

sioners then in control may have felt the importance of keeping Provincial and local affairs in the same hands. Doubtless as a reaction against this too greatly centralized control over local county affairs we find the Burgesses of St. Mary's at the October, 1654, session of the Assembly securing the enactment of a law for the creation of a "County Commission to keep Court," and also the request of the Assembly that these burgesses consider who are those best qualified for that service and that these be nominated to the [Commonwealth] Commissioners of the Province, "the nominees to be present at the next General Provincial Council so that powers may be committed to them for keeping of the Courts of the said country" (Arch. Md. I, 347). Pursuant to this act the Provincial Court at a session held December 5, 1654, authorized the construction of a court house for the "County of St. Maries and Patuxent," at the home of John Hammond, and incidentally gave permission to Hammond to sell wine and strong liquors there (Arch. Md. IV, 410); and at a session held April 24, 1655, appointed as members of the county court Captain John Sly, president, with six associate justices. The court was ordered to hear and determine all civil cases involving less than twenty pounds sterling, and criminal cases where the loss of life or member was not in question (*ibid.* 413). The increase in the number of justices from three to seven would seem to indicate greater powers and independence, and it is likely that the St. Mary's County Court had from this time the same authority as the other county courts.

How long the justices commissioned in 1655 by the Commonwealth Commissioners held office we do not know, as the records of the Council for this period are fragmentary. The next St. Mary's Court of which we have a record of the names of the justices was the bench appointed June 14, 1661, after the government of the Province had been fully restored to the Calverts, and as would be expected, entirely new names now appear. We also have for the first time the specific appointment of a Clerk and Keeper of the Records of the County Court (Arch. Md. III, 422). There is no reason to believe, however, that these offices were now created for the first time.

We have traced the history of the St. Mary's County Court to the period when its organization, powers, and relation to the Provincial Court were doubtless the same as those of the other county courts. By the year 1666, when this volume ends, local courts with clearly defined and limited powers, in addition to those of St. Mary's and Kent which have been described, had been established as follows: Anne Arundel 1650, Calvert 1654, Charles 1658, Baltimore 1659, Talbot 1661, and Somerset 1666.

There are two possible explanations for the presence at the end of the old Provincial Court record book B B, of the St. Mary's County land entries printed here on pages 571-591. They may have been sent up by the clerk of the county court in a case appealed to the Provincial Court, or the blank leaves at the end of the book may have proved irresistible to a thrifty clerk eager to economize on paper. Both suppositions seem about equally probable. We have thus more or less accidentally preserved from oblivion interesting details in regard to Councillor Thomas Gerard and his manor of Saint Clement's, which would otherwise have been lost when the records of St. Mary's County were destroyed