

The Records

RG 1 Town Commissioners (1729-97)

History

The state government created the Baltimore Town Commissioners as part of the 1729 legislative act for "erecting" Baltimore Town. Consisting of seven members, appointed for life, the commissioners were empowered to buy land, to survey and sell lots, and to settle disputes about property boundaries. The commission was the sole vestige of town government until the early 1780s. In 1745, when Jones Town became part of Baltimore, the commissioners gained authority to levy a poll tax. The state granted the body additional power in 1784 to erect street lamps and have them lighted, appoint constables and watchmen, levy a tax on property, and appoint a treasurer. Between this year and 1793 the commissioners also possessed the powers of justices of the peace. Occasionally the state assigned the commissioners special duties including construction of market houses, maintenance of streets, and collection of special assessments and taxes.

By the early 1780s the commissioners shared their administrative responsibilities with two new bodies: a Board of Baltimore Town Special Commissioners, which was mainly responsible for the construction and maintenance of streets and bridges; and a Board of Port Wardens, which regulated the construction of wharves, surveyed the harbor, and levied a tax on vessels. Despite the presence of these three bodies, essential administrative functions remained at Annapolis with the state government. In the mid-1780s Baltimoreans began to urge for incorporation to better regulate the town. The legislature passed such an act in 1796, and the following year the Baltimore Town Commissioners ceased to function. The new government consisted of a mayor, city council, and a handful of officials that absorbed the duties of the commissioners.

Records Summary

The records of the commissioners include minutes, surveys, salary accounts, and financial records. Subjects covered are market stall rentals, levy of special taxes and fees, inspection of cord wood, and construction and repair of roads. Most of these records have been published separately.

Series

1. Baltimore Town Commissioners and Jones Town Commissioners Record Book. 1729-47. 0.5 lin. in. (1 vol.). Arranged chronologically.
2. Baltimore Town Commissioners and Jones Town Commissioners Record Book. 1732-47. 0.5 lin. in. (1 vol.). Arranged chronologically.