

Snow Hill, Nov. 28th, 1834.

My dear friend,—Our village is in ashes—It took fire from a carpenter's shop in the center of the town. The whole central portion is burned, every house of every description. All the stores except Jenkins' and John Dennis'—both the taverns. John Blair's dwelling, Denwood Williams's, Annanias Jones's, Isaac P. Smith's, E. Dymond's, George Hudson's, Dr. John R. Purnell's, Mrs. Due's, Lewin Townsend's, Lowell Jenkins'—all the millinery, shoemakers', tailors', and all other little shops in the central part of the town. The Court House is in ashes—it is said, however, that the records and the most valuable papers are saved. I have given you a very imperfect account of this most dreadful calamity. I am exhausted almost to faintness. What can be done? many of our citizens are houseless, pennyless, without food and clothes. I have lost nothing. The saving of J. Dennis's store and I. P. Smith's stables was the means of saving all the south-western part of the town. The wind was about west, north-west, and blew a fresh breeze. Those who are acquainted with the location of the houses burnt, will readily know who are safe.

Very respectfully, your ob'dt serv't.
John S. Martin.⁶

The damage to the courthouse was so great that it was judged to be beyond repair. Consequently, the General Assembly of that year appointed commissioners for the building of a new courthouse and authorized the Levy Court of Worcester County to borrow as much as \$10,000 for the building and furnishings.⁷ No details are given and none are known to this writer, except that it was made of brick and was surmounted by a wooden cupola. The act does fix the site of the building as the public ground where the late courthouse stood until burned. At the next session of the General Assembly the usual provision for the rerecording of lost records was made.⁸

Second Courthouse at Snow Hill

Major changes were made in this courthouse in 1882 and 1883, some of which are listed in the act of assembly which authorized the county commissioners to issue bonds for the purpose. Provision was made for "an addition to the rear of the present court-room, and of a second story over the whole of the old court-room so extended, so as to give room for a new court-room in said second story."⁹ It was also at this time that fireproof vaults were provided for the Register of Wills and Clerk of Court, and a new slate roof which covered the whole courthouse was built. The cost of these improvements was \$8,530.¹⁰

Third Courthouse at Snow Hill

Unfortunately, this enlarged and improved courthouse was only destined to be of service to the county for a single decade. During the night of August 7, 1893, it too was destroyed by fire along with the jail and a significant part of the town of Snow Hill. The General Assembly did not meet until January 3 of the next year. At that time, an act was passed authorizing the county commissioners to borrow up to \$25,000 to build a new jail and courthouse, the older buildings being beyond repair.¹¹ They were also empowered to use whatever insurance might be collected on the old buildings thereby providing an additional \$10,000.

The commissioners were permitted to employ a "capable architect at a reasonable compensation." They chose Jackson C. Gott of Baltimore; and for builders, Slemmons and Lankford of Salisbury. The county commissioners were also instructed to keep a special book in which all expenditures on the new buildings were to be entered. Fortunately, this book was kept and is still preserved. From it we learn that the total cost of the red brick Victorian courthouse and jail was exactly \$37,449.87. The new building was completed in 1894. It has remained essentially the same to this day.¹²

⁶ The *Maryland Gazette*, December 4, 1834. Microfilm, Hall of Records.

⁷ Ch. 47. This act passed Feb. 3, 1835.

⁸ Ch. 279, Acts of 1835.

⁹ Ch. 239, Acts of 1882.

¹⁰ This figure was taken from the report of a field worker

of the Historical Records Survey, now on deposit at the Hall of Records. The information was drawn from the earliest surviving book of *Minutes of The Board of County Commissioners, 1869-1885*, which is now also at the Hall of Records.

¹¹ Ch. 250, Acts of 1894.

¹² Field Report of HRS worker.