The year 1836 began a new chapter in the growth of Maryland in Liberia. John Russwurm, a native of Monrovia, Liberia, was chosen to succeed Dr. Hall as governor of the colony. During Russwurm's term the colony not only attained a certain measure of economic independence, but grew in political maturity. In 1847 this process was completed by the formation of its own judiciary.

At the time of John Russwurm's death on June 9, 1851, the colony was on the threshold of statehood. Public opinion pointed that way unanimously in a plebiscite held on January 31, 1853. Within a year and half of the vote, the Articles of Agreement between the Maryland State Colonization Society and its colony had been signed and the Constitution of the new republic ratified. The state of Maryland in Liberia proclaimed independence on June 8, 1854.

Concurrently, the Maryland Society underwent changes at home in the 1850's. The most important of these was the election of Marylander John H. B. Latrobe as president of the American Colonization Society in 1853; a move that brought the parent society and the most independent of her offspring somewhat closer together after nearly two decades of strained relations. Yet the Maryland Society continued in financial distress. It had become necessary to give closer and special attention to county auxiliaries and the collection of funds. To a large extent the latter problem had been successfully solved by an administrative reorganization in the late 1830's. A solution to the former problem was found in dividing the state into two areas, the Eastern and Western Shores, and making a corresponding division of Baltimore, with an agent responsible for the collection of funds in each district (including a half of Baltimore).

The problems attending the charter of privately owned vessels for passengers and freight were solved in 1856 with the bequest of John Stevens of Talbot County, Maryland. He stipulated that his funds be used to build a vessel, launched in 1856 as the Mary Caroline Stevens. There had been two previous attempts to establish a maritime link between Maryland in Liberia and the United States. In 1845 the Chesapeake and Liberia Trading Company was incorporated. However, for fear that it might become insolvent, as had a former scheme directed by Russworm, the Board of Managers of the Maryland Society dissolved the Trading Company in 1852 while it was still making a profit.

By the end of 1856 the attention of the Society was drawn from its problems at home to the steadily deteriorating relations between its former colony and the surrounding native tribes. The first week of January, 1857, witnessed a disaster for the colonial troops, followed by a native advance which quickly cut Harper's lines of communication with the hinterland. Responding to the emergency of her neighbor, the Liberian Republic called out its militia to lift the seige of Harper.