the Librarian to oppose members of Congress for very long<sup>33</sup>—he settled out of court, as it were, and on 3 November 1969 the records were brought to the Hall. Radoff would never volunteer the information that they were only on indefinite deposit, with strict conditions for their upkeep and use.<sup>34</sup>

Flushed with success, he went after the one collection still at large. The Scharf Collection at the Maryland Historical Society was first given by J. Thomas Scharf in 1891 to the Johns Hopkins Library, so that it might become a "great repository for Southern history." Scharf, at the time commissioner of the Land Office of Maryland, had gathered together a tremendous collection of materials, both printed and manuscript, for writing his histories of Maryland. As collector/custodian of many of the records of the state, however, he was apt to confuse his two roles. This problem was recognized as early as 1900, when a report of the Public Archives Commission stated that "many early Maryland documents seem to have disappeared in connection with the research of Scharf, the historian of the state."<sup>35</sup> It is suspected that he actively peddled state records to private individuals, lost others through inattention, gave

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 5–8.

<sup>29</sup>Herb Thompson, "Dispute Over Records," Annapolis *Evening Capital*, 12 December 1966.

<sup>30</sup>AR 28, p. 9; AR 32, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup>David C. Mearns. Interview.

<sup>32</sup>AR 33, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup>Mearns. Interview.

<sup>34</sup>AR 34, pp. 51–53.

<sup>35</sup>AR 35, p. 6.

others away, and finally took what he wanted. That is why there are so many state government records in his collection, including the 1870–71 tax lists for every county.<sup>36</sup> The Johns Hopkins University never achieved the center for Southern studies contemplated by Scharf. After keeping the records thirty years without arrangement or further supplementation, Hopkins deposited them in the Maryland Historical Society. Alerted by Leonard Rapport that among the papers was a letter conclusively proving Scharf's intention to sell state documents in his custody, Radoff redoubled his efforts to acquire the papers.

If ever there was a case of an irresistible force meeting an immovable object, it was the confrontation between Radoff, archivist, and P. William Filby, director of the Maryland Historical Society. Afraid of setting a precedent, the Historical Society would not give up the material, which it had acquired legitimately. On the advice of the society's lawyers, correspondence from Radoff was ignored. The two men continued to see each other at meetings of the Maryland Hall of Records Commission however, where Filby was often accused by Radoff of "withholding" records stolen from the Land Office. Filby maintained that the papers belonged to Hopkins still and that the deed of gift prevented their relinquishment.

But the Historical Society never refused permission to copy the materials. Sometime in 1972, \$5,000 was appropriated by the Department of Public Works to make photocopies. Nearly one-third had already been copied, and half the money spent, before it was realized that photocopying on both sides of the page was a terrible mistake. The papers had never been put in proper order. Reproduced in original sequence, an eighteenth-century document might appear on one side and a

nineteenth-century document on the other. In order properly to merge the collections, one side would have to be recopied. Radoff pronounced the project "useless" and decreed that no more money be spent until the ultimate destination of the Scharf papers was determined. He had, however, changed his mind about suing to ensure their return. "Replevin is a dangerous method to use in recovering manuscripts," he stated, "because it makes for the disappearance of records or their sale outside the state. Further, it endangers institutions like the Maryland Historical Society which had procured them honestly by purchase or bequest years ago." Later, in 1975, a microfilming project was initiated calling for first combining the Scharf papers with the related Hall of Records papers. It was fully understood, however, that the Scharf papers would be returned when the project was done. Therefore, without fanfare, without a written agreement and, it should be noted, after the retirement of Radoff, the Scharf papers were put on temporary deposit at the Hall of Records, where they are today.<sup>37</sup>

When Radoff was appointed archivist in 1939, he described his job as one of "trying to fill in the old blanks and to make the work of future archivists easier by preventing blanks in current records."<sup>38</sup> Early in 1940 conversations took place between State Comptroller Tawes and Radoff on how the Hall of Records might be of further use in the preservation of certain government records and the destruction of others. The original act creating the Hall of Records authorized the archivist to accept records or decline them, but did not specify what could be done with the records that were declined.<sup>39</sup> As a result of these discussions a bill was introduced into the next legislature and passed in 1941. It provided that when records were presented for deposit, the Hall

<sup>36</sup>Morris L. Radoff, "An Elusive Manuscript," *American Archivist* 30 (January 1967): 64; P. William Filby. Interview.

<sup>37</sup>*Minutes of the Hall of Records Commission* (hereafter referred to as *Minutes*), 14 December 1972, 22 January 1974, 18 June 1974, 12 December 1972, and 6 January 1975.

