

WASHINGTON COUNTY.

Washington County was erected out of the western portion of Frederick County by the Constitutional Convention of 1776, which decided that Frederick County was then so large that it should be divided into three parts by the erection of two new counties, Montgomery and Washington. The limits laid down at the time for Washington County were as follows:

“Beginning at a place where the temporary line crosses the south mountain and running thence by a line on the ridge of said mountain to the river Potomac, and thence with the lines of the said county so as to include all the lands to the westward of the line running on the ridge of the south mountain as aforesaid to the beginning, shall be and is hereby erected into a new county by the name of Washington county.”

The settlements of Washington County were made much later than were those in the counties in the tide-water portions of the State, the delay being due to three factors. The presence of the Blue Ridge at its eastern limits with only the gap at the Potomac River served for a long time as the limit of enterprise and exploration. The territory, therefore, with its fertile limestone valleys and picturesque situation was practically unknown and offered in its wildness and isolation little inducement to the early settlers who found abundance of land on the eastern side of the Blue Ridge. Still another factor appears to have been the fear of stirring up the Indians, whose treaties with the whites forbade the settlement of Europeans to the west of the Blue Ridge mountains.

The dying down of South Mountain in Pennsylvania left an easy passage along the fertile plains of the limestone valley for progressive settlement and the running of the “temporary line” between Maryland and Pennsylvania stimulated settlement on the western side of the Blue Ridge so that before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War there were thriving centers of colonization about Hagerstown, Sharpsburg, and Williamsport. At the time of the termination of the treaty with the Indians Fort Frederick was established on the western side of the valley and the security which it brought, together with the highway from