

TALBOT COUNTY

The history of the early seats of justice in Talbot County is perhaps as confused as any in the State of Maryland.¹ There is adequate proof that the courts of Kent County, of which Talbot County was then a part, were held on Kent Island, now a part of Queen Anne's County, from 1647 to 1654; and they were probably held there for some years afterward.²

The exact date and manner of erection of Talbot County is not known. However, it was surely in existence by February 18, 1661/62 when a writ was issued to the sheriff by the Council. Its bounds as they exist today were not fixed until the erection of Caroline County in 1773.

The first court record which has been preserved is for the April term of 1662 and that court was held at the home of Mr. William Coursey. The second court, held the following June, met at the home of Richard Woolman and it appears to have continued to meet in the homes of the various justices for some years thereafter.

At a court held August 27, 1674, at the house of Jonathan Hopkinson on Wye River the said Hopkinson contracted to sell his house and ten acres of land to the justices and he also contracted to build a prison for the use of the county.³ The agreement with Hopkinson was revised at the ensuing March term to enlarge the taking to twenty acres. The amount paid him is not definitely known; but as he was allowed 10,000 pounds of tobacco in the next levy, it is reasonable to assume that such was his price for land, house and building of the prison. In June of 1679, the justices agreed with Elizabeth Winkles for her to occupy part of the house which was then used "to Keepe Court in,"⁴ and at the same time one of the justices was authorized to treat with Richard Swetnam about keeping ordinary in the same house and also about building a new courthouse.

Courthouse at York

This new courthouse is assumed to have been built on the same site, perhaps on the south side of Skipton Creek and close by Wye Landing. At the March meeting of court, 1679/80, a detailed agreement was entered into between the justices and Swetnam. Unfortunately, the "Ruff Plott heere annexed" has not survived, but the detail is sufficient to give us a fairly good idea of what this first specially built courthouse for Talbot County looked like.

This Indenture made the sixteenth day of March one thousand six hundred seaventy and nine between Richard Woolman Major William Coursey Coll: Philemon Loyd Edward Mann Capt. George Cowley James Murphy William Combes Comission^{rs}. for the County of Talbott of the one party & Richard Swetnam Carpenter of the other party Wittnesseth that it is Covenanted granted bargained Concluded and agreed by & between the said parties in manner and forme following that is to say that the sd. Richard Swetnam for himself his heirs Execut^{rs} & Adm^{rs} doth covenant in manner & forme as hereafter from Article to Article doth ensue & follow that is to say that the sd. Richard Swetnam att his owne Propper Cost & charges shall forthwith sett aboute & Prosecute the building of one County Court house upon the County Land in Wye River in Talbott County the sd. building to be according to Ruff Plott heere annexed that is to say fifty foote by twenty-three with a Court Hall of eightene foote by eightene with a Porch eight foote by eight the whole building to be of three stories

¹ Much of the material given here is derived from Oswald Tilghman, *History of Talbot County Maryland*, Baltimore, 1915, Vol. II, 200-245.

² *Ibid.*, II, 202.

³ *Court Minutes, 1674-1674-5, Ms.*, and cited in Tilghman, II, 209.

⁴ Tilghman, II, 207.