

FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 62 – April 2020
Conservation Update from Historic Records
Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center



Happy Spring, all! Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center staff are pleased to provide an update on newly-conserved court records that have recently been returned to the archives, after undergoing months of cleaning and repair at a conservation facility in North Carolina. Even though the Historic Records Center is currently closed to the public, the important work of preserving and making available the historic records of the Fairfax Circuit Court continues! In this newsletter, we will examine Plat Book 2, Order Book 1772-1774, and Deed Book C-1.

Fairfax Circuit Court Plat Book 2

The first court record that we are highlighting is Plat Book 2. These subdivision plats date from 1935 to 1938, and represent a point in time when the Fairfax Clerk of Court separated the oversized plats and surveys from deed books and stored them separately. The Historic Records Center holds six plat books in total and we hope to have all conserved in due course.

Plat Book 2 contains subdivision plats, hand-drawn on linen, for some of the earliest Fairfax County developments and demonstrate a level of craftsmanship unmatched today. Originally stored in PVC synthetic plastic sleeves, over time, the plasticizer in the sleeves started to break down, resulting in a yellowy, oily surface. Additionally, many of the pages had started to “cockle,” which looks like rippling or puckering, as seen below.



Plat Book 2, yellowing and cockling.
Image courtesy of Tracy Harter, Library of Virginia (LVA)



Significant cockling in Plat Book 2.
Image courtesy of Tracy Harter, LVA

After months of conservation treatment, Plat Book 2 was returned to the Records Center in late 2019. All pages had been removed from their deteriorating PVC-plastic sleeves and cleaned, and tears mended. Each page was rehoused in an archival-safe clear sleeve and rebound. The result is a beautiful, “like-new” plat book that will last many, many more years.

As you can see, the Plat Book pages now lay flat and the Mylar sleeves allow for clear viewing of each hand-drawn plat.

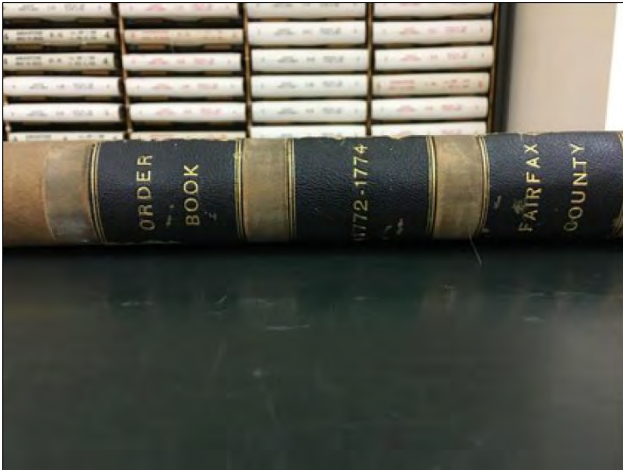


Fairfax Order Book 1772-1774

This Court Order Book contains social, cultural and judicial information about the Fairfax Court and the citizens of Fairfax County in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War. As Fairfax County is considered a “Lost Records Locality” by the Library of Virginia, and has very limited sources for the county’s history pre-1840, this Order Book and others like it take on an additional importance as one of the remaining sources for information about county’s earliest days.

Unfortunately, Order Book 1772-1774 had fallen into serious disrepair before it was submitted for conservation in late 2018. The ledger had been rebound in the 1920s, but the page glue had dried, resulting in

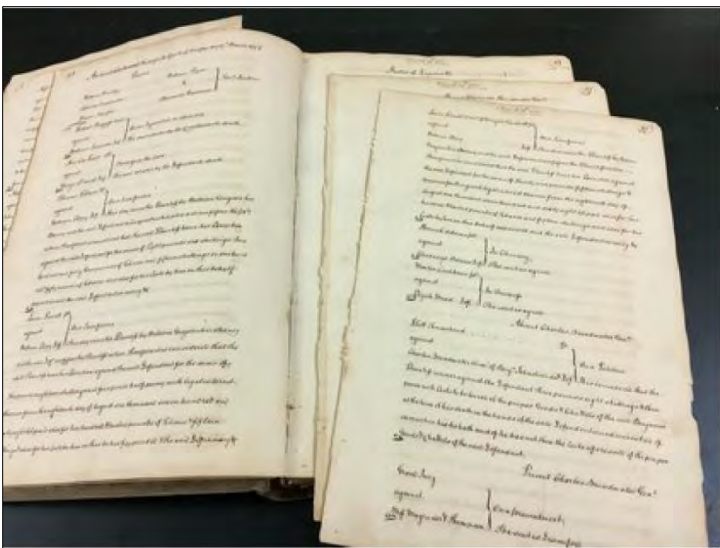
pages coming loose. Free-floating pages are susceptible to corner loss, tears, and chips. Additionally, the front alphabetical index had undergone cellulose acetate lamination – plastic lamination – which we now know has an adverse effect on the paper it is supposed to protect, such as yellowing and cloudiness. Not to mention, once the plastic breakdown process begins, the pages have a distinct “vinegar-like” smell!



