

CALVERT COUNTY

Records

Of all the county records of Maryland none has suffered greater losses than those of Calvert County. There was one move, from Battle Town to Prince Frederick Town, and a move of this kind inevitably causes losses, especially among the "old and useless" records. Thereafter, there was the fire of 1748. In the account of the fire found in the *Maryland Gazette*, it is said that "by the Diligence of the People, the greatest Part of the Records were preserved." Such a judgment is always extremely hazardous, and in the case of records it is doubly so, because it can be only an honest guess. What is likely is that the principal land and probate records were saved because we hear of no re-recordings and that everything else, including the new accumulation of loose papers, perished. Curiously enough, whatever records were saved were unavailable because the Clerk, Samuel Harrison refused to let anyone see them.

According to the complaint filed by the Justices of Calvert County, the Clerk of their Court, one Samuel Harrison attempted to avoid paying his honest debts by refusing to let anyone see the records. His Deputy Ellis Slater deposed as follows:

5th Did not some of the Justices of the County af^d on the day after the Court house burnt apply to M^r Harrison to inspect what Damage the Records had sustained and that He refused to suffer them so to do

Ans^r To the best of my Remembrance M^r Weemes D^r Somerville and Major William Ireland did apply and desire to see the Records but said Harrison refused, locking the Door where the same was lodged and put the Key in his Pockett and carried the same home, afterwards the Gentⁿ aforesaid appointed to meet some days after and Ordered this Respondant to Acquaint M^r Harrison thereof & desire him to meet them or send the Key. This Respondant did acquaint said Harrison according to Request, but he neither met them nor sent the key as he was desired¹

When the British burned the courthouse, in 1814, report was that the records had been removed in advance by the county authorities. There is some likelihood to this story because the redcoats had been raiding about in the neighborhood for several days before the march on Prince Frederick, but again it is still unlikely that all the records were removed. In any case, the slate was wiped clean by the fire of 1882; whatever might have been saved from the earlier fires only served finally to provide more fuel for the latest one. Scisco found a stark summary of the loss in the *Baltimore Sun*:

"Mr. Somerville Sollers, clerk of the county court, was in his office in the court house, and saved some papers, but with these exceptions all the county records were lost. Every book and paper in the county commissioners' office and in the office of the register of wills were burned up. In the clerk's office all the original papers were lost, and a great many records, running as far back as 1650, and many papers of great interest relating to the early history of the county. These records and papers were invaluable, and their loss will cause inconveniences and expenses that will be felt for many years."²

If Somerville Sollers actually saved any papers they too were lost in the Rectory fire a few months later, because nothing antedating this last misfortune has come down to us, with the exception of one volume of re-recordings of land records, a pitiful remnant of a rich store.

¹ *Arch. of Md.*, XXVIII, pp. 444-45.

² Louis Dow Scisco, "Calvert County Court Houses and Records," *Md. Hist. Mag.* XXVII, 36-41.