

Great Fire of 1814

Yorktown was heavily damaged during the Siege of 1781 and many residents abandoned their properties. Those who stayed demolished damaged buildings and repaired others. Everyday life reemerged, but on March 3, 1814, another disaster struck.

The *Richmond Enquirer* carried the news.

York, March 4 — Yesterday about 3:00 p.m. Mrs. Gibbons' house . . . took fire and together with the county Court-house, the Church, the spacious dwelling of the late President Nelson, and the whole of the town below the hill, except Charlton's and Grant's houses, were consumed. The lower town was occupied principally by poor people, who are now thrown upon the world without a shelter or a cent to aid them . . . The wind was high and the [buildings] were old — the fire spread . . . like a train of powder.

Again, little was done to rebuild. The new Courthouse was completed in 1818. It took nearly 30 years to repair the marl walls of the church, renamed Grace. A legend that British sympathizers burned the town has never been proved.



A fire in Virginia, circa 1800. Image courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg.

