

The Maryland society was initially founded in 1817 as an auxiliary of the national organization, the American Colonization Society. Auxiliary groups could be formed at the state, regional, or county level, supporting the national society by collecting subscriptions and fundraising. In 1827, the loosely organized regional and county societies in Maryland united to form a more centralized state group. The society's support by both pro- and anti-slavery supporters prompted the Maryland General Assembly to award it an annual grant of \$1,000 for the purpose of sending free blacks Marylanders to the American Colonization Society's colony in Liberia. However, after the society succeeded in sending only twelve emigrants to Liberia in 1828, the state terminated its appropriation the following year.<sup>1</sup>

The Maryland State Colonization Society's state support was revitalized after Nat Turner's Rebellion in August 1831 in Virginia. Many white southerners believed that free blacks in Virginia were responsible for inciting the actions of Turner and other slaves. By 1820 and until slavery was abolished, Maryland had the largest population of free blacks in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, white Marylanders were particularly worried that a similar violent slave uprising could take place within their borders.<sup>3</sup> Like many southern slaveholding states, horrified Maryland legislators immediately instituted new laws to regulate and restrict the movement and activities of both free blacks and slave. Since colonization in Africa seemed to be a solution to this problem, the Maryland General Assembly reinstated its appropriation to settle free black Marylanders in Liberia during the 1831-1832 legislative session, committing itself to paying the society an annual sum of \$10,000 for twenty years.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the legislation also reflected white Maryland's ambivalent attitudes toward slavery. A session law included a provision to allow free blacks to remain in the state by acquiring an annual permit which might be granted with the testimony of a responsible white person.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the final section of the clause gave the manumitted permission to be removed from the state or to Liberia, only with their consent.<sup>6</sup> However, in 1858, the legislature tried to tighten up manumission laws by setting age limits on manumission at forty-five years of age and requiring freed slaves to be self-sufficient.<sup>7</sup>

The Board of Managers had significant leeway in administering the society, reporting annually to the General Assembly about their progress. Many of the early Maryland colonists settled in Monrovia, a settlement established by the American Colonization Society, or at Caldwell, an

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<sup>1</sup> Stopak, Aaron. "The Maryland State Colonization Society: Independent State Action in the Colonization Movement." *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 63 (1968), 276.

<sup>2</sup> Historical Census Browser. (2004). Retrieved 16 April 2012, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/collections/>

<sup>3</sup> Hall, Richard L. *On Africa's Shore: A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834-1857*. (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2003), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Maryland General Assembly. 1831-1832 Session laws, Chapter 281, "An act relating to the People of Color in this state." <http://www.msa.md.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000213/html/am213--343.html>

<sup>5</sup> Maryland General Assembly. 1831-1832 Session laws, Chapter 281, Section 5. <http://aomol.net/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000213/html/am213--346.html>

<sup>6</sup> Maryland General Assembly. 1831-1832 Session laws, Chapter 281, Section 12. <http://aomol.net/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000213/html/am213--349.html>

<sup>7</sup> Maryland General Assembly. 1858 Session laws, Chapter 307, Section 2. "An act to prevent slaves from gaining their freedom in certain cases," <http://aomol.net/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000624/html/am624--463.html>

outlying agricultural settlement, about ten miles north of Monrovia. However, after Maryland settlers complained that they did not have enough input in governance matters at Monrovia, the Maryland State Colonization Society soon decided to establish a separate colony. On April 30, 1833, the Board of Managers unanimously approved a resolution to establish “Maryland in Liberia” at Cape Palmas.<sup>8,9</sup>

From 1833 to 1834, MSCS instituted explicit laws, included a constitution and Bill of Rights, which outlined colonists’ rights. Echoing the United States Declaration of Independence, the constitution promised that “it becomes the duty of the State Society to afford to the settlements which they may cause to be established, a system of equal laws, that Shall secure to every Emigrant and his descendants the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>10</sup> In 1834, agents of the Maryland State Colonization Society negotiated with the indigenous people to purchase land for a separate settlement at Cape Palmas.<sup>11</sup>

Such an action was highly unusual. The state of Maryland, in collaboration with a private institution, was exerting powers in foreign affairs that were normally reserved for the federal government of the United States.<sup>12</sup> However, the board of the Maryland Colonization Society felt that “independent state action,” without involving the U.S. Congress, was the best course for resolving the issue of slavery in Maryland.<sup>13</sup>

From that point on, most emigrants from the Maryland State Colonization Society settled in Maryland in Liberia rather than in the American Colonization Society’s lands near Monrovia. MSCS funded the passage of emigrants from Maryland to Liberia, provided them with housing and farm land upon arrival, and supplied enough food stores to last for the six or so months that new arrivals needed to acclimate to the new region and its diseases.<sup>14</sup> Life was difficult for newcomers. Almost everyone was incapacitated for several months, and many people died.

