

He may have been preceded by other clerks, but the commissions of the early clerks were not often recorded and it is difficult to trace them. The commission issued by Governor Charles Calvert to John Blomfield on May 5, 1669, as "Chief Clerk of the Secretaries Office of the Provincial Court and Council and of the Custody and keeping of the lesser Seal Records" was the first such commission to be recorded. The accompanying instructions empowered him to sign letters of administration, probate wills and sign warrants to appraisers.<sup>20</sup>

After the offices of Secretary and Commissary General were separated in 1673, each officer had his own clerk or clerks. As long as Philip Calvert was Commissary General, his clerk did little more than record the proceedings of the Court and the instruments filed with it. But after Calvert's death, the duties of the clerk increased steadily and he was frequently referred to as the Register of the Prerogative Court. For example, in 1685 the proceedings of the Court reveal that James Cullen "was appointed by the Judges to be Register of this Court & Clerke of the Office for probat of wills . . ." <sup>21</sup> The title varied considerably in subsequent appointments, but the version most commonly used was "Chief Clerk and Register of the Prerogative Court".

By 1700, the Register had acquired a deputy and was performing most of the routine work of the Court. The commissaries or judges held court at least every two months. While in session, they heard disputes and reviewed the work done by the Register since the last session. A typical court term, as found in the proceedings of the Prerogative Court, began with the style of court which gave the date, place and names of the commissaries present. This was followed by court orders, citations, attachments, etc. Then the docket of cases was heard and decided or continued as in any other court. Finally, the judges passed on accounts which had been allowed by the Register and adjourned until the next term. Between terms of court it is evident that the Prerogative Office remained open continuously, for there are almost daily entries in the proceedings. The entries consist largely of returns of the Deputy Commissaries for the various counties, but there are also entries regarding instruments which were brought directly to the office.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 49-52.

<sup>21</sup> *Testamentary Proceedings* 13, 197.