

# CAROLINE COUNTY

In response to the petition of "sundry" of the inhabitants of Dorchester and Queen Anne's Counties, who found themselves too far removed from the seats of justice of these two counties for their convenience, the Legislature of 1773 ordered the creation of a new county to be named Caroline, in honor of his Lordship's sister, Lady Caroline Eden. Commissioners were named to lay off the boundaries of the new county and to purchase land and erect buildings for the keeping of courts of justice and also for the safekeeping of the records. The site chosen was Pig Point which was to be rechristened Edentown, but later, as a gesture of independence, was called Denton.<sup>1</sup>

## Court at Melvill's Warehouse and Bridgetown

The court met for the first time March 15-17 at Melvill's Warehouse, which lies between Denton and Greensboro (then Bridgetown), and took the necessary steps for the administrative organization of the county. It also provided for the raising of sufficient funds for the erection of the buildings authorized by the General Assembly. For the plans of the new courthouse it addressed itself to William Buckland, distinguished for his work at Gunston Hall in Virginia and the Hammond-Harwood house at Annapolis, who was at that time in the State Capital. As evidence of this move we find the following advertisement in the *Maryland Gazette* for November 3, 10 and 17, 1774 :

The trustees for building a court house and prison in Caroline County, do hereby give notice that they will attend Melville's Warehouse on the 16th and 17th days of the present instant, November, in order to agree with workmen to execute the same agreeable to plans and elevations that will be produced, which plans etc. may be seen at any time between this and the 16th, by applying to William Buckland in Annapolis.

Unfortunately, the minutes of the commissioners for building the courthouse have disappeared and so we do not know what action was taken at Melvill's Warehouse on November 16. But there were greater things astir in the world at that time; the Continental Congress had met in September and October for the first time, and the whole country, including Caroline County, was preparing for war with England. This was no time for building courthouses, and the justices of the court accepted temporary quarters in warehouses, inns and private homes for many years. As time went on, the very site of the county government was put in question. Residents of Bridgetown (now Greensboro) wanted the seat of government, and among other reasons they found that "Pig Point" would be undignified, while "Edenton" smacked of disloyalty. The contest became so bitter that the court sat first in one place and then another, and the General Assembly was persuaded to intervene on several occasions. In 1786, for example, the following Act was passed :

An Act to suspend the erecting of the public buildings in Caroline county. Whereas a petition hath been preferred to this general assembly by many of the inhabitants of Caroline county, praying that the public buildings of the said county may be erected at Choptank bridge; and another petition of many other inhabitants of the same county hath also been preferred to this general assembly, praying that the said buildings may be erected at or near the center of said county; and both of the said petitions have been referred by the house of delegates to the next session of assembly:

<sup>1</sup> Ch. 10, Acts of 1773.