

Courthouse Fires by Arnold L. Dean

Recently, I asked about old tax records for our county at the treasurer's office. The clerk said, "Oh! All of those burnt in the courthouse fire." I asked, "When did our county courthouse have a fire?" The clerk replied, "I really don't know. That is just what I was told when I came to work here a few years ago." And so the story is repeated, often times without any evidence of it being true.

There have been some courthouses in Indiana that have had fires, which did destroy some records. However, this excuse has often been used when the person making the statement has no knowledge about older records, or to keep from having to go to the effort of making a search.

In *Indiana Source Book, Volume 1*, brief descriptions of the records that have been lost or preserved for counties which really have experienced courthouse fires are given. Below is a very brief summary of these counties, including the year of the fire, and what records were really destroyed or preserved.

COUNTY	DATE OF FIRE	STATUS OF PRIOR RECORDS
Boone	Oct. 1856	Practically all lost
Brown	--	All lost, except some clerk's files
Clay	Nov. 1851	All lost except Recorder's records
Daviess	1879	Marriage records and index to probate and deed records were not destroyed
Dearborn	Mar. 1826	Most records lost--some early marriage and will records exist
DeKalb	1913	Probate records before 1860 were the worst loss
Dubois	Aug. 1839	All destroyed, except the WPA found 10 boxes of deeds from 1812
Franklin	Feb. 1852	No records lost
Gibson	1935	No records harmed
Hancock	Dec. 1940	No records harmed

Henry	Feb. 1864	Clerk, recorded, auditor and treasurer's records were saved
Jackson	?1872? and ?1881?	No records lost
Jasper	1864	Clerk's records were lost--deeds and deed indexes escaped damage
Johnson	May 1849 and Dec. 1874	Records that survived: marriages from 1830, "complete" court records from 1823; recorder's entry book from 1822 and deeds and deed indexes from 1824
Knox	Jan. 1814	Records that survived: marriages from 1807; order book from 1811; minutes book 1816-1818; orphan's court minutes 1796-1805; minutes of common pleas court 1790-1810; general indexes to administrations from 1795-1886; deeds from 1814 and wills from 1806
Madison	Dec. 1880	Lost: marriage, circuit court and common pleas court records Saved: wills from 1879, deeds from 1825, and general index to deeds from 1829
Martin	Apr. 1876	Saved: all records of genealogical interest
Miami	Mar. 1843	All records destroyed--deeds from 1828 survived
Morgan	Mar. 1876	Some records destroyed. Saved: marriage and deed records from 1822, probate order books 1822-1836
Noble	1843 and 1859	Most of clerk's records were lost. Saved: marriages from 1859, deeds and deed indexes from 1836
Parke	Oct. 1833	Saved: marriages from 1829; probate, deed and deed indexes from 1833
Porter	Dec. 1934	All records saved
Spencer	Sept. 1833	Saved: marriage and deed records
Sullivan	Feb. 1850	All records destroyed except wills from 1841
Tipton	1857	Saved: records of genealogical interest

Union	Feb. 1903	Water damage to records only
Vermillion	Jan. 1844	All records saved
Wabash	Apr. 1870	Saved: treasurer's, auditor's, recorder's and clerk's records.

Arnold L. Dean has several years experience as a professional family history researcher, and has published a number of books regarding Wayne County, Indiana records.