

Remarks by Dr. Edward C. Papenfuse, Secretary of the State House Trust, at the dedication of the exhibits in the State House, 4/14/92

Today, perhaps more than at any time in our history, we are in need of extending the ground of public confidence in our government.

We need to rejuvenate the spirit that proved persuasive in this very room first in 1788 and 1789 and again in 1825 and 1826.

Today, when most Americans think of the Constitution, they think of the rights and privileges it protects. Yet freedom of speech, freedom to worship as we please, freedom to assemble peaceably for whatever purpose, freedom to participate in state elective office regardless of religion, were not part of the document ratified by Maryland in the very room on April 28, 1788.

The Maryland Minority of the convention, led by former Governor William Paca, clearly and articulately argued the need for a Bill of Rights in this room. Initially they proved unsuccessful, but little more than a year later, in December 1789, once again in this very room, the House of Delegates unanimously passed the Federal Bill of Rights incorporating those basic freedoms into the fabric of our National Government. It was only a beginning. Thomas Jefferson put it best when he wrote that the Constitution "is a good canvas on which some strokes ... want retouching. Defining the rights of minorities and women, and expanding participation in the political process lay ahead. The Constitution, by its very nature, would be forever on trial; the process of reducing to writing the basic principles of government would be forever unfinished.

In 1803 a 27 year old resident of Williamsport Maryland named Thomas Kennedy would write to President Jefferson, addressing him with simple republican salutation as "Respected Citizen." "Without ceremony, [wrote Kennedy] I have made free enough to address you on a subject of a private nature ..." It would be the first of many causes he would adopt in his lifetime on behalf of the underprivileged and the politically disfranchised. In this case he was seeking a pardon for a wayward youth. By 1818 he was in the House of Delegates advocating measures to remove the 'political disability of the Jews' whose religion prohibited them from taking a christian oath of office.

Today you will hear more about this Scottish Presbyterian from Washington County who lost an election because he took a stand on principle, only to continue the battle to its successful conclusion in 1826, when in this room the "Jew Bill" (on display in the case to my right) was finally made a part of Maryland's Constitution. Indeed, if we listen carefully we can hear Thomas Kennedy speak his words here: "I pray God I may die before I cease to be a friend of Civil and Religious Liberty, and a

supporter of the rights of the people."

Some time ago I was contacted by Doris Kahn who wondered why there was no tribute to Thomas Kennedy in the State House. I told her of the Joint Resolution sponsored by then Delegates John Leopold and Donald Munson that passed in 1987, and explained that the State House Trust had no appropriations for exhibits. She immediately raised \$500 and asked us to design an appropriate exhibit.

After consulting with the State House Trust and with now Senator Munson and Lt. Governor Steinberg who agreed to raise the funds privately, I proposed that the tribute to Thomas Kennedy be part of a fitting conclusion to the State House Exhibits which we began in 1983 across the hall.

These exhibits are meant to interpret to the thousands of visitors to the State House, the role Maryland played in helping to forge the National Government and to help teach people that the process of government is one which needs their immediate and constant attention. It seemed most appropriate that we conclude the exhibits on the formation of the Constitution in this room with a tribute to those Maryland Legislators who made a significant contribution to the legislative process in ways that directly benefited the people of Maryland.

The Trust agreed and with the tremendous help of Mimi Calver, Rob McAdam, and Chris Allan of the Maryland State Archives Staff, the exhibit you are about to see was prepared exclusively with private funds now being raised by Lt. Governor Steinberg and Senator Munson. Indeed many of you are donors to whom we have dedicated the back panel of our introductory brochure.

Thomas Kennedy was the logical and unanimous candidate for the first in what the State House Trusts hopes will be a distinguished series of Legislators recognized for their notable contributions to the efforts to expand political liberties. Extending the rights and privileges of democracy and building the ground of public confidence in our government is no easy task. In Maryland and elsewhere it took and still takes men and women of courage, endurance, and foresight to make government work for the benefit of the whole.

To welcome you on behalf of the State House Trust, it is now my privilege to present to you the Chairman of the State House Trust and master of ceremonies for today's unveiling, Lt. Governor Melvin A. Steinberg. Governor Steinberg.