

CHESTER COUNTY'S FIRST REGULATIONS

Revolutionary War fighting ended in 1781. The peace treaty with England was signed in 1783. It took two more years for South Carolina to draw up a state constitution and elect representatives.

Old districts were abandoned in favor of smaller units of government. Thus, Camden District was split into 7 counties of which 3 were Chester, Lancaster and York.

Using Chester as an example, we can see some of the difficulties faced by all the counties. Fortunately, the governor started the ball rolling by selecting men in each county that had already shown leadership. These men were charged with choosing the first county officers and implementing the state laws within the county.

Chester's three appointees were Edward Lacey, who was a general in the Revolution, David Hopkins and James Knox. They met at the house of John Walker on April 19, 1785 and chose Richard Taliaferro (pronounced Tolliver) as the first Clerk of Court.

The next day Court began. The first case heard was a petition on the part of Patrick McGriff who requested permission to keep a tavern. The state required that taverns be bonded and McGriff had backing from 2 men who put up 1 hundred pounds sterling each, a very large amount for the times.

McGriff was told that he must "keep good wholesome Diet, cleanly Lodgings, Forage for Horses Stables, for Horses pasturage . . ." and he must post all prices of each. Every type of liquor had a ceiling on what could be charged. The same day Robert Knox and James Knox were given like permission to set up taverns.

The next order of business was to appoint surveyors of the roads. These surveyors were given authority to recruit "tithables," (people who had property along the roads). The tithables were charged with helping the surveyors lay off the roads, clear away the debris and to keep the road in repair.

The Clerk of Court was ordered to advertise for the lowest bids for construction of a court house and a jail.

The first court closed after granting tavern licenses to a half dozen more people and adding additional surveyors to oversee roads.

In July the Court met again at the house of John Walker. Again they were faced with more petitions to operate taverns. Seven more tavern licenses were granted, leading us to believe that tavern-keeping must have been the most profitable enterprise in the county in 1785.

July Court also had presented to them a charge against Robert Jameson for passing "base metal." After listening to Jameson's defense that he had not counterfeited coins, he was found not guilty. At that point the court decided that they needed to draw up jury lists to hear similar cases in the future.

In the October court, Jennet Dodds was charged with Bastardy. The father was named but it was Jennet who paid the fine of 5 pounds, 7 shillings and a half penny. And Patrick McGriff, who had been issued the first permit to operate a

tavern, was found guilty of overcharging and was fined six pence. These were the first moneys collected by the county.

The Clerk of Court was then ordered to pay 1 pound sterling for the support of "a destitute distressed old man name Thos. Wiley."

The October 1785 Court also recorded the first five land deeds of the newly constituted county.

John Walker, whose house has served as the first courthouse, then voluntarily agreed to build a prison at his house at no expense to the county. He promised to build the jail at the direction of Edward Lacey, the first sheriff. John Mills was appointed coroner.

And thus ended the first year of operation of Chester County.

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