

Be it enacted, *by the general assembly of Maryland*, That the erecting of the public buildings in Caroline county, shall be suspended till the end of the next session of assembly, any law to the contrary notwithstanding.<sup>2</sup>

The next session of the General Assembly renewed the prohibition against the erection of public buildings.<sup>3</sup> According to the historians of Caroline County, the contest was settled by a referendum which resulted in a two-to-one majority in favor of Pig Point. This referendum was held along with the election of representatives to the General Assembly in 1790.<sup>4</sup>

## First Courthouse at Pig Point-Denton

As a result of this referendum, the General Assembly at its session of 1790 made *tabula rasa* of all preceding actions on its part and passed an act entitled "An Act for the removal of the seat of Justice from Melville's Warehouse to Pig Point, in Caroline County."<sup>5</sup> Among other things, this act provided for commissioners to purchase land on which to build the courthouse and jail at Pig Point, which was thereafter to be called Denton. They also provided that while these preparations were being made, the clerk was to move the records to Pig Point and the justices were to hire a convenient house for the keeping of court.

The new commissioners appointed at this time were William Richardson, Zebdiel Potter, Joseph Richardson, Peter Edmonson and Joshua Willis. On April 27, 1791, they contracted with William Benson to build the courthouse. The contract price was £1,300, current money; but before the work was done, Benson, who alleged that he was being ruined, was allowed an additional £500.<sup>6</sup> The building was finally completed in 1797. Whether Benson followed the original plans and elevations which were exhibited to bidders by William Buckland in 1774 is not known, but the building was a handsome one in pure Georgian style—it would not have done the master discredit.<sup>7</sup>

This building served the County for one hundred years; however there were many changes during this period. The first was a rearrangement of the courtroom in 1801:

Ordered that the following alterations be made in the Court Room under the direction of George Martin. Viz. Extend the floor where the Court Sit two feet and raise the same Nine Inches higher than at present, and fix the Bannisters in front as at Present. Remove the Bannisters Back of the Clerks Desk to the Part next to the Attorneys Table—Have three Benches of Seats where the present Jury Boxes are. The first one Eighteen Inches high—the others to be raised Eighteen Inches above each other, with Bannisters at the South End.

It is ordered that 40 Dollars be levied for the above alterations.<sup>8</sup>

Then the record vaults for the Orphans' Court and the Circuit Court and some other remodeling and renovation were authorized to be completed by 1875.<sup>9</sup> Whether the vaults were actually built at this time is more than doubtful because six years later an act was passed providing specifically for the construction of these two vaults and for no other purpose.<sup>10</sup>

## Second Courthouse at Denton

When another four years had passed, the county commissioners were given the choice of further enlarging and remodeling the vaults in the old courthouse or building a new one.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ch. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. 32, Acts of 1787, April Session.

<sup>4</sup> See William N. Rairigh, "A Narrative History of Caroline County," in Charles B. Clark, *The Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia*, New York, 1950, Vol. II, p. 1099, and Edward M. Noble, *The History of Caroline County*, Federalsburg, 1920, p. 11. The writer has been unable to verify this referendum, since neither author gives a reference to his original source. Some of the details of building which follow also come from Noble and while they appear to be accurate, they cannot always be verified. It is probable that original county records which were available for Noble are no longer in existence.

<sup>5</sup> Ch. 11, Acts of 1790.

<sup>6</sup> Ch. 29, Acts of 1793; Ch. 50, Acts of 1794.

<sup>7</sup> For the opinion of an expert in this field, see Rosamond Randall Beirne, "William Buckland, Architect of Virginia and Maryland," *Md. Hist. Mag.*, XLI, p. 215.

<sup>8</sup> Caroline County Court *Minute Book No. 7*, no pagination, *Ms.*

<sup>9</sup> Ch. 172, Acts of 1874.

<sup>10</sup> Ch. 184, Acts of 1880.

<sup>11</sup> Ch. 315, Acts of 1884.