

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

When Prince George's County was erected in May 1695,¹ the commissioners for the new county named in the act were instructed to be ready to undertake the government of the county by the following April 23, St. George's Day. The records of the county court open exactly on that day when the court met for the first time. The place of meeting was Mount Calvert, a small settlement on the tract of the same name, which had been granted to Philip Calvert in 1652 and erected into a Manor in 1657. For some reason the justices of the court were not satisfied with this name and so by court order at their first meeting they changed it to Charles Town, a most unusual procedure.² The village retained this name long after the county seat had been removed and until, in time, it had disappeared altogether.

It has not been possible to determine what served as the first courthouse in Charles Town. It may have been a private dwelling or an inn, but this is not certain. In any case, the sheriff was ordered to erect before the next (June) meeting of court the usual cage, pillory, whipping post and stocks.³ At the June meeting, an order in council was read designating the church at Mount Calvert as a proper courthouse. But apparently the sheriff had not acted on this order when the court met next, July 25, 1696, because he was then ordered to clean out the old lumber and shingles in the church and to furnish the space thus made available with a table, chair and other necessities for the court; and he was told to have all of this ready for the session of court scheduled to meet August 25, following. Presumably this was done for we hear nothing further of it.

Courthouse at Charles Town

It was not until June 24, 1697, that any steps were taken for the erection of a real courthouse to serve the county. On that day the justices of the court entered into an agreement with Robert Brothers, carpenter, to erect a frame building for 50,000 pounds of tobacco, half to be paid at once, the other half to be paid when the structure was finished. The agreement gives not only the necessary building details but it also has interest because of the frequent references to the courthouse of Calvert County which furnish details of that building otherwise unknown to us. The text of the agreement follows:

June the 24th: 1697.

A mutuall Agreement between the Justices of Prince Georges County and Robert Brothers Carpenter &c.

I Robert Brothers doe Agree with the Justices of Prince Georges County that hee is to build a five and thirty foot house in Length and twenty two foot wide to be a Substantiall framed house with Locus or Ceder grunsells the Remainder of the frame to be Oake with two doores in the front with folding Shutters Between the Doores two transum windowes of Six Lights Each to be Sett one on Each Side of the place of Judicatory & the Lower Roome to be in the Same forme & Method as Calvert County Court house only the place of Judicatory to be one foot one halfe higher then Calvert County Court house is to build an office in the Same forme as Calvert County office the buigness of the houses only Excepted the Stares & upper Roome to bee in the Same manner & forme as Calvert County Court house is in the difference of the buigness of houses (Excepted) to be well Lathed and plaistered above Staires and belowe with one

¹ Ch. XIII, Acts of 1695, May Session.

³ *Loc. cit.*

² *Court Proceedings, Liber A, f. 7, Ms.*