

CALVERT COUNTY

Courthouse at Battle Town-Calvertown

Calvert County was erected by an order in Council of July 3, 1654. The order set the boundaries of the new county and named the sheriff, but it said nothing about the seat of local government.¹ Subsequent loss of all the county records has prevented the discovery of the earliest county seat, if indeed there was a fixed place of government. Scisco believes that in all probability the county court was itinerant at first, following a pattern common to many of the early Maryland Counties. The same author found that a courthouse was referred to in 1669 at Battle Town on the north shore of Battle Creek.² All that we know of this courthouse is the little contained in a legislative report of March 23, 1697/98, as follows:

The records of Calvert County are kept in a very good Court house and distance enough from any other houses in which no ordinaryes are Kept nor is there any chimney.³

The name of this town was changed to Calvertown in 1683. Several attempts were made during the first quarter of the eighteenth century to remove the county seat to Huntingtown but all failed. In 1725, the county seat was removed to Williams Old Fields which lay halfway between the two towns.⁴

First Courthouse at Williams Old Fields-Prince Frederick Town-Prince Frederick

The two reasons given for the removal of the county seat were that the present courthouse was too old and too dilapidated to be of further use and that Battle Town was too inconvenient for a large part of the population. Unfortunately, neither the old nor the new courthouse was described in the act. However, the instructions to the commissioners for laying out three acres of public ground and the attached plat have been preserved in a re-recording of 1908. The commissioners were authorized to contract with an "undertaker" for the erection of the necessary buildings and this they did, although again the loss of the court records does not permit us to know when or on what terms. We know the name of the builders, William Kidd and John Critchard, because in 1728 they petitioned to be relieved of their contract and to be paid for such work as they had finished. Their petition was granted in an act of the General Assembly which also empowered the commissioners of Calvert County to levy further sums for the completion of the structure.⁵ We know the location of the public grounds because of all the records of the county preceding 1882 only the single sheet containing this plat and the surveyor's notes survived. This plat was re-recorded in the land records by the county commissioners, whose resolution follows:

Dec. 22, 1908

Whereas the fire that destroyed the Court House in Prince Frederick Town in March, 1882, also destroyed all of the land record books then belonging to Calvert County and—Whereas the only paper or instrument of writing then belonging to Calvert County that was not destroyed by the aforementioned fire—but was preserved

¹ *Arch. of Md.*, III, 308.

² Louis Dow Scisco, "Calvert County Court Houses and Records," *Md. Hist. Mag.*, XXVII, 36-41.

³ *Arch. of Md.*, XXII, 102-03.

⁴ Ch. 11, Acts of 1725, *Arch. of Md.*, XXXVI, 581-83.

⁵ Ch. 17, *Arch. of Md.*, XXXVI, 289-90.