<sup>38</sup>"Dr. Robertson . . . Is Dead," *Baltimore Sun*.

<sup>39</sup>Skordas. Interview.

of Records would be the judge of what would be preserved at the Hall of Records, what retained in the office of origin, and what destroyed. It was by virtue of these new duties that the Hall of Records became something more than a depository for historical records; it was launched into the important and complex problem of the care of almost all the state's records.<sup>40</sup>

Almost at once space began to run out. By 1946 the lack of space was such a chronic problem that most records offered for deposit could not be kept and were ordered retained in the office of the custodian if the archivist felt they were too valuable for destruction. The Hall of Records had fulfilled its mission of "gathering into one place for preservation all the historical records of the state"; but many of the counties had sent their later records as well. Some state agencies wanted to deposit all their non-current records, many of which were only two or three years old. Radoff wondered if the responsibilities of the Hall of Records should be officially enlarged to include all non-current records. As long as there was space in the stacks, there was no pressing need to make such a decision; but with space failing it was clear that if the records were worth keeping, provisions had to be made for housing them.

Meanwhile, lack of space was no deterrent as Radoff continued his efforts to secure for the Hall other official papers of recent origin. In 1947 he persuaded Governor Herbert R. O'Connor to turn over his papers at the end of his first term of office. These were especially valuable since they gave an excellent picture of state activities during World War II. Equally important, a precedent had been established for the quick transfer of execu-

tive files, quickness which Radoff hoped would be followed by future governors of the state.<sup>41</sup> It was. Governor William Preston Lane, Jr., deposited his papers,<sup>42</sup> and Governor Theodore R. McKeldin began sending his while still in office.<sup>43</sup> Ironically, Radoff may have been indirectly responsible for the political downfall of Governor Spiro T. Agnew who, as was the custom, turned over his papers when he left office to become Vice President. He was not required by law to do so. Later, when the papers were subpoenaed, Radoff refused to let the original documents leave the Hall; but he did grant the federal prosecutors permission to photocopy them.<sup>44</sup>

Radoff also made arrangements for the Hall to receive one copy of any state publication. By 1955 he had completed the series for sixty-seven state offices, agencies, and institutions.<sup>45</sup>

In 1949 the state passed an act which, among other things, established a procedure for scheduling the periodic destruction of records, defining certain types of non-record materials which could be destroyed when no longer needed.<sup>46</sup> Radoff began publishing record retention schedules in his annual reports, emphasizing his concern for preservation by choosing to call them retention rather than disposal schedules. In 1951, however, the act was amended to allow one clerk of court to dispose of certain land records, thereby seriously challenging Hall of Records authority over the Baltimore City Records.<sup>47</sup> This amendment may have been partially responsible for the destruction in the early 1960s of the chattel records for Baltimore City, the largest single collection of records relating to Civil War Blacks.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>40</sup>AR 10, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup>AR 12, p. 27.

<sup>42</sup>AR 16, p. 36.

<sup>43</sup>AR 20, p. 33.

<sup>44</sup>Isaac Rehert, "Troubles Amid State Archives," *Baltimore Sun*, 21 January 1975.

<sup>45</sup>AR 20, p. 23.

<sup>46</sup>AR 14, p. 31.

<sup>47</sup>AR 15, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup>Skordas. Interview.



Because of the increasing demands of the records management program, and from a desire to offer guidance and advice to state agencies with records problems, Radoff proposed in his 1952 budget a new position, Public Record Examiner, which was created 1 July 1952. He persuaded the governor that the time had come to “step forth boldly” and he proposed to organize a whole system of records disposal and records management at one time. Forty-eight thousand dollars was appropriated to conduct a record survey of all Maryland state agencies. Based on that inventory, the Records Management Division of the Hall of Records officially came into being on 1 July 1953.<sup>49</sup> A year later, Radoff reported that space was being set aside in two new state office buildings for a records center, areas to be used for the temporary storage of semi-current records. In 1958, when the records were finally moved, he remarked, “We have embarked on the administration of a records center, a new device invented by the federal government and now adopted for state use (here) and elsewhere.”<sup>50</sup>

In 1967–68 Maryland organized a convention to revise its 100-year-old Constitution, providing the Hall of Records with a unique opportunity to assist in the management of all convention records. Fortunately, the historic importance of the proceedings was recognized by its president. On the advice of Radoff, Sherrod E. East, newly retired from the National Archives, was hired as historian-archivist. East worked closely with the Hall, and they agreed on file boxes, arrangement, and labeling long before the convention began. Radoff was particularly proud of his part in the proceedings and “from the archival viewpoint” he declared it a “text-book operation.”<sup>51</sup>

