

ALLEGANY COUNTY

Allegany County owes its existence to an act of the General Assembly of 1789:

All that part of Washington County which lies to the westward of Sideling Hill Creek, shall be and is hereby erected into a new county by the name of Allegany County.¹

Real need for the new county, which derived its name from the Indian word "Oolikhanna," meaning "beautiful stream," did not arise until after the peace with England. Thereafter, a steady stream of immigrants from the north and east took up land in the western mountains, some of it bounty paid to officers and men who served with the Maryland troops in the Revolution. The new county included, in addition to the present Allegany County, the very westernmost part of Maryland, which in 1872, or almost one hundred years later, became Garrett County, the last county to be created in Maryland.

The same act which erected Allegany County also provided that the seat of county government be in the town of Cumberland until the voters should have an opportunity formally to choose a county town. An effort was made in 1839 to move the seat of justice elsewhere, to Wills Creek, when one courthouse was building. Another attempt was made to change the county seat in 1893, on the occasion of the burning of another courthouse, this time to Frostburg. But both efforts failed and Cumberland has remained the county seat to this day.²

No provision was made in the creating act for a courthouse, perhaps because of the uncertainty of the county town location, but the same act did require that both the County Court and the Orphans' Court should meet on the first Monday of April, 1791; and so temporary quarters for the courts as well as for the other agencies of local government had to be found. The first courts were held at the home of John Graham. After that, and until the erection of the first proper courthouse, the business of the courts was transacted in the tavern of Abraham Faw which was located on the south side of Green Street on Lot No. 10.

First Courthouse at Cumberland

A courthouse was authorized by the General Assembly of 1793.³ It was to be located on the four lots of ground which Thomas Beall, of Samuel, had prudently set aside for this purpose in 1787, when he surveyed the town by authority of an act of that year.⁴ Title to the land was vested in the county, apparently without cost, and £600 current money was authorized for the courthouse and jail. According to Thomas and Williams the new courthouse was not occupied until 1799.⁵ The same authors describe it as follows:

It was two stories high, inclusive of the rough stone basement, which served the purposes of jail and residence for the jailor and his family. The second floor, or upper story, which was of brick, was taken up by the court room. The structure was decidedly unique in its exterior, while its interior was altogether quaint in its arrangement. The roof was surmounted by a small cupola, in which was suspended a steel triangle, played on by a steel hatchet or hammer, worked by a cord in the attic. It was rung each morning at nine o'clock, that the court was in session.⁶

¹ Ch. 29, Acts of 1789.

² There are several good sources for the history of Allegany County the chief of which are J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Western Maryland*, Philadelphia, 1882, Vol. II, pp. 1311-1510, and James W. Thomas and T. J. C. Williams, *History of Allegany County*, 1923. Thomas and Williams is especially com-

plete in the section dealing with the courthouses of the County, pp. 128-132.

³ Ch. 17.

⁴ Ch. 27, Acts of 1786.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.