

13th CONGRESS.]

No. 371.

[3d Session.]

BOOKS AND PAPERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND THE LIBRARY OF
CONGRESS, LOST BY THE CONFLAGRATION OF THE CAPITOL IN 1814.

COMMUNICATED TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, SEPTEMBER 22, 1814.

SIR:

CLERK'S OFFICE, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, *September 20, 1814.*

Being compelled to leave home the latter part of July, for the Springs, on account of indisposition; after leaving the clerks in charge of the office, with instructions as to their official duties, and a person in charge of the library of Congress, for the purpose of opening and airing the books, pursuant to the regulations thereof; during my absence, the invasion of this city was effected by the enemy, and the destruction of public property by them, in those Departments immediately under my superintendence, ensued; and, for a more particular detail of the circumstances attending that disastrous event, I must, through you, refer a statement of facts (submitted in a letter to me from the clerks, who were left in the office after the militia marched from the district) to the House, with a request that a committee may be raised for the purpose of investigating the subject matter thereof, and report to the House accordingly; and, also, that the Committee of Accounts may be instructed to ascertain, as near as can be, the amount of money paid on account of the contingent expenses of the House, since the first day of January last, by the clerk, that he may have credit for the same at the Treasury, as the public vouchers for the expenditure of the public money since that period have all been destroyed in the conflagration of the Capitol. Without the aid of such an ascertainment, by a committee of the House, justice cannot be done to the undersigned or the public.

I am, sir, with respect, yours, &c.

PATRICK MAGRUDER.

The SPEAKER of the *House of Representatives.*

SIR:

CITY OF WASHINGTON, *September 15, 1814.*

In order to correct any erroneous statements or representations which may go, or have gone out to the public, in relation to the destruction of your office, we deem it our duty to make the following statement of facts:

At the time you left the city, (which was in the latter part of the month of July,) for the springs in Virginia and Pennsylvania, for the recovery of your health, all was quiet, and we believe no fears were entertained for the safety of the seat of Government. Indeed, nothing was heard of the enemy, except his marauding parties in the Chesapeake, and what was seen in the newspapers, of troops being ordered from Europe to America.

About the middle of August it was stated that the enemy was in the bay, in great force, and, on the 19th of that month, the whole body of the militia of the District of Columbia was called out, under which call every clerk of the office was taken into the field, except Mr. Frost, and marched to meet the enemy.

On the 21st, the first of the undersigned clerks was furloughed, by Brigadier General Smith, at the request of Colonel George Magruder, for the purpose of returning to the city, to take care of, and save such part of the books and papers of the clerk's office, as he might be able to effect, in case the enemy should get possession of the place; he arrived here in the night of that day.

His orders from Colonel George Magruder were, not to begin packing up until it was ascertained that the clerks at the War Office were engaged in that business; and it was not until 12 o'clock, on Monday, the 22d, that we were informed that they had begun to move the effects of that office, although we were subsequently told that it had commenced the day before.

We immediately went to packing up, and Mr. Burch went out in search of wagons or other carriages, for the transportation of the books and papers; every wagon, and almost every cart, belonging to the city, had been previously impressed into the service of the United States, for the transportation of the baggage of the army; the few he was able to find were loaded with the private effects of individuals, who were moving without the city; those he attempted to hire, but, not succeeding, he claimed a right to impress them; but, having no legal authority, or military force to aid him, he, of course, did not succeed. He then sent off three messengers into the country, one of whom obtained from Mr. John Wilson, whose residence is six miles from the city, the use of a cart and four oxen; it did not arrive at the office, until after dark on Monday night, when it was immediately laden with the most valuable records and papers, which were taken, on the same night, nine miles, to a safe and secret place in the country. We continued to remove as many of the most valuable books and papers, having removed the manuscript records, as we were able to do with our one cart, until the morning of the day of the battle of Bladensburg, after which we were unable to take away any thing further.

Every thing belonging to the office, together with the library of Congress, we venture to say, might have been removed in time, if carriages could have been procured; but it was altogether impossible to procure them, either for hire, or by force.

The most material papers which have been lost are, the last volumes of the manuscript records of the Committees of Ways and Means, Claims and Pensions, and Revolutionary Claims; the clerks were engaged in bringing up these records previous to the alarm, and as it was not certain that the enemy would get to the city, and being desirous to have them completed, they were not packed away with the rest, but were kept out, that they might be finished by the meeting of Congress; but with the intention of taking them to a private residence, if such removal should be found necessary. After the defeat of our troops at Bladensburg, Mr. Frost removed them to the house commonly called General Washington's, which house being unexpectedly consumed by fire, these records were thus unfortunately lost.

The secret journal of Congress was also consumed; it was kept in a private drawer in the office, and in the hurry of removal was forgotten. Its contents, however, have been, in most cases, published by order of the House.

The manuscript papers, which have not been saved, were mostly of a private nature, consisting chiefly of petitions, and unimportant papers, presented previous to the year 1799.

