

WICOMICO COUNTY

The predicament of Salisbury, which found itself one-half in Somerset County and the other half in Worcester, stimulated the movement for a new county to be created from the northern parts of Somerset and Worcester; but the need had otherwise been present for some time. Unfortunately, the older counties were reluctant to be divided, and many of the inhabitants of the area proposed for the new county were unwilling to abandon old loyalties. The fight for the new county was carried into the Constitutional Convention of 1867 and there, for a time, threatened to obscure the major purpose of the Convention. The contest was settled amicably, however, by including a referendum in the constitution itself.¹ The referendum was held September 18, 1867, and those in favor of erecting the new county of Wicomico carried the day.

Temporary Courthouse at Salisbury

The effective date set for the beginning of county government was the following October 5. An election of county officers was held in January 1868, and shortly thereafter the search began for a place of meeting for the courts and for office space for the other county agencies of government. The Town Hall was rented for the use of the circuit court. This hall occupied the second floor of the E. E. Jackson Company general store at the southeast corner of Main and Market Streets. The offices of the Clerk of Court, Register of Wills, County Commissioners and Orphans' Court were located on the second floor of the R. K. Truitt Building on the opposite side of Main Street.² Of course, the need for a proper courthouse was recognized at once, but the county found the required expenditure for this purpose too great for the moment. It was not until 1874 that legislation was asked to authorize the county commissioners to purchase a site and to build a courthouse and prison;³ and even then no action appears to have been taken to implement the act except to purchase, on June 22, 1875, a suitable lot of ground called the "Old Hotel Property."⁴

First Courthouse at Salisbury

Four years later another act to provide for a courthouse was passed, and this time the county was ready to build.⁵ An architect, E. M. Butz, was employed and the contract for building was given to W. V. Hughes.⁶ According to the Salisbury historian, Charles J. Truitt, the building cost was approximately \$25,000 which the county did not have for reasons not now clear, since the county commissioners had been specifically authorized to levy up to \$40,000 for this purpose. Rather than postpone the work, however, five leading citizens offered to lend

¹ Article XIII, Sec. 2.

² For these details and much more, the writer is indebted to Charles J. Truitt, *Historic Salisbury Maryland*, New York, 1932.

³ Ch. 212.

⁴ Actually this is the date of the Agreement to sell for \$7,000 the "Old Hotel Property" lying between Division Street and Thomas Humphrey's mill pond and bounded on the north by Water Street and on the south by the property of E. L. Waites

and Levin C. Parsons "for the purpose of erecting a court house." (*Wicomico County Land Records, S.P.T. No. 1, f. 164*). The conveyance was executed June 13, 1878, and recorded December 2, 1878 (*S.P.T. No. 3, f. 34*), microfilm, Hall of Records.

⁵ Ch. 197, Acts of 1878.

⁶ *Inventory of the County and Town Archives of Maryland No. 22, Wicomico County*, Maryland Historical Records Survey Project, Baltimore, 1940, p. 32.