

The names of the architect and the builder of this first Baltimore courthouse have been forgotten, but its appearance is well known from contemporary illustrations as well as from the accounts of diarists and others. Scharf quotes a vivid passage from John P. Kennedy :

This was a famous building, this old court-house, which to my first cognizance suggested the idea of a house perched upon a great stool. It was a large dingy square structure of brick, elevated upon a massive basement of stone, which was perforated by a broad arch. The buttresses on either side of the arch supplied space for a stairway that led to the Hall of Justice above, and straddled over a pillory, whipping-post, and stocks which were sheltered under the arch, as symbols of the power that was at work up stairs. This magisterial edifice stood precisely where the Battle Monument now stands on Calvert street. It has a notable history, that old court-house. When it was first built it overlooked the town from the summit of the hill some fifty feet or more above the level of the present street, and stood upon a cliff which, northward, was washed at the base by Jones Falls—in that primitive day a pretty rural stream that meandered through meadows garnished with shrubbery and filled with browsing cattle, making a pleasant landscape from the court-house windows.⁵⁸

The appearance of this courthouse was changed radically in 1784. At that time the city fathers found that Calvert Street was effectively blocked by the courthouse. A group of interested citizens were persuaded by the architect, Leonard Harbaugh, that it would be practical to excavate twenty feet under the courthouse and support it by three arches thus permitting traffic to move under it. The General Assembly was in turn persuaded, being apparently much impressed by the confidence of those citizens who were willing to assume the whole cost as well as to post a considerable bond that the building would stand for twenty years after this operation.⁵⁹ The surgery proved to be successful—the building lasted for over twenty years and even then it had to be razed.

Second Courthouse at Baltimore

Then by 1805, it found itself “in a state of ruinous decay, and the public records therein deposited considerably endangered . . . ,” apparently a chronic state for Maryland courthouses of the period over twenty years old. An act was passed, therefore, to authorize a levy of at least \$50,000 to build a new courthouse; to raze the old building and devote what was necessary of the ground on which it stood for a thoroughfare and sell the rest; to place the new building on the public ground belonging to the county “situated at the north end of the dwelling occupied by John Hollins, Esquire. . . .”⁶⁰

For some reason, not now clear, no action was taken under the provisions of this act. It was renewed without change in 1808,⁶¹ except that the amount to be levied was reduced to \$40,000. This was increased again in 1809 to \$3,000 per annum for as long as the building commissioners should find it desirable.⁶² And finally, an additional \$20,000 was granted the next year to complete the courthouse and to construct a watch-house.⁶³ According to Griffith the designs of the building were those of George Milleman,

who was builder, and executed the wood work, Mr. William Steuart executed the stone work, and Colonel James Mosher the brick work.

The county records were removed and the courts held sessions there in 1809, when the old arched court house was taken down. The new building is 145 feet front on Church, now Lexington street, and on Washington Square 65 feet deep; at which end there is a court room in each of two stories, 60 by 46 feet; the basement of the whole is arched in stone and brick work, and the Orphan's court and clerks rooms, where the records are kept, vaulted for safety against fire.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ *Chronicles of Baltimore*, Baltimore, 1874, p. 232. The history of Godefroy's *The Old Court House* is found in Robert L. Alexander, "The Drawings and Allegories of Maximilian Godefroy," *Md. Hist. Mag.*, Vol. 53, p. 20, fn. 7.

⁵⁹ Ch. 18, Acts of 1784.

⁶⁰ Ch. 91, Acts of 1805.

⁶¹ Ch. 75.

⁶² Ch. 196.

⁶³ Ch. 168, Acts. of 1810.

⁶⁴ Thomas W. Griffith, *Annals of Baltimore*, Baltimore, 1833, pp. 180-81.