We regret very much the loss of your private accounts and vouchers, amongst which, we are sorry to add, were the receipts and accounts of the expenditure of the contingent moneys of the House of Representatives; they were in the private drawer of Mr. George Magruder, which being locked, and the key not in our possession, we delayed to break it open until the last extremity, after which it escaped our recollection.

It is well known to one of us, (Mr. Burch,) that the receipts were from the first of January last, and embraced nearly the whole amount of the appropriation for the contingent expenses of the House.

A number of the printed books were also consumed, but they were all duplicates of those which have been preserved.

We have thus given you a full account of our proceedings during the troublesome scene, and we flatter ourselves you will not see in them any thing to disapprove, as we were guided solely by a zealous endeavor to discharge our duty to you, and to the public.

S. BURCH,
J. T. FROST.

To PATRICK MAGRUDER, Esq.,
Clerk to the House of Representatives.

[13th CONGRESS.]

No. 372.

[3d SESSION.]

PURCHASE OF THE LIBRARY OF THOMAS JEFFERSON.

COMMUNICATED TO THE SENATE, OCTOBER 7, 1814.

IN SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES, *October 7, 1814.*

Mr. GOLDSBOROUGH, from the joint committee on the library of Congress, reported:

That they have received, through Mr. Samuel H. Smith, an offer from Mr. Jefferson, late President of the United States, of the whole of his library for Congress, in such a mode, and upon such terms, as they consider highly advantageous to the nation, and worthy the distinguished gentleman who tenders it. But the means placed at the disposal of the committee being very limited and totally inadequate to the purchase of such a library as that now offered, the committee must have recourse to Congress, either to extend their powers, or to adopt such other plan as they may think most proper.

Should it be the sense of Congress to confide this matter to the committee, they respectfully submit the following resolution:

Resolved, by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress Assembled, That the joint Library Committee of the two Houses of Congress be, and they are hereby, authorized and empowered to contract, on their part, for the purchase of the library of Mr. Jefferson, late President of the United States, for the use of both Houses of Congress.

SIR:

OCTOBER 3, 1814.

I have the honor, in furtherance of the proposition contained in a letter from Mr. Jefferson to me, tendering the disposition of his library to Congress, to enclose his letters for submission to the honorable committee over which you preside, with the expression of my readiness at any time to proceed in the discharge of the agency confided to me.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

SAMUEL H. SMITH.

HON. ROBERT H. GOLDSBOROUGH,
Chairman of the Library Committee of Congress.

DEAR SIR:

MONTICELLO, *September 21, 1814.*

I learn from the newspapers that the vandalism of our enemy has triumphed at Washington over science as well as the arts, by the destruction of the public library, with the noble edifice in which it was deposited. Of this transaction, as that of Copenhagen, the world will entertain but one sentiment. They will see a nation suddenly withdrawn from a great war, full-armed and full-handed, taking advantage of another whom they had recently forced into it, unarmed, and unprepared, to indulge themselves in acts of barbarism which do not belong to a civilized age. When Van Ghent destroyed their shipping at Chatham, and De Ruyter rode triumphantly up the Thames, he might, in like manner, by the acknowledgment of their own historians, have forced all their ships up to London bridge, and there have burnt them, the tower, and city, had these examples been then set. London, when thus menaced, was near a thousand years old; Washington is but in its teens.

I presume it will be among the early objects of Congress to recommence their collection; this will be difficult while the war continues, and intercourse with Europe is attended with so much risk. You know my collection, its condition, and extent. I have been fifty years making it, and have spared no pains, opportunity, or expense, to make it what it is. While residing in Paris I devoted every afternoon I was disengaged, for a summer or two, in examining all the principal bookstores, turning over every book with my own hands, and putting by every thing which related to America, and, indeed, whatever was rare and valuable in every science; besides this, I had standing orders, during the whole time I was in Europe, in its principal book-marts, particularly Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Madrid, and London, for such works relating to America, as could not be found in Paris. So that, in that Department particularly, such a collection was made as probably can never again be effected; because it is hardly probable that the same opportunities, the same time, industry, perseverance, and expense, with some knowledge of the biography of the subject, would again happen to be in concurrence. During the same period, and after my return to America, I was led to procure also whatever related to the duties of those in the high concerns of the nation. So that the collection, which I suppose is of between nine and ten thousand volumes, while it includes what is chiefly valuable in science and literature generally, extends more particularly to whatever belongs to the American statesman. In the diplomatic and parliamentary branches, it is particularly full. It is long since I have been sensible it ought not to continue private property, and had provided that, at my death, Congress should have the refusal of it at their own price; but the loss they have now incurred makes the present the proper moment for their accommodation, without regard to the small remnant of time, and the barren use of my enjoying it. I ask of your friendship, therefore, to make for me the tender of it to the Library Committee of Congress, not knowing, myself, of whom the committee consist. I enclose you the catalogue, which will enable them to judge of its contents;