

TALBOT COUNTY

Records

Many of the records of Talbot County have been preserved, but unfortunately a great number have been lost.¹ The major series in the office of the Register of Wills are extant, either at the courthouse or at the Hall of Records in Annapolis. The land records are intact; but there are serious gaps in the records of the court and practically none of the early administrative records of the county have survived.

Sometime between 1936 and 1939 this writer witnessed the transfer of many court records from a wet basement room to the attic of the courthouse. When everything which would hold together had been removed, there remained on the floor a mass of wet pulp which had to be judged a total loss. Many of the records which were removed to the attic at that time have since come to the Hall of Records, and a major repair project has been under way for some years to save those parts of books which, while not total losses, are in some cases only token survivals. That other records have escaped to private hands and may be someday retrieved is evidenced by the fact that Tilghman used records which he stated were not in the possession of the County.²

Note

The writer is indebted to a reviewer of Volume I of this work, Henry Chandlee Forman (*Md. Hist. Mag.* Vol. 55, 246-49) for calling attention to the 1858 engraved map of Talbot County prepared by William H. Dilworth. In one corner there is a representation of the Courthouse. A good copy was made from the print in possession of the Maryland Historical Society and is here reproduced. From a study of this print and other evidence available to him, Mr. Forman, a resident of Talbot County and an expert in the history of Maryland architecture, had this to say about the so-called restoration of this same courthouse in 1958, exactly 100 years later: ". . . the old print proves that no 'restoration' was made to the façade in 1958, as claimed locally.

The print shows a front doorway to have had a large triumphal arch with keystone and impost, not the triangular pediment placed there in 1958. The architects at that time also left off the original brick front gable with flattened oval window, replacing them with a wooden, windowless gable: and omitted the chimneys and balcony shown in the fine old print. In the 1959 remodelling, all the old partitions were moved to cater to office space demands, without regard to the original floor plan of the courthouse. Further, the erection of enormous, somewhat grotesque, two-story wings and arcades, made of a cheap grade of brick, were the direct cause of the destruction of a number of original eighteenth-century windows in the sides of the court structure. Is it too much to hope that in a second edition all these things which happened recently to the finest courthouse in the State will be duly entered?" They are herewith entered!

¹ When these records were examined by Scisco he reported that the only court minutes to be preserved were those which had been recorded in books used also for recording of conveyances. He had not seen those in the basement. There were so few probate records that Scisco did not think it worthwhile to list them chronologically by series. As a matter of fact there are few losses. The hint

he gives about original wills being around somewhere proved to be correct: there are several years of wills which are not found in the record volumes (Louis Dow Scisco, "Colonial Records of Talbot County," *Md. Hist. Mag.*, XXII, 186-189).

² Oswald Tilghman, *History of Talbot County, Maryland*, Baltimore, 1915.