

Third Courthouse at Baltimore

It was fortunate that the records were so placed because on February 13, 1835, "The court-house, at that time one of the finest buildings in the country, was destroyed, but all the valuable records were saved."⁶⁵ Fortunately, the fire occurred during a business morning and many records were carried out by the grand jurors and other volunteers.⁶⁶ The General Assembly was then in session so it was possible to have passed within a month "An Act to authorize the repairing of the Court House of Baltimore County, . . ."⁶⁷ To finance this project the commissioners were authorized to issue \$80,000 of twenty-year, five-per-cent stock which was to provide not only for the courthouse but "Also for erecting and completing upon the vacant lot in the said City, west of the said Court House, adjoining the same, fire proof offices, for the safe keeping of the records of Baltimore County Court, and the Orphans' Court of Baltimore County, and for the purchase of the necessary materials and supplies for that object; . . ."⁶⁸ This proved to be too large an order for the sum authorized, but only one additional grant was required to finish the job, \$1,500, which was made available by an Act of Assembly of 1839 when the buildings were almost completed.⁶⁸

Both the rebuilding of the courthouse and the erection of the record office were entrusted to the distinguished Baltimore architect, Robert Cary Long, Jr. Long had first submitted a daring Egyptian temple design for the record office, but the building which finally went up "was unique and surprisingly modern in its stark simplicity. The vaulted brick interior, which was acclaimed as absolutely fireproof, was sheathed on the outside in Baltimore County marble. Originally there were two short flights of steps leading up to the great iron doors, but about 1880 the street level was lowered five or six feet and the open terrace was added, spoiling the proportions of the building as seen from the street. The solid mass of the building still recalled that of an Egyptian structure, or possibly to some observers that of a Mayan temple."⁶⁹

This building stood on the southeast corner of Lexington and St. Paul Streets until it was razed in 1894.

Separation of City and County-1851

Those inhabitants of Baltimore County who protested the transfer of the county seat from Joppa to Baltimore in 1768 pointed out that the latter town was at the very southeastern tip of the county and would be extremely inconvenient as a center of county business. The northern part of the county never reconciled itself to the change and only five years later was able to establish itself as a separate county, Harford. Much of the northwestern part of the county achieved autonomous status in 1839 with the creation of Carroll County. But the conflict of interest between the bustling center of commerce and industry and the static agricultural hinterland went on as before. Nothing would now satisfy either party but an absolute divorce of city and county. The partisans were there from the moment Baltimore became the county seat, but the conflict did not enlist the interest of a significant part of the electorate until the 1830's. The act authorizing the rebuilding of the fire-damaged courthouse in 1835 provided as follows:

And be it enacted, That if, at any time hereafter, a separation should take place between Baltimore City and County, and a county town and Court House erected in

⁶⁵ J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Baltimore City and County*, Philadelphia, 1881, p. 261.

⁶⁶ The fire was checked on the second floor but one of the chimneys was left standing. On June 27 following, this chimney was blown down with great force, breaking through the temporary roof over the first floor. In addition to the property damage caused by the falling bricks, there was one casualty:

Thomas Marshall, son of the Chief Justice, who had taken shelter from the violent storm, was fatally injured. (*Ibid.*, p. 728.)

⁶⁷ Ch. 151, Acts of 1834. Passed March 9, 1835.

⁶⁸ Ch. 61, Acts of 1839.

⁶⁹ Richard H. Howland and Eleanor P. Spencer, *The Architecture of Baltimore*, Baltimore, 1953, p. 92 and plate 72.