LEFT: Binding from 1926. Image courtesy of Tracy Harter, LVA

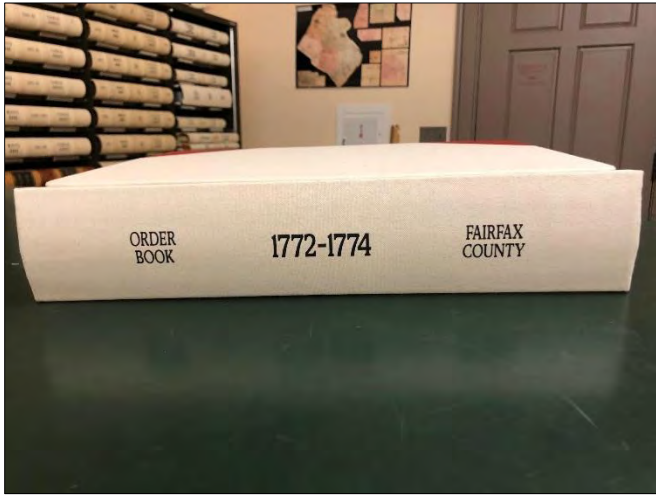


RIGHT: Index pages with cellulose acetate lamination. Image courtesy of Tracy Harter, LVA

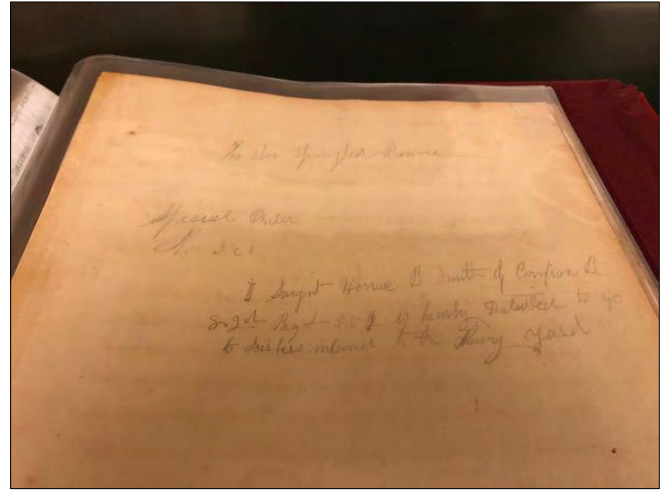


LEFT: Pages had come loose from glue binding. Chipped edges can be seen on the paper. Image courtesy of Tracy Harter, LVA

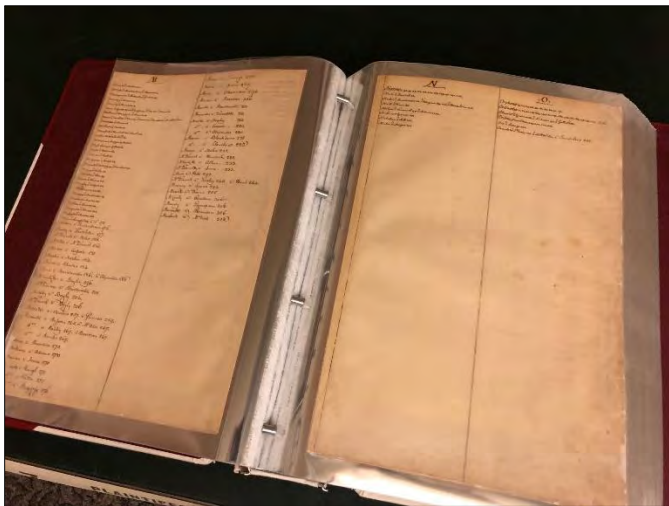
The recommended treatment for Order Book 1772-1774 included delaminating the pages, removing pressure-sensitive tape (like the tape you have on your desk), mending tears, and housing pages in Mylar sleeves. The conservation of this document will allow future historians to continue to access this essential part of Fairfax County history!



