

CECIL COUNTY

Cecil County was set up in part because of the urgent necessity of Lord Baltimore to protect himself against what he considered to be the encroachments of Pennsylvania. The bounds of the new county were even anticipated, in 1670, by Augustine Herman's map of Maryland. The formal establishment of the new county was not to occur, however, for another four years when it was proclaimed by Charles Calvert who was then Governor of the province.¹ This proclamation of June 6, 1674 had to be hastily revised two weeks later when it was discovered that far too much of the area of other counties, especially of Kent County, had been assigned to the new county.² The boundaries of Cecil County, named for Cecil, Second Lord Baltimore, have remained approximately the same to this day except for the northern line which was not finally established until the survey of Mason and Dixon was run a century later.³

Courthouse at Oldtown

As was customary in Maryland in the early period, the first courts of Cecil County met in the homes of private citizens and in public houses. What is unusual is that this practice continued for so long a time in Cecil County. According to George Johnston, the first courthouse was not built until 1692.⁴ This first building is said to have been erected on the "north side of Sassafras River, a short distance east of Ordinary Point, at what was afterwards called Jamestown, and is now designated on the map of Cecil County as Oldtown."⁵ Johnston deduces from the fact that the jurors were wont to deliberate on occasion in the yard, that the courthouse was small—the oak under which they sat was long known as the Jury Oak. There are, of course, other reasons for assuming that the building was small, chief of which is the fact that courthouses were all small at this time. This courthouse somehow cannot be documented in existing records of the county, but from the report of a legislative committee of 1697 we can be certain that it was not finished at that time, and we are given one or two precise details as to construction:

There is a new Court house building in Cecill County wherein may be a Brick Chimney and there when finished the records are to be kept and no ordinary.⁶

The builder, according to Johnston, was Casparus Herman. But when it was finished we do not know. It was abandoned when the seat of justice was moved to Court House Point.

Courthouse at Court House Point

When the boundary between Kent and Cecil Counties was adjusted, in 1706, giving Kent the area lying between the Sassafras and the Chester, Oldtown ceased to be anywhere near the center of Cecil County. Soon thereafter residents of the county began to insist that a more convenient location be chosen and a new courthouse built. They addressed the usual "humble petition" to the General Assembly which replied as was its wont by granting the

¹ *Arch. of Md.*, XV, p. 39.

² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³ Details concerning boundaries and election districts of this county as of all the other counties of Maryland should be sought in Mathews, *The Counties of Maryland*.

⁴ *History of Cecil County Maryland*, Elkton, 1881, p. 83. This

work is the chief secondary source for the history of Cecil County. It contains a great deal of information but, unfortunately, there are few references to sources.

⁵ *Loc. cit.*

⁶ *Arch. of Md.*, XXII, p. 103.