

FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 18 – March 2016
Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center



Hello! The Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center is excited to continue bringing our monthly newsletter, *Found in the Archives*, to you.

We have many records still to share with you, but this month, we thought that we would provide you with an overview of how to access the records available at the Historic Records Center.

The Circuit Court's Historic Records Center, located in Suite 1600 of the Fairfax Historic Courthouse (4000 Chain Bridge Road), is open from 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. It houses records dating back to the formation of Fairfax County in 1742 up through the early 1900s.



The Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center Records Room

Archival Holdings

- Marriage information from 1742 to the mid-1800s
- Marriage Licenses from 1860s through 1957
- Birth and Death information from 1700s and 1800s
- Birth and Death Certificates for the years 1912-1917 only. For records after 1917 please check with the Virginia Department of Health.
- Deed Books from 1742 through 1944
- Will Books from 1742 through 1948
- Court Minute Books from 1749 through 1920
- Early Court files. Chancery up to 1942 and Law up to 1931
- Pension records, Southern Claims, and other assorted Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War records
- Tax Records for both Real Estate and Personal Property from 1853 through 1980
- Election Records from the 1800s and early 1900s

Research Aids

Historic Records staff has created finding aids to help locate records within particular record groups. A small number of these finding aids are available online:

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/courts/circuit/historical-records-finding-aids.htm>.

Historic Records also maintains a small library of research material relating to Fairfax County and Virginia in our office.

For records prior to 1742 see:

Prince William County for the years 1731 up to 1741

Stafford County for the years 1664 up to 1730

Westmoreland County for the years 1653 up to 1663

Northumberland County for the years 1645 - 1652

FAIRFAX CIRCUIT COURT HISTORIC RECORDS – RECORD INFORMATION

The resources listed below are not a complete record of the contents in the Circuit Court Historic Records Center. They are intended to serve as an introduction to the variety of records kept by the Circuit Court.

African American History

Circuit Court Historic Records contain a number of records relating to the history of African Americans in Fairfax County. One record group is two volumes of the *Registration of Free Negroes* kept from 1821 – 1861 as required by Virginia Law. Also in our collections are a variety of documents that deal with African American families and communities.

Books

Fairfax County Historic Records hold a number of secondary sources to aid researchers. Most of the collection is genealogical material related to Fairfax and the surrounding counties. Also in the collection are books written regarding the history areas within Fairfax County. Some books unique to the Historic Records library are *The Biography of Fairfax County 1860* by Edith Sprouse and the accompanying map and deed abstracts prepared by Beth Mitchell. If more in-depth resources are required, we suggest you try the Virginia Room at the City of Fairfax Regional Library.

Chancery Suits (CFF #)

Chancery is a form of litigation seeking equity. These files contain the original papers of litigation and frequently pertain to divorce and real property: boundary disputes, estate divisions (land and slaves), and sales of property for the satisfaction of debts. These files date from 1805 to about 1940 and are arranged by year and by number. These suits also include the **suspended** and **pending** chancery cases. **Please see staff for assistance in finding chancery suits.** Later suits can be found at the Off-Site Records Center or if filed within the last five years, in the file room on the third floor.

Chancery Order Books

The order books do not contain the entire suit, only the court's rulings for a particular term. These volumes begin with **book 1** (1858) and continue through **book 319** (1980).

Churches/Cemeteries

The Historic Records room holds various records dealing with Churches and Cemeteries in Fairfax County. Minute books reflect the appointment of trustees to the various church boards and the deed books reflect land transactions that involved churches.

Clerk's Order Books

Index and Volumes 1 - 45 (1904 - 1981) contain records of the Circuit Court Clerk's appointments of notaries, guardians, deputies, trustees, members of county boards, and other civic officers.

Common Law Order Books

These volumes begin as Circuit Court Minute Books with book # 1 (1852) and go through book 227

(1980). They contain the orders of the Circuit Court. There is an index in the front of each volume from 1852 through 1952. Later volumes are indexed in the Law, Chancery, and Clerk's Orders index. Prior to 1930 all **Criminal Orders** were filed in the Law Order Books.

