

preserving the records of the court. Since 1777, he has been authorized to issue marriage and other licenses required by law.

## **Sheriff**

The sheriff has been described as "the county court's chief executive officer." He served summonses, writs and other process issued by the court. He impaneled juries, apprehended persons accused of crimes and kept them in custody if they were sentenced to the county prison, which was in his charge. He collected and paid out the county levy and public levy. He had certain duties with respect to elections. He also supervised the work of the constables in preparing lists of taxables within their respective hundreds and in their capacity as law enforcement officers.

## **Law Jurisdiction**

At first, the jurisdiction of the county court was limited to civil cases not exceeding 3,000 pounds of tobacco in value and to criminal cases not jeopardizing life or member. Even in such cases it shared concurrent jurisdiction with the Provincial Court. However, after 1710 cases in which the debt or damage amounted to less than 5,000 pounds of tobacco or £20 sterling were barred from the Provincial Court. This limitation was increased to 30,000 pounds of tobacco or £100 sterling. At the same time the county court was given concurrent jurisdiction with the Provincial Court in criminal cases. In 1785, the county court acquired full jurisdiction in all civil cases, and finally, upon the abolition of the General Court in 1805, became the highest court of original jurisdiction in the State.

## **Equity Jurisdiction**

Throughout the colonial period, and for sometime afterwards, the Chancery Court was the major equity court of Maryland while the county court handled the lesser cases. For example, in 1715, the county court was assigned exclusive jurisdiction in equity cases in which the value in dispute did not exceed 1,200 pounds of tobacco or £5 sterling. In 1763, it was given concurrent jurisdiction with the Chancery Court in equity cases involving no more than 5000 pounds of tobacco or £20 sterling. The powers of the county court were further enlarged in 1791 when it was granted original equity jurisdiction in all cases where the value in dispute did not exceed 10,000 pounds of tobacco or £100 sterling. In 1814, all limitations were removed and the county court was given equal jurisdiction with that of the Chancery Court. Finally, the Chancery Court was abolished in 1851 and the county court assumed exclusive original jurisdiction in equity cases.

## **Baltimore City Courts**

Under the Constitution of 1851, Baltimore City was separated from Baltimore County and established as a unit of government comparable in many respects to a county. The judicial functions performed by the circuit court of a county were distributed among the three courts established for the City. The court system of Baltimore has since been expanded and there are now six trial courts, each of which has certain responsibilities, as follows:

### **1. COURT OF COMMON PLEAS**

This court was created by the Constitution of 1851. It was assigned civil jurisdiction in all suits where the debt or damage claim was over one hundred dollars and did not exceed five hundred dollars. The minimum of one hundred dollars still applies, but since 1867, the court has had concurrent civil jurisdiction with the Superior Court and Baltimore City Court.