Records management was soon costing one-third of Radoff’s staff and budget. By 1966 the widespread use of computers by state agencies began presenting additional problems in establishing and applying the schedules. Finding himself in unfamiliar territory, Radoff readily cooperated with a committee established by the comptroller of the Treasury to coordinate the development of data processing programs. A COM system was designed calling for machine preparation and maintenance of records schedules, conversion of all source documents to microform, and the deposit of paper records in the records center within thirty days of receipt. With space still a pressing problem, the old Annapolis Armory was used to supplement existing records storage areas.<sup>52</sup>

Although Radoff reports on COM with enthusiasm and knowledge, he did not want to have much to do with it. Recognizing that it was inevitable, however, he chose a young man, Edward Papenfuse, as his successor.<sup>53</sup> Records management was getting too big for him to handle, and he no longer had the energy that characterized his early years. Records management as a profession had split from the SAA. Maryland followed the trend and, when Radoff retired, the records management function was taken from the Hall of Records. Radoff strongly disapproved. In 1955, when he was elected president of the SAA, he had made an eloquent appeal for joint efforts. He felt that records managers and archivists were necessary to each other. “We do not share *common interests*,” he said, “we have only *one interest*; namely, the guardianship of records.”<sup>54</sup>

It is ironic that his very success with the records management program probably led to the takeover of the Hall of Records by the Department of General Services. This was a blow, many believe, from which

<sup>49</sup>AR 18, p. 18.

<sup>50</sup>AR 22, pp. 3–4.

<sup>51</sup>AR 33, pp. 24–25.

<sup>52</sup>AR 34, p. 46.

<sup>53</sup>Jacobsen. Interview.

<sup>54</sup>Morris L. Radoff, “What Should Bind Us Together,” *American Archivist* 19 (January 1956): 4.

Radoff never fully recovered, and it was certainly a contributing factor in the early retirement of Gust Skordas. Radoff fought the plan as hard as he knew how. "It seemed to me to be duplicating the National Government's plan without any study of how that arrangement had fared," he said, "and both the Society of American Archivists and the American Historical Association feel that the National Archives has done poorly under General Services."<sup>55</sup> The Hall of Records had always been an independent agency directly under the governor, and the change lowered its status. "Why should we be classed in the department that manages buildings, furniture, and transportation pools?" he asked in 1974. "We are a cultural service. We should be part of a Department of History and Culture, with Cabinet rank. We shouldn't be bureaucrats."<sup>56</sup>

The takeover also marked the publication of the last of Radoff's remarkable annual reports which had been favorably reviewed in the *American Archivist* and were called by Posner, "fine examples of informative reporting strengthened by sound, critical self-inspection."<sup>57</sup> George Lewis, head of General Services and Radoff's new boss, had told him that the \$950 needed to print the report would no longer be available. In a defiant gesture, Radoff printed the report anyway. Lewis was furious. Although he did not say so, he could not suffer the idea that the Hall of Records, a subsidiary agency, was putting out a report twice the size of that of the whole department of General Services. Radoff, on the other hand, was astute enough to realize that lack of such a relatively small amount of money was not the real problem. Insufficient funds had been a problem at the Hall ever since the beginning. Under the governor, their appro-

priations had never been cut because Radoff had earned an outstanding reputation for honest budgeting. Gust Skordas actually prepared the budgets; but "the toughest budget hearing of all," he recalled, "was when I had to justify the budget to Dr. Radoff." Even in lean years, money had always been found for publication of the annual reports.<sup>58</sup>

Gathering records was important only if they were to be used. That meant preparing them for use. In 1937 a fumigation unit was installed and crepe-lining was done both to preserve fragile records and to allow them to be handled. Robertson had recommended purchase of the Barrow laminator, but died before it was installed; and Radoff, unconvinced of the technique's reliability, delayed its purchase until Bureau of Standards tests proved it to his satisfaction.<sup>59</sup> Barrow often showed up at the Hall to demonstrate his technique himself.<sup>60</sup> In 1952, Radoff boasted: "It has always been our feeling that the quality of our repair work, primarily lamination, was excellent—perhaps unsurpassed by any other archival establishment."<sup>61</sup> He knew, of course, that a laminated and rebound record does not look or feel like the original, but he deliberately chose to make the records serviceable, sacrificing some of their antique appearance. "After twenty years," he said, "we do not regret the choice."

