

CHARLES COUNTY

The Charles County which built the courthouses and created the records described in this account must be distinguished from an earlier Charles County whose bounds were entirely different. This earlier county, now referred to as "Old Charles," was created by an order in Council of October 3, 1650.¹ And the date of its erection, November 21, 1650, is mentioned in the act setting up Calvert County.² Robert Brooke was made commander of the County, and it was perhaps for his benefit that the County was laid out. In any case, he was then a close personal friend of the Proprietor and presumably had benefited largely from his patronage. On September 28, 1653, "Old Charles" was wiped out, a casualty of the religious and political feuding of the period,³ and on July 3, 1654, part of it was incorporated into Calvert County.

A first step was taken in the creation of new Charles County, April 13, 1658, when it was ordered:

That a Commission be drawne up for the keepeing of a Court, on the North side of Wicocomaco River & that that part of the Province be erected into a County.⁴

The commission is found among the records of the Provincial Court and is dated May 10, 1658. The bounds of the new county were described as follows:

all that tract of Land of this our Province of Maryland Bounded with West Wicocomoco Ryver, up to the head thereof, & Sowth with Patowmeck ryver from the mouth of Wicocomoco up as high as any Plantaõn under our government is now seated, And from thence with a right Line drawne from such plantaõn as aforesaid to the head of Wicocomoco Ryver

The county was to be named for Lord Baltimore's son and heir apparent, Charles Calvert.⁵

First Courthouse

Little time was lost by the commissioners who were named by the Governor in actually beginning to function as a separate government. The court sat for the first time May 25, 1658. It is possible that its first meetings were held at what is now Port Tobacco, and this is the current belief in Charles County. However, there is no indication in the earliest records that this was the case. The first two volumes of the court records covering the period 1658-1666 mention an exact place of meeting only twice: "At A Counties Court Held at Humpherie Atwikses the 4th of June A^o 1658," and "The Court is Adiourned untill the 12th of March A^o 1660 & appoynted to bee held at Clement Theobals hows." ⁶ Otherwise one must be content with the unrevealing "At A Court held in Charleses Countie," which is repeated time after time until 1670, after which the place of meeting is sometimes given as "Portobacco."

According to the plaque erected in the 1954 addition to the present courthouse, the first Charles County courthouse was built in 1658, and it is described as "One room built of logs, located on the western shore of Port Tobacco Creek." This writer, unfortunately, has not

¹ *Arch. of Md.*, III, 259-60.

² *Ibid.*, 308.

³ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 341.

⁵ *Ibid.*, XLI, 87.

⁶ *Ibid.*, LIII, 4, 111.