Court Orders / Minutes 1749 - 1903

The earliest county court orders and minutes beginning 1742 through 1748 are missing. Our books span the years 1749 through 1903, with some missing years (1775 - 1782, 1793 - 1796, 1798, and some in the early 19th century). Orders and minutes 1749 - 1870 have been abstracted by the Historical Society of Fairfax on 3 x 5 index cards.

Deed Books (Lifers)

The Circuit Court maintains all land record filings from 1742, when the county was founded, to the present day. In Historic Records are the land records books from 1742 to 1942. The deeds are arranged chronologically by the date of recordation. Early deed books include Commissions and Bonds from the Governor of Virginia along with the land records. All deed indexes and deeds are available through CPAN (Courts Public Access Network) which can be found on the public computer located in Historic Records.

* Some records are missing from the Circuit Court. The following Deed Books are missing:

In the # 1 series: F, H, J, N, and V

In the # 2 series: C, D, F, H, I, K, N, Q, T, & X pages 238 - 244

Elections/Voting

Included in the records of the Historic Records Room are a variety of documents relating to elections and voting. Some of the items included are *a **List of Voters Registered 1902 - 1903***, and a book containing a list of ***precincts and poll taxes paid***. Also found in Historic Records are a variety of records relating to elections in the late 1800 and early 1900s. An early "Poll for Election of Burgesses for Fairfax County" from 1744 can be found in Deed Book A.

Index Card Files

Court Minutes Index 1749 - 1870 - These index card files contain abstracts of Court Orders (Minutes) 1749 - 1870, arranged by subject and alphabetically by surname.

Birth, Death, and Marriage Records

An act of the Virginia Assembly in 1665, assigned to the parish vestries responsibility for keeping a record of births, marriages, and deaths. In 1712, ministers of the various parishes were

assigned responsibility for reporting vital statistics to the secretary of the colony annually. Surviving parish registers of the colonial period provide a partial record of births, marriages, and deaths. The maintenance of official vital statistics by the Fairfax County court was not begun until 1853. From 1897 until 1912 neither Fairfax County nor the State of Virginia kept birth and death records.

- a. **Births** - 18th and 19th century birth information on index cards. This information has been gathered from a variety of sources including the loose birth register and newspaper accounts.
- b. **Deaths** - This information has been gathered from a variety of sources including the loose death register and newspaper accounts. The unbound sheets (loose death registers 1860's – 1890's) and a list of persons who died 1849 - 1850 are in labeled boxes located on top of the index card cabinets.
- c. **Marriages** - Marriage information prior to 1853 appears on cards arranged alphabetically. Marriage information prior to 1853 has been collected from records such as wills, deeds, court orders, pension files, estate accounts, chancery suits, newspapers and other reliable sources. After 1853, marriages are indexed in the Marriage License index.

Maps/Plats/Surveys

There are a variety of maps, plats and surveys found in the Circuit Court Historic Records. Early official records of surveys and plats can be found in the **Record of Surveys 1742 -1856, Land Records of Long Standing 1742 - 1770, Proceedings in Land Causes # 1 & # 2 and Quit Rents 1761 – 1774**. Later official court records include the **Fairfax County Plat Books** where oversized plats dealing with subdivisions and private property were filed as well as **State Highway Plat Books** where the Virginia Department of Transportation easement information is recorded. Maps, plats and surveys were also filed with the Court as part of the recording of deeds and as evidence in court cases.

There are also a variety of non-court related maps including the **Hopkins Atlas** from 1879, an atlas that shows geographical location as well as individual names for Fairfax County and the surrounding area. Also in Historic Records are the **Davis Ruffner Plat Books** which were hand drawn by the Davis Ruffner title company from the mid-1900s as they researched titles. They are not an official court record, but they use court documents in determining property lines. Historic Records holds plat books of Arcata Real Estate Data, Inc., which include plats of a variety of subdivisions in Fairfax County. In our holdings are Fairfax County Tax Maps dating from 1962, published by Fairfax County to identify every individual parcel of land in Fairfax County. These maps can be used as a quick way to identify the current property owners, or to study the change over time in particular areas of Fairfax County. The tax maps cover Fairfax County only, and exclude the cities of Fairfax, Falls Church, and Alexandria. (Maps for 1970 – 1980 include the City of Fairfax.)