Binding, too, was done on-site after 1952, though Radoff had to resign himself to the higher cost compared with that done commercially. He justified it to his own satisfaction, however, by claiming the bindery was necessary for daily repairs, mats, maps, and trimming. "It is comforting too," he remarked, "that so long as we bind and repair, none of our records need ever be out of our possession. It is not

<sup>55</sup>AR 34, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup>Rehert, "Troubles," *Baltimore Sun*.

<sup>57</sup>Ernst Posner, *American State Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 138.

<sup>58</sup>Skordas. Interview.

<sup>59</sup>AR 6, p. 18.

<sup>60</sup>AR 11, p. 13.

<sup>61</sup>AR 17, p. 31.

possible to estimate the price of the safety of unique records, but it is surely a factor worth considering.”<sup>62</sup> The Maryland Hall of Records was certainly a pioneer in the field of archival repair, with one of the best departments in the country. It attracted hundreds of visitors each year. In spite of this reputation, when *Liber B* from the Peter Force Collection was found to be in need of repair, the Library of Congress refused Radoff permission to do it. A messenger was sent to hand-carry the papers to the Library for lamination.<sup>63</sup> It wasn't worth it. Comparison with adjacent records today shows clearly that the Hall of Records work is superior.

From the first day the Hall opened, records were preserved by photoduplication, and later by microfilming on photographic equipment belonging to the Land Office. Microfilming was done for insurance purposes, to film materials too costly or otherwise unavailable for use, to conserve the original material, and to preserve the accuracy of government papers. In 1952 Radoff reported “with relief” the end of the photostat project for all county land records dated prior to 1788, gaining for the Hall a full set of the originals, repaired and rebound where necessary, and for the counties, newly made and bound photostatic copies. Microfilming, taken over by the Records Management Division in 1953, was the preferred process after that early project was completed. Beginning in 1947, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints had sponsored a project to microfilm all the land and probate records of Maryland up to 1850, the last year in which they had any theological interest. All records after 1949 having been microfilmed as a matter of course by the Hall of Records, it only remained to keep the current records up to date and to fill in the period between 1850 and 1950. The series, now complete,

is a rich source of information for researchers.

Making the materials physically available was only half the problem. Intellectual access had to be provided as well. Radoff believed that, in a broad sense, everything done at the Hall of Records was an aid to research. “When records are moved from a dark, airless courthouse vault or from an office which is too busy to answer inquiries, these records are already more available because of the addition of air and light or the services of an experienced attendant.”<sup>64</sup> During Radoff's first year, a department was set up to receive new material, and a systematic accession procedure was established. Gust Skordas was in charge. After Radoff had completed negotiations, Skordas was responsible for the preliminary lists of records made before the transfer and for the final inventory after their arrival at the Hall. He supervised the transfer and was responsible, with the archivist, for care of materials in transit. The collections were arranged and boxed, and lists of the contents placed therein. The lists were then mimeographed, to provide almost instant access to the collections. “It would be easy enough to accept all such papers, place them in the stacks and forget them,” Radoff remarked, “but it is hardly worthwhile to preserve such collections without making them available. It is because a good number of archival agencies have followed this method in the past that archival ‘discoveries’ are more often made there than elsewhere.”<sup>65</sup> Radoff would not permit accumulation of a large backlog.

Even with Work Projects Administration (WPA) workers to assist him, Skordas tried to carry too much of the load himself and suffered a heart attack.<sup>66</sup> He recovered completely, however, and with the help of both WPA and National Youth Administration (NYA) workers was able to begin

<sup>62</sup>AR 25, p. 30.

<sup>63</sup>*Minutes*, 12 December 1972.

<sup>64</sup>AR 5, p. 17.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>66</sup>Jacobsen. Interview.

the huge task of indexing the wealth of materials on deposit. When possible, existing indexes were photocopied or rehabilitated, but new indexes were made when there were none.

