

building in every respect workmanlike, according to the Dementions and Directions as above specified by the Twentyeth Day of November which shall happen in the year of our Lord One Thousand Seven hundred and Twelve; and also to finde and provide for the said Justices a Convenient house at or near the said place called Pitt's Bridge to hold Court in on the third Tuesday in June next and During the building of the Said house &ca.

In consideration whereof we the Said Justices being authorized as aforesaid Doe agree to pay him the Said Philemon Hemsley or his assigns the full and just Quantity of one Hundred and fifteen thousand pounds of Good merchantable tobacco; convenient in the aforesaid County (that is to say) sixty thousand pounds of Tobacco this present year and the sum of Twenty Thousand pounds of tobacco at the closing of the said house and the remaining part at the finishing of the aforesaid worke; In witness whereof the Partys above said have hereunto set their hands and Seals the Twenty third day of March in the Tenth year of the reigne of our sovereigne Lady Anne of Great Britain France and Ireland Queen Defender of the faith &c. Annoq. Domini 1710.¹¹

Progress on the building was rapid enough so that the next year, 1712, the June session of court could be accommodated in it. This courthouse continued in use until 1792.¹²

Second Courthouse at Easton

Before this time, however, the old courthouse had become possibly too dilapidated and certainly too small to accommodate the county offices as well as the General Court of the Eastern Shore, and a petition was sent to the General Assembly of 1789 asking for authority to build a new one.¹³ The commissioners were given the usual authority to levy for this purpose, to enter into a contract with a builder, and so forth. They were, however, instructed to erect the new structure on the public grounds at Easton. Apparently it was first assumed that a place could be found for the new building alongside the old courthouse, but this proved not to be feasible. Consequently, we find the commissioners asking for a new act two years later, granting them authority to dispose of the old building. The bill, which passed December 27, also authorized the commissioners to rent proper quarters for the county officers and for the storage of the county records.¹⁴ A supplemental act passed at the same session provided that arrangements could also be made for renting a large place for the meeting of the court.¹⁵

In January of the next year there appeared in the *Easton Herald* an advertisement for the sale at public vendue of the old courthouse to be held February 2, 1792, at eleven o'clock in the morning on the public grounds at Easton. Presumably the old courthouse was razed shortly thereafter and the new one begun. The architect is unknown—and in this case this knowledge would be more than ordinarily interesting because the building was one of the largest in the State and showed signs of a careful and experienced hand. We do, however, know that the builder was a certain Cornelius West who, having completed the building and having been paid the £3,000 of current money as provided by law, found himself out of pocket a fairly large sum. He thereupon appealed to the General Assembly for relief and was granted £150 current money.¹⁶ The new courthouse was finished and accepted by the court on June 18, 1794.¹⁷

¹¹ *Talbot County Land Records, R.F. No. 12, ff. 26-27, Ms.*, and cited in Tilghman, II, 225-27.

¹² Chapter 15, Acts of the February Session, 1777, provided that the General Court should continue to meet for the business of the Eastern Shore at Talbot Courthouse until a town should be laid out at Dover and a courthouse and prison built there. Dover, on the Choptank River, was granted to William Harrison in 1734 and is recorded with a plat in *Patent Records* of the Land Office, *E. I. No. 2, 682*. It was still in the Harrison family at this time. This order seems to have been ignored and presumably the court continued to meet at Talbot Courthouse. Curiously enough there appears to have been no settlement around the courthouse and officially, in the middle of the century, it was known as the courthouse near Pitt's Bridge.

The town did not receive the name of Easton until 1788, when the General Assembly repealed that part of the act concerning the General Court which mentioned Dover and ordered the court to meet at Talbot in Talbot County "and that the name of said town shall hereafter be called Easton" (Ch. 16).

¹³ Ch. 36.

¹⁴ Ch. 4, Acts of 1791.

¹⁵ Ch. 28. Beginning with the November term, 1791, the court established itself in the Lodge Room over the Market (Court *Minutes, Dec. 12, 1791, Ms.*).

¹⁶ Ch. 63, Acts of 1794.

¹⁷ *Minutes of The County Court, Liber W.S.B., Ms.*