Military History

The Circuit Court Historic Records Room holds a variety of records that deal with military action involving Fairfax County Citizens. The Historic Records Room **Civil War** records contain files pertaining to Civil War pensions, secession vote, and **Southern Claims** records for Fairfax County residents loyal to the Union during the civil war. For the majority of the Civil War, the Fairfax County Courthouse was occupied by Union Troops and Historic Records has some unique souvenirs from this occupation.

From later wars, the Circuit Court has the Muster Roll for World War I, a draft list from 1918 and records pertaining to the Selective Service in 1917-1918.

Private Papers

Circuit Court Historic Records has a small collection of private papers of Fairfax County Citizens. Some of the files on records are Ledger Books from James Hooe and Alexander Smith and Sons. Other private papers are the Notebook of Joseph Berry, Fairfax County Surveyor and the private papers of Clerk of the Court F. W. Richardson.

Public Buildings

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors was not established until 1872, before this time the Court held the majority of the responsibility for the erection and maintenance of public buildings, including schools, the courthouse and the jail. Historic Records has additional school records including a variety of salary log books. Another responsibility of the Court was to grant licenses for citizens to run ordinaries, and there are a variety of records regarding this activity.

Roads/Transportation

Along with public buildings, the Court also held responsibility for the maintenance and construction of roads and bridges as well as dealing with the records of the various railroad companies who operated in Fairfax County. Found in Historic Records are the **Records of Roads** a two volume book bound as one, of certain land surveys made during the period from 1742 to 1856 as well as a selection of papers dealing with petitions and maintenance records of County Roads and Bridges and various papers relating to railroads . The Courts maintained their position as the primary overseer of county roads until the Byrd Act passed in 1932 and road building and maintenance responsibilities were transferred to the State of Virginia.

Tax Records

Land and Personal Property tax lists beginning 1851 and continue to 1980. Each tax book contains several lists of surnames arranged alphabetically by magisterial district (or north and south districts) and shows, in the case of land, the size of the property, the distance and direction from the courthouse, the value of the property, with and without buildings, and the amount of the tax assessed. Tax lists for

the years prior to 1851 are available on microfilm, beginning about 1790 in the Virginia Room of the City of Fairfax Regional Library at 10360 North Street, Fairfax City and with the Library of Virginia in Richmond.

Term Papers 1818 – 1952

These boxes contain a variety of different resources relating to specific court cases that have not been filed elsewhere. The majority of the collection is returned sheriff's executions which can contain genealogical information regarding to whom the summons was delivered.

Will Books

These volumes comprise the complete probate records (wills, inventories, estate and sale accounts, guardianship bonds and accounts, executor's bonds) from 1742 – 1948. Probate records after 1948 available through CPAN (Courts Public Access Network) which can be found on the public computer located in Historic Records.

Vital Records

Marriage Licenses – In addition to the index card filed that contain marriage information, original marriage licenses from 1864 - 1957 are found in Historic Records.

Birth Records – Fairfax County Historic Records hold original Birth Certificates for the years 1912 – 1917.

Death Records – Historic Records holds original death certificates for the years 1912-1917

Research

Basic inquiries may be made over the phone at 703-246-4168, by email at historicalrecords@fairfaxcounty.gov, or by mail at Fairfax Circuit Court, Attention: Historic Records, 4000 Chain Bridge Road, Suite 1600, Fairfax, VA 22030. More extensive research must be done in person or, if you live out of the area, by hiring a private researcher.

The Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center is a public, working archive and visitors are always welcome!

For more information on documents in this edition of *Found in the Archives*, please email historicalrecords@fairfaxcounty.gov or call 703-246-4168.

Planning Your Visit

The Historic Records Center is located at the Historic Courthouse located at Number 2 on the map below. The entrance to the building is located on the West Street side of the structure. We have indicated the two closest free parking lots to the facility. Our office is open Monday – Friday from 8:00 am – 4:00 pm.