During Radoff's first year, the first of an admirable series of publications appeared, *Liber A of the Records of Prince Georges County Court*. Calendars, indexes, and catalogs soon followed. Publication No. 2, *A Catalogue of Archival Material* (1942) anticipates modern theories of archival practice in that records are arranged by groups and subgroups, prefaced by a brief account of the office that created them. "There is no index, because an index to records whose contents are not analyzed is of small value and such an index would have required an exorbitant expenditure of time and effort."<sup>67</sup> In his annual report for 1941, Radoff announced the forthcoming sale of *Calendar #1, The Black Books*, the first of the "Rainbow Series," so called because of their colorful bindings. Later calendars were the Blue, Brown, and Red Books. Radoff supervised the work, but "undertook as a personal enterprise only one, the unorthodox but interesting *Calendar of the Bank Stock Papers*, a successful experiment in preparing a calendar dealing with one subject but including materials from several sources."<sup>68</sup> Radoff's technique received national attention when his "A Guide to Practical Calendaring" was serialized in volume 11 (1948) of the *American Archivist*, "A Guide to Practical Calendaring," in number 2 (April) and continued as "A Practical Guide to Calendaring," in number 3 (July). From the evidence, one might think he was a great believer in the practice. Papenfuse thinks, however, that he used calendars as a vehicle to show what could be done with a collection entrusted to him. He particularly wanted to show up the

Maryland Historical Society, which had neither the staff nor the time to prepare elaborate finding aids.

In 1948 the Hall began, at the governor's request, to edit the *Maryland Manual*, the official Maryland directory, a compilation of historical and other information about Maryland that is normally published biennially. For a while, the Hall served also as an information center, until Radoff, in desperation, helped organize a Department of Information, which, when it opened in February 1948, relieved the Hall of the burden of replying to the 1,001 questions asked by schoolchildren and prospective tourists. The Hall then gladly gave up publication and distribution of such pamphlets as "Triton Beach, Let's Go Fishing," and "Maryland, Haven for Horselovers."<sup>69</sup>

One project got Radoff's particular attention: an attempt to continue the WPA's work by publishing a new edition of *Maryland: A Guide to the Old Line State*. The project began in 1953, but was beset with problems, including a limited staff and problems with the publisher. Not until 1975 was a rough draft completed. In the preface, Papenfuse credits Radoff with keeping the ideal alive and says that "without his perseverance, the project would have been forgotten."<sup>70</sup> Radoff published extensively himself and encouraged his staff to do likewise. He was interested most particularly in preservation, and he was, without doubt, proudest of his books *County Courthouses and Records of Maryland* and *The State House at Annapolis*.<sup>71</sup>

But all these things—the manuscript collection, the vast amount of public records recent and past, the indexes and other publications, the preservation program—were for one purpose, the aid of scholarship. In that aid, Radoff was pas-

<sup>67</sup>Publication No. 2, *Catalogue of Archival Material, Hall of Records, State of Maryland* (Annapolis: Hall of Records Commission, 1942).

<sup>68</sup>Land, *Law, Society and Politics*, p. xv.

<sup>69</sup>AR 13, p. 49.

<sup>70</sup>Writer's Program, Work Projects Administration, *Maryland: A New Guide to the Old Line State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. xiv.

<sup>71</sup>Skordas. Interview.

sionately interested. The ideal state archives, he felt, would combine the rigorous scholarship of a historical society with the rich Southern traditional concern for family history.<sup>72</sup> In the early days, genealogists made up 90–95 percent of Hall of Records clientele, Skordas reports, and Radoff tried continually to stimulate various Maryland colleges to encourage their graduates to use Hall of Records materials. He was particularly upset by the decline in circulation after World War II and the Korean War, and he felt real frustration in trying to increase the accessibility of records, only to have scholars ignore them.<sup>73</sup> Even as late as 1965 he was chiding historians because no decent history of Maryland had been written since Matthew Page Andrews wrote his in 1929.<sup>74</sup> Aubrey Land remembers that Radoff felt that a proper archives ought to be a home-away-from-home for visiting scholars. Radoff personally led guided tours. He believed that archivists and their staffs should be prepared to offer scholars guidance, not only with the records themselves but in the actual structure of their research. He was probably at his best, and certainly his happiest, when he talked and visited with young scholars. Radoff never got over not being a teacher. His ambition was for the Hall to sponsor a program like the Grand Seminar at Johns Hopkins, where faculty and students could present their research problems and discuss them.<sup>75</sup> Negotiations with the University of Maryland failed. He was able to establish with Ernst Posner at American University, a continuing relationship that began casually in 1943 and was formalized in 1945. Posner's class in archival administration and techniques (sponsored jointly by American Univer-

sity, the National Archives, and the Hall of Records) typically spent three days in Annapolis studying indexing, preservation, and reproduction.

