

# HOWARD COUNTY

The area composing the present Howard County was separated from Anne Arundel County in 1698 and made part of Baltimore County.<sup>1</sup> Then in 1727, this action was reversed and the same area, or approximately the same area—the bounds were not clear—was returned to Anne Arundel County.<sup>2</sup> In time, the ready water power offered by the Falls of the Patapsco attracted mills to the area, especially those of the Ellicott brothers who came from Pennsylvania immediately before the Revolution.<sup>3</sup> The mills changed the area from tobacco to small-grain country, they encouraged the building of roads, and ultimately they brought the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

These developments stimulated an increase in population and, consequently, the demand for a county town more convenient than Annapolis. As a first step in local governmental divorce, this section of Anne Arundel County was set apart and called Howard District after the Revolutionary soldier and statesman, John Eager Howard. In effect this act of the General Assembly of 1838 created a new county with normal county government seated at Ellicott's Mills, except that it had no right to representation in the General Assembly.<sup>4</sup> Ellicott's Mills became Ellicott City by virtue of Chapter 48 of the Acts of 1867. The pure formality of recognizing the accomplished fact of a new county was left to the Constitutional Convention of 1850.<sup>5</sup>

The stone building which served as the first meeting place of the county government of Howard County still stands. It is located on what was then known as County Street. It runs from Fels Avenue and is parallel to Main Street in Ellicott City.<sup>6</sup> A site was chosen for a proper courthouse October 6, 1840, and the land purchased on January 22, 1841, from Mrs. Deborah Disney, who ran a tavern close by.<sup>7</sup>

## Courthouse at Ellicott City

Funds had been provided for the purchase of the lot and the building of a courthouse, clerk's office, register's office, jail, and poorhouse by an act of the General Assembly two years earlier.<sup>8</sup> But the total amount to be levied was limited to \$20,000 which was expended before the buildings were completed. As was customary in such cases, the General Assembly was asked to provide for the deficiency and this was done in 1843 in the amount of \$8,000.<sup>9</sup> Construction of the courthouse began early in 1841, shortly after purchase of the site, and was completed in 1843, when the county offices were moved to the new building.<sup>10</sup> Samuel Harris was the architect and Charles Timanus, the builder.<sup>11</sup> No significant changes were made in the outward appearance of the courthouse until a new two-story addition was built with

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 13, Acts of 1698.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 1, Acts of 1726.

<sup>3</sup> Martha E. Tyson, "A Brief Account of the Settlement of Ellicott's Mills," *Fund Publication*, No. 4, Baltimore, Md. Hist. Soc., 1871.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 22.

<sup>5</sup> Article VIII, Section 1 of the Constitution of 1851.

<sup>6</sup> *Ellicott City Times*, Century Edition, March 17, 1941, Section J—page 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Howard County Deeds*, Vol. No. 1, p. 257, microfilm, Hall of Records.

<sup>8</sup> Ch. 98, Acts of 1839. Actually, the jail was not built until 1849 and then out of a separate authorization (Ch. 555, Acts of 1849).

<sup>9</sup> Ch. 332.

<sup>10</sup> These dates are provided in the *Ellicott City Times*, Century Edition, Section A—page 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Inventory of the County and Town Archives of Maryland No. 13, Howard County*, p. 29. This information was found by the editor of this work in the *Ellicott City Times*, December 8, 1938. This issue was not available to the writer. The name of the builder is given as Samuel R. Powell by the editor. Timanus is named as builder on the cornerstone.