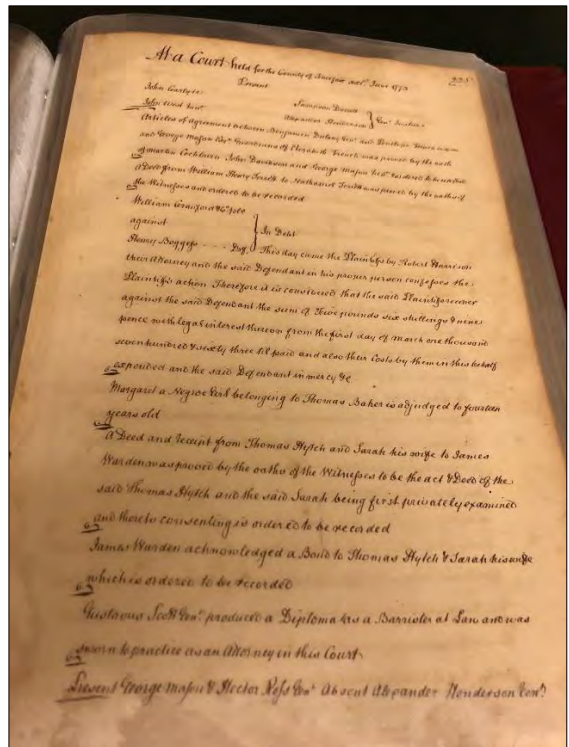
ABOVE: New post-binding for this ledger



ABOVE: Suspected Civil War-era graffiti found at the back of the ledger



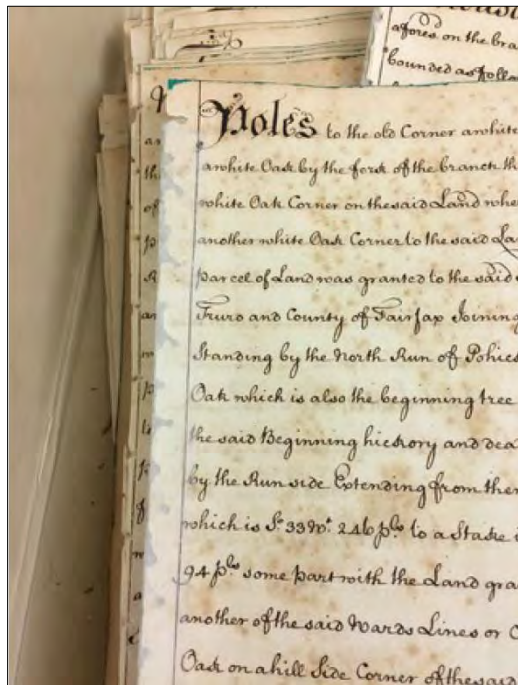
Delaminated index pages at front of ledger



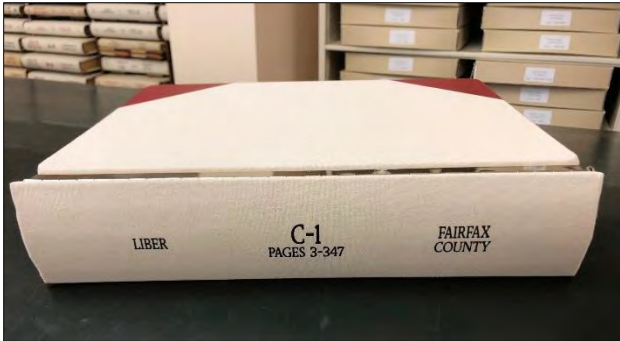
Cleaned, repaired, and sleeved orders

Deed Book (Liber) C-1

Deed Book (Liber) C-1 holds Land Records, covering the dates 1750 to 1754, and is heavily used by patrons researching their family histories. The ledger was disbound – taken apart—several decades ago to be microfilmed, and had not been rebound. As a result, the brittle, loose pages were subject to chips, tears, creases, and other page loss. Torn pages were “fixed” with pressure sensitive tape, which left stains on the original handmade paper. (All images courtesy of Tracy Harter, Library of Virginia)



The recommended conservation treatment for Deed Book (Liber) C-1 was similar to that proposed for Fairfax Order Book 1772-1774: removal of any tape, mend tears, and deacidify pages. Tissue guards, which had been affixed to cover the holes where the book had been original sewn together, were removed and all holes fixed. The deed book was rebound into a new canvas volume, and now sits fully conserved on our shelves in the Records Center!



New binding for Deed Book C-1



Even with the removal and cleaning of pressure sensitive tape, adhesive stains remain. The original page tear that was covered by tape has now been covered with Japanese tissue, a reversible conservation process.



Here is a close-up of the original Clerk's handwriting. Note the beautiful flourishes and copy of the Commonwealth's seal.

In August 2019, the Library of Virginia announced that Fairfax Circuit Court had been awarded a grant in the amount of \$8,281.50 for court records preservation from the CCRP program. The funds will be used to conserve *Fairfax Order Book 1768-1770*, *Plat Book 3*, and *Subpoenas and Rough Minute Book 1846-1855*.

We look forward to the conservation and return of these records!

Please note: Effective March 24, 2020, the Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center is **CLOSED** to the public until further notice. However, we have finding aids online to help you with your research, and you can **Call us at 703-246-4168, or email us at CCRHistoricRecords@fairfaxcounty.gov.**

