

# BALTIMORE COUNTY

## Records

The reader may be startled that a county as old as Baltimore has records dating only as far back as 1851 when the county and town of Baltimore became separate governmental units. The reason for this division of records is a purely practical one. It was cheaper and more convenient to leave the records of Baltimore County in Baltimore City than to move them to the new county seat of Baltimore County in Towson. These records have fared well in Baltimore City and with the exception of the early administrative records and some of the judgment records they are intact.

## Note

The following note of the Clerk of Court will be interesting because of its detailed description of the fire of 1835 and also because of its judgment as to the cause of the fire. For some curious reason arson was almost universally accepted as the cause of fire in courthouses.

Entered in Minutes under date of Friday, February 13, 1835, Court met agreeably to adjournment.

On This day about 11:00 o'Clock when the County Court in the upper Court room & the City Court in the lower room were both in session, The dome of the Courthouse was discovered to be on fire. Whether by accident or design is not known, yet the latter is supposed, because stoves were used in all the rooms but one, which are not likely to have conveyed sparks of fire from the tops of the chimneys used by them and if sparks had risen from the fireplace, the distance of that Chimney and all the others from the dome and the Wind at the time being from the South West would have borne the sparks across the House and not towards the dome—The general impression is that after the opening of the Jury room from a door opposite [the] Stairway which led up to the dome, the Key of which was tied to and left with the Key of that room in the door, must have been taken by someone unobserved and thereby got up there to the dome and set fire to the dome which is rendered the more probable as both Keys were, soon after the alarm of fire, found upon the private stairs leading to it.

The Clerk deems it proper further to remark That all the Public Records, Books and papers have been pre[served] uninjured by the fire (at least none useful are missed) and very [illegible] but little wet by the great quantity of water s[prayed] by Engines into the building. These are the joint results [of] fire proof offices and the unremitted [sic] care and attention of all the persons employed in the Office during the conflagration which continued through the day and most of the following night.

In the Proceedings of the May term 1836 of Baltimore County Court (pp. 197-198) there is an interesting account of the laying of the cornerstone of the Record Office built after the fire in the courthouse of February 13, 1835. There is so much relevant information given here and this kind of document so rare I have thought it worthwhile to quote it *in toto*.

On motion of the Clerk, the Court here order and direct that the following be spread upon the minutes of the Court, to wit:

“The ceremony of laying the cornerstone of the new City and County Record office, on the Court house lot, was yesterday (28<sup>th</sup> June) performed by Solomon Etting, Esq. President of the Board of Commissioners for repairing the Court house &c. assisted by General Samuel Smith, our venerable mayor, in presence of Chief Justice Taney, the Judges of the different Courts, and other City and County officers, and a numerous assemblage of Citizens and Strangers. Previous to fixing the Stone in its place, Mr. Etting addressed the meeting as follows:—Gentlemen: The destruction by fire of a