

Courtroom Jammed For Trial To Oust Sheriff

Last Saturday, Circuit Judge Leon Bazile took under advisement a demand for the ouster of Sheriff J. S. Dishman after a day-long trial that ended with defense lawyers delivering a fiery attack on Dishman's accuser.

Defense Attorney John D. Butzner Jr. told Commonwealth's Attorney Horace T. Morrison, who had sought Dishman's removal on charges of incompetence and neglect of duty, that he was guilty of slandering "an innocent man."

Butzner pointed a finger at the Commonwealth's attorney who earlier had appeared as principal witness for the State, and said; "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

Dishman's second lawyer, Joseph A. Billingsley, Jr., of King George, told the court: "The charges are ridiculous. I never have seen one fall as flat as this one did."

Morrison, granted permission by Bazile to speak, fired back that Butzner and Billingsley were engaging in "unethical conduct" and were breaking rules of the bar by attacking him personally. He threatened to take reprisal against them through the State Bar Association.

R. H. L. Chichester Stafford County Commonwealth's attorney who had been named prosecutor by Judge Bazile after Morrison disqualified himself defended of Morrison and said he believed Morrison had a right to bring the charges against the sheriff into court "if he believed laws were being broken."

"He simply did his duty," said Chichester. "As you know, I was drafted for this job. I did not come down to King George to tell you people what to do, but I think we have established a case."

Morrison spent much of the eight-hour trial on the stand and testified that Dishman had failed to summon witness when asked; refused to investigate break-ins,

(continued on page 5)

Courtroom Jammed * * *

Continued from Page 1

assaults and liquor violations; and acted adversely to the good of the Commonwealth in criminal trials.

Dishman was also charged by Morrison with failing to make proper investigation in a death 18 months ago which, he said, newly-discovered evidence indicates may have been a murder by poisoning.

Dishman also was accused of refusing to accompany Alcoholic Beverage Control officers on raids, of turning in poor reports and being generally "hard to find."

Dishman defended himself, point by point, and labeled the charges either as untrue or "greatly magnified" from trivial circumstances.

One of these witness, summoned for Morrison, caused a near-sensation when he surprisingly refused to testify on Morrison's behalf.

W. E. Spillman, a farmer from Index, was called by Chichester and asked to testify as to Morrison's reputation for truth and veracity in his (Morrison's community).

Spillman hesitated, "Well," he finally said, "I'll have to say it is bad." Morrison and Spillman exchanged words hardly audible as the farmer left the witness stand.

Three witness R. A. Peed, county commissioner of revenue for 35 years; W. Thomas Weaver, King George merchant, and W. E.

Taylor, a former school board member called by the defense also were asked the same question regarding Morrison and replied that his reputation for truth and veracity is "bad."

However, Morrison was defended on the same question by W. A. Grigsby, justice of the peace, and G. E. Richardson, a long-time county resident.

Sheriffs from three surrounding counties testified to their contacts with Sheriff Dishman and said they believed him to be efficient. They were Sheriffs Alaric MacGregor of Stafford, C. B. English, of Westmoreland and Garnett Brooks, of Caroline.

About 15 defense and 15 Commonwealth witness were called.

Approximately 250 jammed the courtroom for the trial, sitting and standing both on the main floor and in the balcony.

The Commonwealth's move for a trial by jury was overruled at the outset, by Bazile.

Judge Bazile also threw out a request by Morrison that his appointment of Trial Justice Bascom S. Pribble, Jr., be invalidated on a technicality.

Bazile said he expects he will need at least a month before announcing his decision in the ouster proceedings brought against Sheriff Dishman.