

QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY

The beginnings of Queen Anne's County lie in the mysterious period when the center of Eastern Shore local government was found on Kent Island. Since some account of this period is given in the chapters on Talbot and Kent Counties, it is not necessary here to repeat the story. We begin, therefore, with the Act of Assembly setting up Queen Anne's County, Chapter 3 of the Acts of 1706. This same act provided for a commission to choose a convenient place for erecting a courthouse and otherwise setting up a new county government.

Courthouse at Queenstown

The next year another act was passed providing for the seating of the county government at the new town to be erected on the land of John Hawkins on Coursey Creek.¹ Normally, authorization to build a courthouse is found in the act erecting the county or in a special act, but in this case authorization is contained in a few words lost in a long bill for the erection of ports and towns. It may be for this reason that the General Assembly found it necessary three years later to pass a confirming act, the text of which follows:

Whereas there is in Queen Anns County in this Province at Queens Town a good and suff^t Court house well built made use of and found to be usefull and servicable to that County for holding the County Court of the said County and though perhaps some Doubts may arise whether the builders Connivers [contrivers] or Justices of the County had suff^t authority for the building of the said Court house and for Raising and Levying tobacco on the Inhabitants of the said County for the defraying the Charge thereof.

Be it Enacted by the Queens most Excellent Maj^{ty} by and with the advice and Consent of her Maj^{ty}s Councill and Assembly of this province and the authority of the same that all such Doubts be forever unquestioned and that all the builders Contrivers and Levyers of Tob^o for the building of the house af^d be for their building Contriveing and Levying af^d for Ever Indemnified and Saved harmless by Virtue of this Act and that the Court House as now built and Employed and two acres of Land whereon it is built and scituated forever hereafter deemed adjudged and Esteemed the Very true Court house and County Court house Land of Queen Anns County any former Act Statute Law Vote of the Delegates of the Generall Assembly warr^t & ord^r of the Councill petition of parties or any thing or things Else to the Contrary notwithstanding.

Provided that the Justices of the said County make or tender full and satisfactory payment for the said Lot to him or them it is Due to.²

What is of special interest to us here is that in fact Queenstown had become the county seat and that by 1710 at the latest a courthouse had been built. Unfortunately, we know nothing else about the structure. It must have been fairly sturdy, however, for there are no subsequent acts authorizing its repair nor are there any for its enlargement, which indicates that its size was adequate. We hear nothing further of it, as a matter of fact, until the Convention of 1776, which provided for the first elections under the new State Constitution. The elections were to be held at the several county seats except for four counties. Queen Anne's was one of those excepted, and there the election was ordered to be held at Chester Mill, "where George Hanson now dwells."³ Frederic Emory theorized that this indicated dis-

¹ Ch. 16, Acts of 1707.

² Ch. 7, Acts of 1710; *Arch. of Md.*, XXVII, 570-71.

³ *Proceedings of The Conventions of The Province of Maryland, 1774-1776*, p. 363.