

Excerpt from the letter of Lt. Col. Thomas Clark, edited by Marilyn Clark-Snyder in 1994.



### *History of the Forth-Dumfries Court House*

Directly across from the Henderson House is the Courthouse lot, now for sale. The county courthouse that sat on this lot was constructed in 1762 and served as the center of county government for sixty years. In 1774, residents of Prince William County met at the courthouse and boldly adopted the **Prince William Resolves** to proclaim their opposition to Britain's crackdown on Boston following the Boston Tea Party. The building slowly deteriorated after the county courthouse was moved to Brentsville in 1822. All that remains of the building is its foundation, which is buried underground and a few bricks that were used to create a monument at the corner of Fairfax and Duke Street.

Here is a very interesting entry in a **letter of Lt. Col. Thomas Clark of the 29th Ohio Volunteers on Jan. 1, 1863** while in Dumfries. It gives the history and condition of the Town of Dumfries and Court House of that time. "We are four miles from what is called Dumfries Landing which in old colonial times was a place of no small importance. I am told it was settled in 1604 and is the oldest place in Virginia, except Jamestown. The old colonial Court House still stands. Occupied as a dwelling & with its old moss covered roof & dilapidated sides looks very ancient. The old jail is close by it & is used as a barn. The court seat of Prince William Co. was moved about 40 years ago to Brentsville some 16 miles from here. Since which time this has been gradually running down until it is nearly deserted & its former paved streets are now crowded by a thick growth of pine & oak trees to recuperate the old worn out soil. At the landing not a house is left & only one between here & there. This place was once an incorporated town of 10 thousand inhabitants and had 60 large stores and warehouses. Now, there has only been one or two little stores and about 20 dwelling houses for a few years back previous to the war. The court house got a secesh (old term for confederate) shell through it the other day and is very much in ruins and has been used somewhat as a schoolhouse & church during the last 40 years. It was once put in mourning for the Death of Washington & has still a bright coat of black paint on its inside ornaments. It was from this house that the burning Eloquence of Patrick Henry went forth to the world in that great speech in which the words occur. "Our chains are already forged. Their clanking is heard on the plains of Boston." Winding up with "Give me Liberty or Give me Death." Well may the few remaining miserable poor inhabitants of the once wealthy town of Dumfries turn to the record of the past as their all that is of interest to the passer by of the present . . ."

It is with great thanks to **Lee Lansing, Dumfries Town Historian** that we are able to share an excerpt from the letter of Lt. Col. Thomas Clark, edited by Marilyn Clark-Snyder in 1994.