

1805 and 1806; and it was incidental to a decentralization and localization of the administration of justice, or, more exactly, of trials at law. Since near the beginning of the settlement of the province its population had been provided with one chief trial court, sitting first at St. Mary's, and thereafter for over a hundred years at Annapolis. It was an institution which in 1805 was approaching two hundred years of age, and seemed of remote antiquity. It had figured largely in the lives of each generation and had been the stage of some of the most important and dramatic of the activities of the people back as far as tradition could reach, and farther. Notwithstanding the fact that there was a right of appeal from its judgments in its cases of first instance, it was the great court of the people of Maryland while it existed. After the Revolution the Chancellor was regarded as the most important dignitary on the bench, and as has been seen his salary was far higher than that of any other judge during the existence of his office,⁴³ but he had little contact with litigants or witnesses, cases before him were heard on the papers and on depositions only, and his court did not figure so largely in the minds of the people; and its location at Annapolis caused them little or no inconvenience. That the General Court and the Court of Chancery could both be regarded, even during a short period, as of more importance than the Court of Appeals with its superior jurisdiction on review, is difficult for modern men to understand, but the evidence that they were so regarded seems conclusive. In answers to queries of the Lords of

43. See 1 Bland, Chancery, 678 note.