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THE GENESIS OF LOUISA COUNTY

by Josephine Henderson Neal
Louisa, Virginia

On December 11, 1738, a petition by the inhabitants of the upper part of Hanover County was presented to the House of Burgesses asking that Hanover be divided and a separate county be formed. After Committee action, the bill was passed by the Assembly but was never signed by the governor.

On June 4, 1740, a bill was introduced for the division of Hanover County and the Parish of St. Martin's. After due process the bill was passed on June 9, 1740. The bill provided:

That from and immediately after the first day of December next ensuing, all that tract of land now deemed to be part of the said county of Hanover, lying above a straight course to be run from the mouth of Little Rocky Creek, on the river Northanna, south twenty degrees west, until it intersects the line of Goochland County, be divided from the said county of Hanover, and be made a distinct county, to be called by the name of Louisa county. ¹

Several petitions relative to the location of a courthouse were presented, and on November 4, 1742, the Executive Council of the House of Burgesses directed the justices of Louisa to hold court at the house of Matthew Jouett for six months. If agreement for the location could not then be reached, the Council would give further consideration to the matter.²

The first Order Book of Louisa County Court contains the record of the first court:

At the House of Matthew Jouett, Gent., on Beaver Creek, in the County of Louisa, the XIII day of December, in the XVI year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the second, by the Grace of God of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, etc., Anno Dom. MDCCXLII –

Present –

Robert Lewis
Christopher Clarke
Ambrose Joshua Smith
Abraham Venable
Charles Barret
Richard Johnson
Thomas Meriwether

Robert Harris
John Carr
Joseph Bickley
Joseph Fox
John Starke
Joseph Shelton
John Poindexter

A Commission of the Peace for this County directed to the above mentioned persons and a Dedimus Protestation for Administering the Oaths, etc. both bearing date the IV day of November last past, were this day openly read. And thereupon, the said Robert Harris and John Carr administered the Oaths appointed by Act of Parliament to be taken instead of the Oaths of Allegiance and supremacy and the Abjuration Oath, unto the said Robert Lewis, which he took, and then subscribed the said Abjuration Oath and the Test. And then the said Robert Harris and

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John Carr administered unto him the Oath of a Justice of the Peace and the Oath of a Justice of the County Court in Chancery, which he likewise took. And then the said Robert Lewis, administered all the said Oaths unto the said Christopher Clarke, Ambrose Joshua Smith, Abraham Venable, Charles Barret, Richard Johnson, Thomas Meriwether, Robert Harris, John Carr, Joseph Shelton, and John Poindexter, who, in like manner, took the same and subscribed the said Abjuration Oath and Test. ³

On May 3, 1743, the Council again heard petitions pertaining to the location of Louisa County courthouse and found Matthew Jouett's land to be the most convenient site. Since this site was also favored by a majority of the justices, it was ordered that the courthouse be erected there.⁴

By a deed dated June 24, 1746, John Moore, executor of Matthew Jouett, late of Hanover County, and Susanna, his widow, conveyed to Hon. Philip Lightfoot of York County approximately 3,400 acres of land in Louisa County. The deed stated that Matthew Jouett by his last will dated December 31, 1743, recorded in Hanover County Court, directed that all his lands on Harris and Beaver Creeks in Louisa County "whereon the courthouse then and now stands" be sold.⁵

An act was passed in October 1748, which reads in part:

And to every Court-house already erected and established 2 acres of the land built upon and adjacent thereto, not having any house, orchard or other immediate convenience thereon, shall be and remain appropriated to such Court-house, and the fee simple thereof is hereby declared to be in the Court of the same County and their successors to the use of such County as aforesaid. ⁶

On July 27, 1752, James Littlepage and Sarah, his wife, of Hanover, Robert Jennings and Mary, his wife, of Hanover, conveyed to Thomas Johnson of Caroline County all that certain tract or parcel of land and plantation situated in Fredericksville Parish of Louisa County, containing 5,120 acres.⁷ The deed identifies adjoining landowners and a corner with Thomas Johnson on Beaver Creek. This tract of land included the present site of the courthouse.

Several more attempts were made to change the location of the courthouse. One petition was made by Anthony Thompson in 1764. The last was filed in 1787 when the justices ordered the county measured, and the courthouse as located on Johnson's land was found to be near the center of the county and ordered to so remain. This was evidently the Jouett site; the records do not disclose how Littlepage got the Lightfoot part of the Jouett land. In the County Court Judgments of 1775 is a plat of the two acres and adjoining ten-acre tract assigned for prison bounds.

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The types of buildings which housed the first courts are not known. The courthouse erected in 1818 is the earliest one of which a record and a picture remain.⁸ It stood just in front of the present courthouse and was torn down when the present courthouse was completed in 1905.

¹Hening, William Waller (ed. and comp.), *The Statutes At Large*, vol. 5, p. 208.

²*Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, vol. 5, p. 102.

³*Louisa County Order Book, 1742-1748*, p. 1.

⁴*Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, vol. 5, p. 118.

⁵*Louisa County Deed Book A*, p. 237.

⁶Hening, p. 507.

⁷*Louisa County Deed Book A*, p. 532.

⁸See cover.