

# WASHINGTON COUNTY

## Records

On the night of December 6, 1871, the courthouse was burned. Normally we are left to guess about which records were lost but the special correspondent of the *Baltimore American* (Dec. 8, 1871) supplies us with some details:

The vault of the Register's office aided by the well directed use of the Junior Company's steam fire engine, was proof against the flames and falling timbers. The energetic Register, Mr. M. S. Barber, had, however, with his aids removed nearly all of the important papers. The Clerk's office had been also nearly emptied by that officer and his faithful deputies, but the fire reached and scorched some old papers already recorded. The papers and books of the County Commissioners were all saved by the gallant efforts of H. W. Lyday, a Commissioner. These papers were in an upper room, and after great risk Mr. Lyday, Mr. E. W. Funk and others succeeded in carrying them off.

I have not been advised whether the papers of the School Commissioners, also in rooms up-stairs, were saved. Sheriff Bamford retreated in good order, without the loss of a docket or process.

The Commissioners' safe fell through the floor, and the fate of its contents, which are probably unimportant, has not thus far been ascertained. Mr. Lyday unfortunately had not been able to get the key to rife it before the burning, and now the lock stubbornly refuses to act, whilst no one has been found who is able to pick it.

Perhaps the Special correspondent was a bit too optimistic for many records including the valuable first twenty years of the Judgment records are gone and must have perished in the fire. Among the papers which have disappeared some escaped the fire for this writer saw a large trunkfull of such papers—some labelled "1777"—in a hotel in Roanoke, Virginia some-time in the late 1930's. All efforts to trace them in 1939 and thereafter have proved fruitless.

## Note

In the first volume of this study (p. 156, and *ibid.* footnotes 10 and 11) I noted the attribution of the courthouse of 1823 to Benjamin Henry Latrobe. At that time no part of the Latrobe family papers—in which Edith Ross Bevan said there was, "much correspondence between Latrobe and Ringgold relative to the Courthouse"—was available to me. Since that time a part, but not all, of these papers have been purchased by the Maryland Historical Society which kindly permitted me to examine them. I found only one item relating to the courthouse (*Latrobe Letters*, 1817, pp. 36-37) :

Washington, March 10, 1817

General L. Ringgold  
Hagerstown  
Dear Sir,

The time allowed me to design the Courthouse has been very short, that with the utmost diligence, & encroaching on the duties of the Sabbath, I can only send you a general design, & have hardly time enough left to add the necessary explanation.

The Courtroom is 63 ft by 40 ft.

Each of the Offices 18 feet square vaulted

The Jury rooms 18 by 16, the grand jury room 25.8 by 18.0

You were so pleased with the Church that I have designed the building in the same taste but it will be a much handsomer building. I must defer the bill of scantlings to next