Making a living offered another challenge for the colonists. The Maryland State Colonization Society envisioned that the colony as “an agricultural community” “would present better

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<sup>8</sup> Hall, 27-32.

<sup>9</sup> Papers of the Maryland State Colonization Society, 1817-1902. Correspondence. Film No. M 13224-1. Minutes, 22 November 1833. [http://mdhistory.net/msa\\_sc5977/scm013224/html/msa\\_sc5977\\_scm13224-0147.html](http://mdhistory.net/msa_sc5977/scm013224/html/msa_sc5977_scm13224-0147.html)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Papers of the Maryland State Colonization Society, 1817-1902. Manumissions, Misc. Md. Colon. Journal, 1835-1844, Film Number M 13250-1, Land Deeds.

[http://mdhistory.net/msa\\_sc5977/scm013250/html/msa\\_sc5977\\_scm13250-0403.html](http://mdhistory.net/msa_sc5977/scm013250/html/msa_sc5977_scm13250-0403.html)

<sup>12</sup> Several sections of the United States Constitution seem to reserve these powers for the President or Congress. Article I, Section 10: “No State shall enter into any Treaty, Alliance, or Confederation; grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal; coin Money; emit Bills of Credit; ... No State shall, without the Consent of Congress, lay any Duty of Tonnage, keep Troops, or Ships of War in time of Peace, enter into any Agreement or Compact with another State, or with a foreign Power, or engage in War, unless actually invaded, or in such imminent Danger as will not admit of delay.” Article II, Section 2: “He [the President] shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties ...” Article IV, Section 3: “The Congress shall have Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States; and nothing in this Constitution shall be so construed as to Prejudice any Claims of the United States, or of any particular State.” National Archives and Records Administration. “Constitution of the United States.”

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html) (Accessed 3 April 2012)

<sup>13</sup> “Independent State Action.” *Maryland Colonization Journal*. Vol. 1, No. 9 (April 1837), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Hall, p. 20.

examples to the surrounding heathens,” who would then be moved to convert to Christianity. As a model Christian community, the colony would also be founded upon “the temperance principle,” with all settlers agreeing “to forbear the use of ardent spirit, except in case of sickness.”<sup>15</sup> As such it discouraged settlers from engaging in trade. As the colony’s general agent James Hall wrote, this “restrictive commercial policy [was] designed to promote an idealistic agrarian society [but] that was demonstrably impractical on the coast of tropical Africa.”<sup>16</sup> Settlers, many of whom had not been farmers in the United States, struggled to grow subsistence crops in the new climate. Their difficulties were compounded by having to choose between poor, sandy soil near the settlements and the possibility of attack by unfriendly natives in farther areas with richer soil.

In Maryland, MSCS agents faced their own challenges in recruiting emigrants. From 1831 to 1851, only 1,025 emigrants were sent to Liberia while the number of recorded manumissions during the same period was 5,571.<sup>17</sup> However, the number of recorded manumissions was probably lower than the actual number of slaves freed since not all slave owners filed manumissions. Furthermore, during this same period, the total population of free blacks in the state increased at a much higher rate, from 51,392 in 1830 to 83,942 by 1860.<sup>18</sup>

Despite support for the colonization society in powerful quarters, a diverse set of Marylanders also opposed the efforts. In cities and rural areas with small farms, many non-slaveholding whites worried that free blacks and hired out slaves would no longer be available as a source of cheap, and often seasonal, labor. Black and white abolitionists felt that slavery should be abolished unconditionally, regardless if manumitted slaves chose to emigrate. Unsurprisingly, African Americans, who wanted to remain in and attain equal rights in the land of their birth, were some of colonization’s most vociferous detractors.

In a report to the society’s board of managers, travelling agent John H. Kennard unironically summarized many of the key reasons that blacks opposed colonization.

They [free blacks] are taught to believe, and, do believe, that this is their country, their home. A Country and home, now wickedly withholden from them but which they will presently possess, own and control. Those who Emigrate to Liberia, are held up to the world, as the vilest and veriest traitors to their race, and especially so, towards their brethren in bonds. Every man woman and child who leaves this country for Africa is considered one taken from the strength of the colored population and by his departure, as protracting the time when the black man will by the strength of his own arm compell those who despise and oppress him, to

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<sup>15</sup> *Maryland Colonization Journal*, May 1835, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Hall, p. 298.