John Hemphill and scholars like him remember that Radoff had a knack for dealing with people, and consider that his finest skill. Not everyone would agree. Vernon Tate, formerly librarian at the U.S. Naval Academy, accurately observed that sometimes Radoff had “all the finesse of a bull in a china shop.” Both views are true. A diplomat in his dealings with the counties, a master of public relations, a gifted scholar and dedicated teacher, he was also a shrewd politician, managing the Board of the Hall of Records with consummate skill, using them as foils when required and flattering them each year in his annual report.<sup>76</sup> He did not suffer fools gladly, however, nor would he tolerate any lack of professionalism. His relations with those in whom he detected these flaws were stormy.<sup>77</sup> From the old-school of management, he liked to keep his employees off balance, and practiced the technique of divide and conquer, which invariably caused ruffled feathers, hard feelings, and, sometimes, deep hurt.

In 1964, while the Hall was preparing to celebrate Radoff's twenty-fifth anniversary, he suffered the first of three strokes. He recovered and returned to work, but the illness had slowed his speech, sapped his energy, and affected his productivity. Although he was cynical and inclined to be pessimistic most of his life,<sup>78</sup> those who knew him in later years believed the strokes also changed his outlook on life. Radoff's introduction to the 1965 edition of Andrews' *History* is a case in point.<sup>79</sup> Throughout, Radoff exhibits a preoccu-

<sup>72</sup>Jacobsen. Interview.

<sup>73</sup>Edward C. Papenfuse. Interview.

<sup>74</sup>Matthew Page Andrews, *History of Maryland: Province and State* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1929); *ibid.*, new edition, Introduction by Morris L. Radoff (Hatboro, Pa.: Tradition Press, 1965).

<sup>75</sup>Land. Interview.

<sup>76</sup>Papenfuse. Interview.

<sup>77</sup>John M. Hemphill. Interview.

<sup>78</sup>Skordas. Interview.

<sup>79</sup>See note 74, above.

pation with illness and a pervading sense of the futility of life.<sup>80</sup> A few years later he said:

It seems a sad ending to a long, professional career. I began as a lexicographer and spent long months writing a doctoral dissertation on farce and comedy in the French renaissance. Now my career is ending and I spend long hours filling out forms with multiple carbons. I hate to think of myself as a bureaucrat. A state archivist ought to be a very important official.<sup>81</sup>

Contradictions begin to turn up more frequently in his writings. His annual reports and the minutes of the Hall of Records Commission sometimes describe the same meeting in curiously different ways. What appear to be pathological about-faces in his ideas about replevin are hard to explain. Radoff spent his last five years trying to hold on and to survive.<sup>82</sup> Retiring reluctantly at age seventy, he planned to continue his research and writing, but, although he came in almost every day, he never felt welcome at the Hall. Papenfuse tried to make him comfortable, but Radoff was used to running the place and could not accept not doing it. It was a conflict bound to arise, and one for which there could be no solution. He passed the time instead with his vegetable and herb gardens and hunting with his

dogs on the Eastern Shore farm he had bought in 1961.

Gradually he began to rediscover the faith he had abandoned years before. He and his wife visited Israel, and he later sought and was granted permission to be buried in the Jewish cemetery outside Annapolis. He remembered his mother in his will by setting up a generous endowment in her name for the benefit of the Israeli Archives. He had apparently reconciled himself to his faith and his fate, because six weeks before his death on 2 December 1978 he told his old friend Aubrey Land, "I'm ready, anytime."<sup>83</sup>

He left as his legacy one of the greatest archival establishments in the nation, having created both a personal and institutional record of unparalleled accomplishment.<sup>84</sup> A scholar-administrator, Morris Radoff was also publisher, editor, bookman, connoisseur, lobbyist, bon vivant, and outdoorsman. But, above all, he was an archivist "as good at looking forward as back."<sup>85</sup> With the help of his hand-picked staff he fought an uphill battle to create a viable archival institution where there was none, working with lethargic state bureaucracies and fighting reluctant localities.<sup>86</sup> He described himself only as a pioneer making a road through the forest. He was confident that others would follow his lead and bring things to perfection.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>80</sup>I thank Edward Papenfuse for pointing this out to me.

<sup>81</sup>Quoted in Rehert, "Troubles," *Baltimore Sun*.

<sup>82</sup>Papenfuse. Interview.

<sup>83</sup>Land. Interview.

<sup>84</sup>Edward C. Papenfuse, "Morris Leon Radoff," *American Archivist* 42 (April 1979): 263.

<sup>85</sup>"Morris L. Radoff," *Baltimore Evening Sun*, 4 December 1978.

<sup>86</sup>Papenfuse. Interview.

<sup>87</sup>Jacobsen. Interview.

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