

Bicentennial group as fragmented as 13 colonies

By **ROBERT A. ERLANDSON**

Maryland's American Revolution Bicentennial commemoration seems as diverse and fragmented as the 13 colonies that fought the war in the first place.

And whether the Maryland observance will produce any-

thing of substance or just a lot of forgettable fluff has sparked passions nearly as heated as those that ignited the original rebellion.

The symbolic battle lines were drawn years ago. The professional historian-historical purist group is on one side, and on the other are those who

see the Bicentennial observance as a festival to accommodate all tastes from the scholarly to the party-goers, ethnic dance groups and fire-plug painters.

Some, cynics perhaps, see the whole thing as a multi-million-dollar boondoggle that will somehow become over-

commercialized, certainly more than the Civil War Centennial—and at least as much as Christmas.

The major complaint of the historian group, led most vocally in Maryland by B. Floyd Flickinger, a retired American history professor who was briefly the acting state chairman, is that the commemoration's leaders are overlooking—or simply ignoring—an unparalleled opportunity for serious scholarship on the founding of the nation in favor of "a big birthday party."

His replacement as chairman—in what Dr. Flickinger claims was a political deal—is Louise Gore, the socially active Washington-area businesswoman who was appointed by Governor Mandel, her long-time friend and conqueror in last year's gubernatorial election.

"It was a plum for Mandel because she wanted it after she left the U.N. and he doesn't give a damn about the bicentennial," said the outspoken Dr. Flickinger, who was the National Park Service's first historian and who has taught at five Baltimore-area colleges.

Miss Gore, a Republican and a former ambassador to the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization, enjoys a solid reputation as a party-giver. She said

in a recent interview that she believes the bicentennial in Maryland already has reached the festivities stage.

She said, "If we were to close the commission office tomorrow," she would consider that the state commission had accomplished its main job—"to set the involvement of the people in motion."

"The unexciting work was done early, getting the writing and publication of the books, getting preservation bills through the Legislature two years ago, getting to the counties, the schools and the ethnic groups," she said.

"What remains to do now is the frosting on the cake, the festival part, setting up the celebrations for next year's Ratification Day, Maryland Day, Flag Day, the Fourth of July and the other important days," said Miss Gore.

People who know Dr. Flickinger and Miss Gore said, "Floyd wanted a 'substantive bicentennial', a return to the origins of the country, and he was the only trained historian. Louise wanted to have a 'grass-roots bicentennial' and since the Governor made her chairman that's what we are getting."

Lt. Gen. Claire E. Hutchin, Jr. (Ret.), who draws \$30,000 a year from the commission in addition to an estimated \$26,000 annual military retirement pay, handles the daily

routine of the 21-member commission's Annapolis office, but says he is not planning to make it a second career.

General Hutchin said he expects to close the commission office in April, 1977: "I'm going to write an after-action report; then I'll fold my tent and, like an old soldier, I'll just fade away."

Although they are the two top Maryland bicentennial officials, neither Miss Gore nor General Hutchin has any known academic historical credentials. This also annoys the "purists."

However, the two officials are enthusiastic about what they consider the great things the commission has accomplished, particularly through the county committees they regard as the "backbone" of the commemoration.

Their chief staff assistants, at \$16,000 a year each, are Anne Grooms, the deputy director, who was formerly Miss Gore's legislative aide in the state Senate, and Patricia H. Hoffman, a former liaison officer for the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland.

The "purist" group believes that bicentennial officials at all levels really know little about the American Revolution, that they lack comprehension of its causes and are unaware of its lasting effects even today.

General Hutchin conceded that there are no professional historians on his seven-member staff, but he said they are available if needed. Commission opponents question this and suggest that if professionals are available they are not being used properly.

As one example, according to Robert Hieronimus, the Baltimore muralist who is a member of the city and state commissions, there was a commission attempt last year to force publication of a Maryland Revolutionary Era Landmark guidebook by labeling items as "legends" instead of historical truths—"to avoid hurting anyone's feelings"—after professionals had discovered at least 100 factual errors in the original work.

William E. Brown, a commission member from Baltimore who is an amateur historian and a partner in a printing firm, said strong protests forced deferral of the project so the research could be re-evaluated and corrected. The revision is expected to be published within the next few months as a series of four booklets covering the state sectionally.

General Hutchin says proudly that "there are over 600 bicentennial projects going on," and that, among

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Claire E. Hutchin, Jr., is in charge of commission office in Annapolis.



FLOYD FLICKINGER
... Gore critic



LOUISE GORE
... commission chairman

Revolution observance factional

REVOLT, from CI them, the 13 books the commission is sponsoring and, at least in part, subsidizing, represent "a long-lasting substantive contribution."

General Hutchin said, "The State Bicentennial Commission was the catalytic agent for the subdivisions. . . . I can stand up in front of the General Assembly and anyone else and say that Maryland has a good bicentennial program, one that has really good grass-roots involvement all across the state and will have something substantive at the end."

He vigorously denies allegations that the commission has approved and spent large sums on some bicentennial projects that were not only frivolous, but completely extraneous to the whole idea of the commemoration.

General Hutchin says the commission has a \$277,000 budget from all sources—more than one-third of which goes for staff salaries—and that it supports only projects that fall legitimately within the criteria of the three main bicentennial categories:

- Heritage '76: Projects that are expected to contribute to an understanding of Maryland's heritage and the role the state played in United States development.

- Festivals USA: Part of the national cultural activities program, in which foreign visitors are particularly welcomed and which is expected to foster a better understanding of Maryland's character.

- Horizons '76: "A call for all Americans to engage in some project, individually or collectively, that will carry out the theme of 'a better quality of life.'"

Mr. Brown said, "It is the most needlessly fragmented movement I've ever been involved in and it's a shame because the bicentennial is important."

But Mr. Brown tried to be conciliatory, too. He said, "It should have something for everyone. My hunch is that Maryland is going to get the type of bicentennial it wants and it won't be all bad. There is room in the bicentennial for many types of things and Maryland is going to be swept up into the national celebration."

Mr. Brown said he sees three groups, each with a radically different interest, as those most deeply involved in, and committed to, the commemoration:

- The technical-professional people and their historically-minded companions.

- The party people who want sound-light shows, parties, parades and festivities.

- Those for whom its only importance is what it might do for the future in such areas as improved race relations, ecology or perhaps a campaign to eliminate venereal disease.

Mrs. J.M.P. Wright, the tenacious president of Historic Annapolis, Inc., who has battled bureaucracy for more than a decade to protect and enhance the the state capital's colonial heritage, is another critic of the commission.

For example, she said she still is waiting—after a year of non-communication from the commission—for an answer to a request for help in setting up exhibits in various historic Annapolis buildings to help bicentennial visitors "see and understand the role of Annapolis as the administrative center of Maryland's war effort in the Revolution."