

Sessions of the General Assembly of Maryland

Provincial Assemblies

The earliest Provincial legislative bodies were *primary assemblies*, the Governor issuing personal writs of summons to the members of the Council and a few others as often as he thought wise. Some of those thus summoned in person, such as commanders of hundreds, were directed to encourage the attendance of such persons as they saw fit, and to give all other freemen of the hundred the privilege to attend in person or to choose delegates. As a result many proxies were given, and complaint arose that the Governor and Secretary were able to control the Assembly. Until 1650 the Proprietary claimed the sole right of directing how the Assembly should be constituted, but in that year and ever afterward each of the hundreds elected from one to three delegates. Thus the representative system was inaugurated.

In the early years *all freemen*, as well as freeholders, were not only entitled to a seat in the Assembly, but were liable to fine for failure to attend in person or by proxy. A property qualification was imposed in 1670 (*Archiv.* 5:77), and was required under the Constitution of 1776. It was removed by an amendment to the Constitution, Act of 1801, ch. 90, confirmed by Act of 1802, ch. 20.

By ch. 1, of the Acts of 1650 the Assembly was divided into two houses—the Upper House to stand for the rights and interests of the Proprietary, while the Lower House stood for the rights and interests of the People.

The local unit of representation was the hundred until 1654, when the county became the unit and the writs of election summoned from one to four delegates from each county.

	<i>Dates.</i>	<i>Place.</i>	<i>Adjourned.</i>
1634-5	St. Mary's.....	No record.
1637-8	January 25.....	St. Mary's.....	March 24.
1638-9	February 25.....	St. Mary's, adjourned same day to St. John's, Mar. 19.	
1641	August 2.....	St. John's.....	October 24.
1640	October 12.....	St. Mary's.....	March 23.
1641-2 ¹	March 21.....	St. Mary's.....	August 12.
1642	July 18.....	St. Mary's.....	August 2.
.....	September 5.....	St. Mary's.....	Sept. 13.
1643 ²
1644-5	February 11.....	St. Mary's.....	February 11.
1644 ³
1646	December 29.....	St. Inigoe's.....	March 4.
1647-8	January 7.....	St. John's.....	March 4.

¹It was declared by the House at this session that the House of Assembly may not be adjourned or prorogued but by and with the consent of the House. (*Archives*, 1:117.)

²Proclamation issued for Assembly on February 3d, but it was recalled by later proclamation. Another proclamation was issued for April 3d, but no record of meeting exists. (*Archives*, 1:201.)

³Proclamation for Assembly to be held on December 3d. No record of meeting. (*Archives*, 1:201.)