

DORCHESTER COUNTY

Records

Some of the early Proceedings of the Court have been lost. Some others may have been badly kept from the beginning as witness a report to the General Assembly of "The Committee of Aggreivances and Courts of Justice" of April 5, 1736:

"That by the Return of the Justices from Dorchester County in the Clerkship of Hugh Eccleston and of Govert Loockerman from the years 1716-1720 the proceedings are very Irregularly and Imperfectly Entered."¹

After this period there are large gaps until the middle of the eighteenth century and there are smaller gaps thereafter. On the other hand, the deed records seem to be intact. Almost all of the loose papers in the clerk's office have disappeared, but a small number have recently been retrieved from the attic where they were seen by Scisco.² It is fair to assume that the major part of them were burned in the fire of 1852.

The proceedings of the justices sitting as an administrative body have also disappeared as have the records of the Commissioners of the Tax and the Levy Court. None of the records that the Board of County Commissioners had created before 1852 survived the fire. With the exception of two current minute books which happened to be at the home of the Deputy Register of Wills, nothing from the Orphans' Court survived. In response to the call for the rerecording of instruments issued immediately after the fire, and despite successive acts of Assembly which extended the rerecording period to 1860, there was little response.³ Only a few wills were brought in and none of these seems to be earlier than 1823. The exact number and the dates of these rerecordings is difficult to determine because contrary to the usual procedure under such circumstances, no separate book was dedicated to this purpose. The Register of Wills simply copied such instruments at the place in his books where he happened to be recording current business. The reader is cautioned that while there is no way to substitute for the lost court records it is possible to fill part of the gap in the probate records through use of the records of the Secretary and the Prerogative Court at the Hall of Records and the single volume of Wills taken from the Dorchester County files for the use of Caroline County. This last-named record is found in the courthouse at Denton as well as at the Hall of Records.

Note

The architect for the 1931 courthouse work has advised me that his name is improperly inscribed on the vestibule plaque which was copied faithfully in my first volume: the name should be William F. Stone, Jr. and not William A. Stone, Jr. He also noted that he persuaded the Commission not to change from Italianate to Georgian style, that he added the quoins and did the interior remodeling which proved to be an almost total undertaking. (Letter of William F. Stone, Jr. to the writer, March 1960)

The December 11, 1673 session of Dorchester County Court in which Elias Jones found the information about the courthouse at Harwood's Chance is not lost as I stated (Vol. I, p.

¹ *Arch. of Md.*, XXXIX, 394-5.

² Louis Dow Scisco, "Colonial Records of Dorchester County," *Md. Hist. Mag.*, XXIII, 243-46.

³ Acts 1852, Ch. 316; 1854, Ch. 46; 1856, Ch. 103 and 1858, Ch. 114.