

for the amount estimated, and the General Assembly had to be petitioned for a revision upward. The General Assembly, in 1818, authorized the levying of an additional sum not to exceed \$15,000.²⁶ Apparently the building had been progressing in the meanwhile, for we find that during the next year the General Assembly authorized the Levy Court "to pull down, or otherwise dispose of, as they may deem most expedient, the house in which the offices of clerk and register are held."²⁷ The new courthouse was occupied by the county in September 1821. It is this courthouse which in the eyes of Charles Countians became identified with Port Tobacco and for long was confused with the first courthouse of the county.²⁸ About the same time an act was passed changing the name of Charles Town to Port Tobacco.²⁹

This courthouse continued in service until the fire of August 3, 1892, when it was completely destroyed. The circumstances surrounding the fire are curious. The town of La Plata, about three miles north of Port Tobacco, began inauspiciously in 1873. Soon thereafter, the Popes Creek Railroad established communication between this little village and the rest of the State. As a result it grew, while Port Tobacco declined. Soon there developed strong sentiment for the removal of the county seat to La Plata, and a bill was passed in the General Assembly of 1882 to accomplish this purpose.³⁰ This act provided for a referendum to be held at the next Congressional election. The result was, for removal, 310; against removal, 2,410.³¹ No further legislation was attempted until 1890, when a similar bill was introduced.³² This bill passed but was vetoed by Governor Jackson.

At the next session, a bill was enacted and approved by the Governor.³³ This act provided that a referendum be held May 7, 1892, to decide the issue between the two towns. The proposed transfer was defeated by a vote of 995 to 1,329.³⁴ But on August 3, during the night, the courthouse burned. At the time, there were bitter allegations that the La Plata partisans had decided to accomplish their purpose by this extra-legal means; but no formal charges were ever made, and looking back on it from this distance in time, one is inclined to attribute the allegations solely to the acrimonious feeling over the transfer which had been developing for so long a time. Whatever the cause, however, the fire did indeed settle the issue insofar as Port Tobacco was concerned. It would not have been wise to rebuild in this village which had long since lost its entrance to the sea because of silting, and which had been bypassed by the railroad. Therefore, when the question was brought before the General Assembly of 1894, the two rivals for the new seat of government were La Plata and Chapel Point. The law passed at that session provided for an election to be held the first Tuesday in June, 1895. Provision was also made for a bond issue of \$20,000 for a new courthouse and jail wherever the voters chose to put them, and the county commissioners were authorized to provide temporary quarters in the meanwhile.³⁵

First Courthouse at La Plata

The election favored La Plata and at midnight of June 4, 1895, La Plata became the county seat. The same law empowered the building commissioners to sell the old courthouse and jail lots and to apply the proceeds to the cost of the new buildings. This was done and thereafter Port Tobacco rapidly declined so that when it was taken in hand again, fifty years later, by the Society for the Restoration of Port Tobacco, there was little left of the public buildings but the memory. The architect of the courthouse, completed in 1896, was Joseph C. Johnson; the contractor, James Haislip.

²⁶ Ch. 5.

²⁷ Ch. 12, Acts of 1819.

²⁸ Klapthor and Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²⁹ Ch. 159, Acts of 1820.

³⁰ Ch. 494, Acts of 1882.

³¹ *Baltimore Sun Almanac*, 1883, p. 43.

³² *Journal of the House of Delegates*, 1890, p. 239.

³³ Ch. 260, Acts of 1892.

³⁴ *Sun Almanac*, 1893, p. 42.

³⁵ Ch. 546, Acts of 1894.