<sup>17</sup> Papers of the Maryland State Colonization Society, 1817-1902. Manumission Lists, 1832-1834. Film No. M 13248-1, Records of Manumissions reported to the Board of State Colonization Managers.

[http://mdhistory.net/msa\\_sc5977/scm013248/html/msa\\_sc5977\\_scm13248-0124.html](http://mdhistory.net/msa_sc5977/scm013248/html/msa_sc5977_scm13248-0124.html)

<sup>18</sup> Historical Census Browser. (2004). Retrieved 16 April 2012, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/collections/>

acknowledge his rights, redress his wrongs, and restore the wages, long due and inniquitously withholden.<sup>19</sup>

There were several other reasons that African Americans were reluctant to emigrate. Most distrusted white Americans, even under the guise of philanthropy, and feared that emigration was a ploy to sell them down South. Separation from family members who could not or did not want to emigrate was another compelling reason to stay in Maryland. Others were wary of moving to a strange land with potentially fatal diseases, unknown wild animals, and hostile native populations.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, the small number of African Americans who settled in Liberia demonstrates that it was an attractive proposition to some. Many emigrants despaired of a future where blacks and whites would live together on equal terms. These Liberian pioneers were optimistic that the colony offered them and their descendants the economic and social opportunities that had evaded them in the racially prejudiced United States.

Due to the small numbers of emigrants, many Marylanders questioned the effectiveness of the Colonization Society. After the twenty-year appropriation ended in 1852, some doubted the wisdom of continuing the state support. Swinging the vote in the legislature was the favorable recommendation of the House of Delegates Committee on the Colored Population. The white population felt that it was losing ground to the growing free black population in economic opportunity, jobs, and social situations.<sup>21</sup> State representatives believed that the two races required separation which could be achieved by settling African Americans in Liberia. Therefore, the state legislature renewed the appropriation for an additional six years at the rate of \$10,000 per year.

Across the ocean, the Liberian colonists' sentiments toward the Maryland State Colonization Society were also changing. By 1853, the desire for self-determination led colonists to vote for independence. In consultation with managers of the Maryland State Colonization Society, African American settlers wrote a constitution heavily based upon those of the United States and Maryland. Following ratification of the constitution, Maryland in Liberia became independent on June 8, 1854. The nation suffered from a weak economy and faced military threats from the indigenous people. In 1856, Maryland in Liberia found itself in a war with the neighboring native peoples over trade policies and territory. The new nation was forced to request military aid from the Republic of Liberia, which had formed in 1847 from the American Colonization Society's settlement. After peace was restored, in 1857, Maryland in Liberia citizens voted in favor of annexation to the Liberia, becoming Maryland County.

After Maryland in Liberia's independence, the Maryland Colonization Society continued to send emigrants to Liberia but at a much slower rate. Its last sponsored expedition took place in 1862

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<sup>19</sup> Papers of the Maryland State Colonization Society, 1817-1902. Manumission Lists, 1832-1834. Film No. M 13248-1. Reports to the Board of Manager, 1838. Original spelling and grammar maintained. [http://mdhistory.net/msa\\_sc5977/scm013248/html/msa\\_sc5977\\_scm13248-0296.html](http://mdhistory.net/msa_sc5977/scm013248/html/msa_sc5977_scm13248-0296.html)

<sup>20</sup> Stopak, 292-295.

<sup>21</sup> Guy, Anita Aidt. *Maryland's Persistent Pursuit to End Slavery, 1850-1864*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 377.

with only fifteen emigrants. However, only ten of that number was from Maryland.<sup>22</sup> The Maryland Colonization Society ceased active operations in 1863 but continued supporting schools in Liberia until it finally disbanded in 1902. The society's general agent, Dr. James Hall, donated the organizational papers to the Maryland Historical Society in 1877.

In 1970, the Maryland Historical Society microfilmed the Maryland State Colonization Society papers, some of which were in poor or fragile condition. In 2011 in a collaborative project with the Maryland Historical Society, the Maryland State Archives digitized the microfilm reels and made them publicly accessible online. The digitization was funded by a U.S. Department of Education grant to study the Underground Railroad in Maryland.

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<sup>22</sup> Papers of the Maryland State Colonization Society, 1817-1902. \_Manumissions, Misc. Md. Colon. Journal, 1835-1844. Film No. M 13250-1. Emigrants. [http://mdhistory.net/msa\\_sc5977/scm013250/pdf/msa\\_sc5977\\_scm13250-0364.pdf](http://mdhistory.net/msa_sc5977/scm013250/pdf/msa_sc5977_scm13250-0364.pdf)

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