

FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 73 – April 2022
The City of Fairfax's Old Town Hall
Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center



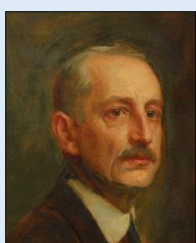
Happy Spring, and welcome back to *Found in the Archives*! The Historic Records Center is pleased to announce that we are now once again fully open and receiving walk-in researchers. Researchers who wish to make an appointment are still welcome to do so, but appointments are no longer required. We are also excited to announce we are resuming our weekly, guided tours of the Historic Courthouse every Friday at 3 p.m.; those who are interested can meet at the green doors at the 1799 Courthouse entrance, where the tour begins.



Fairfax Old Town Hall, 3995 University Drive, Fairfax, Virginia

In this month's edition of *Found in the Archives*, we discuss the history of the City of Fairfax's Old Town Hall, including both its difficult early years and how the City of Fairfax has become excellent custodians of the building since taking it over in the late 1980s.

The City of Fairfax's Old Town Hall is located on University Drive, approximately one half-mile from the Historic Courthouse, and you can catch a glimpse of it from the 1799 Courthouse. Old Town Hall was built in 1900, one hundred years after the Courthouse, funded by Fairfax resident and benefactor Joseph Willard.



Joseph Willard (1865-1924), pictured here, was a resident of Fairfax, politician, and diplomat. The son of a Union Army major and a Confederate spy, Willard served in the Virginia House of Delegates, was elected Lt. Governor of Virginia in 1902, served on the Virginia State Corporation Commission, and in 1913, President Woodrow Wilson appointed him as Ambassador to Spain, a position he held until 1921.

Old Town Hall was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1987, as part of the City of Fairfax's Historic District.

While the land for Old Town Hall was purchased by Willard in 1897, as seen in original deeds in the Court's land records, the building was put into trust in 1900. Willard intended for the Town Hall to act as a meeting house for sundry community groups and clubs, including chapters of the American Legion and the Henry Masonic Lodge, which had previously met in the Courthouse.



Town of Fairfax aerial, 1947, courtesy of the Virginia Room, City of Fairfax Public Library

In his July 1900 deed transferring the building into the care of trustees, Willard included five conditions that the trustees had to follow. In addition to requirements such as keeping the building in “reasonable repair” and “reliably insured,” Willard’s third condition stated that “the use of said hall [was] to be restricted to white people (Fairfax Deed Book F-6, page 307).”

This stipulation, like restrictive covenants more generally, serves as one example of how racial inequality and racism permeated the legal history of Fairfax County.

Over the years, trustees of Town Hall resigned, and new trustees were appointed, and the building fell into a state of disrepair. In 1944, a member of the American Legion’s Fairfax Chapter penned a letter to Fairfax Circuit Court Judge Paul E. Brown, asking that new Trustees be appointed to take care of the decaying building. Describing the damage, the trustee wrote that “the Basement was full of water and they thought the floor would fall in...I inspected the place and found that to be true.” This letter also states that skunks and rats had infiltrated the basement.

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have been trustees since January 1941. Yet nothing has ever been in the way of repair to the hall. DOWE

John Whalen told me just before he died that the ladies had mentioned to him that they were afraid to go into the building too much because the ~~basement~~ was full of water and they thought the floor would fall in. As a result I inspected the place and found that to be true. Later I called this to the attention of the Mayor of Fairfax and pointed out that the water from the Little River Turnpike was draining into the cellar. He then saw that a sidewalk was placed along the road and a culvert built under the walk. This took care of that situation.

Mr. O.B. Campbell has been of great help in advising me of the history of the hall. He has been engaged from time to time to make certain repairs. He advises me that twenty years ago he was employed to place new first floor sills, where the old ones had been rotted out because of the water standing in the basement. At the present time there is no door in the basement. The frame has rotted away. The skunks and rats have a merry time under there. The furnace has long since been ruined because of the water down there. The place has needed a coat of paint ever since I have known of the hall when I first started to come to the Courthouse.

My understanding of the deed is that it was left for the use of the white people of the Town; that the "northwest room was for the exclusive use of the Henry Masonic Lodge" and that Henry Masonic Lodge would have the use of the upper hall for their stated and called communications without interference of the white people of the Town. The fact that mention is made of the "exclusive use of the Northwest room" indicates that Mr. and Mrs. Willard intended that that was the only room

Fairfax City Old Town Hall, Drawer X Subject Files, Historic Records Center

After years of difficulty retaining active trustees, The Old Town Hall Trust was official dissolved by a 1987 Court Order, as part of its donation to the City of Fairfax.

ADJUDGED, ORDERED and DECREED that the Trustees are authorized to transfer the remaining assets of the Trust to the City of Fairfax, Virginia, for the purpose of maintaining a certain property known as Old Town Hall, and it is further

ADJUDGED, ORDERED and DECREED that the Trust created by Deed dated July 30, 1900, and recorded in Liber F. Book 6, Page 307, among the land records of Fairfax County, Virginia, be and hereby is terminated; and it is further

Fairfax Deed Book 6661, page 1068, Historic Records Center

Fairfax’s Old Town Hall still hosts community events, like the beloved “Chocolate Lovers’ Festival” held every February, the Fairfax 4-Miler race every New Year’s Eve and hosting couples celebrating their weddings. Unfortunately, in August 2020, one of the four front columns of the building collapsed into the street, and it has since remained closed. Good news came just this week, however, as the City announced that repairs to the columns and other structural elements would begin! We look forward to seeing the building serve once more as a gathering place, for lively community events and celebrations in Fairfax.



Fairfax Old Town Hall, 2022

For more information on these and other records held at the Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center, please call 703-246-4168 or email CCRHistoricRecords@fairfaxcounty.gov.

The Historic Records Center is **OPEN** to both walk-ins and appointments. You can make a research appointment by calling 703-246-4168.

Tours of the 1799 Historic Fairfax Courthouse are given every Friday at 3 p.m. Please meet Historic Records Center staff at the green doors of the 1799 Courthouse for the start of the tour.

Sign up for *Found in the Archives*, the monthly newsletter of the HRC:
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/circuit/historic-records-center>

FAIRFAX HISTORY DAY

**SATURDAY
APRIL 23
10am - 5pm**

HISTORIC BLENHEIM

3610 Old Lee Hwy, Fairfax, VA 22030
fairfaxva.gov/historyday ★ (703) 591-0560

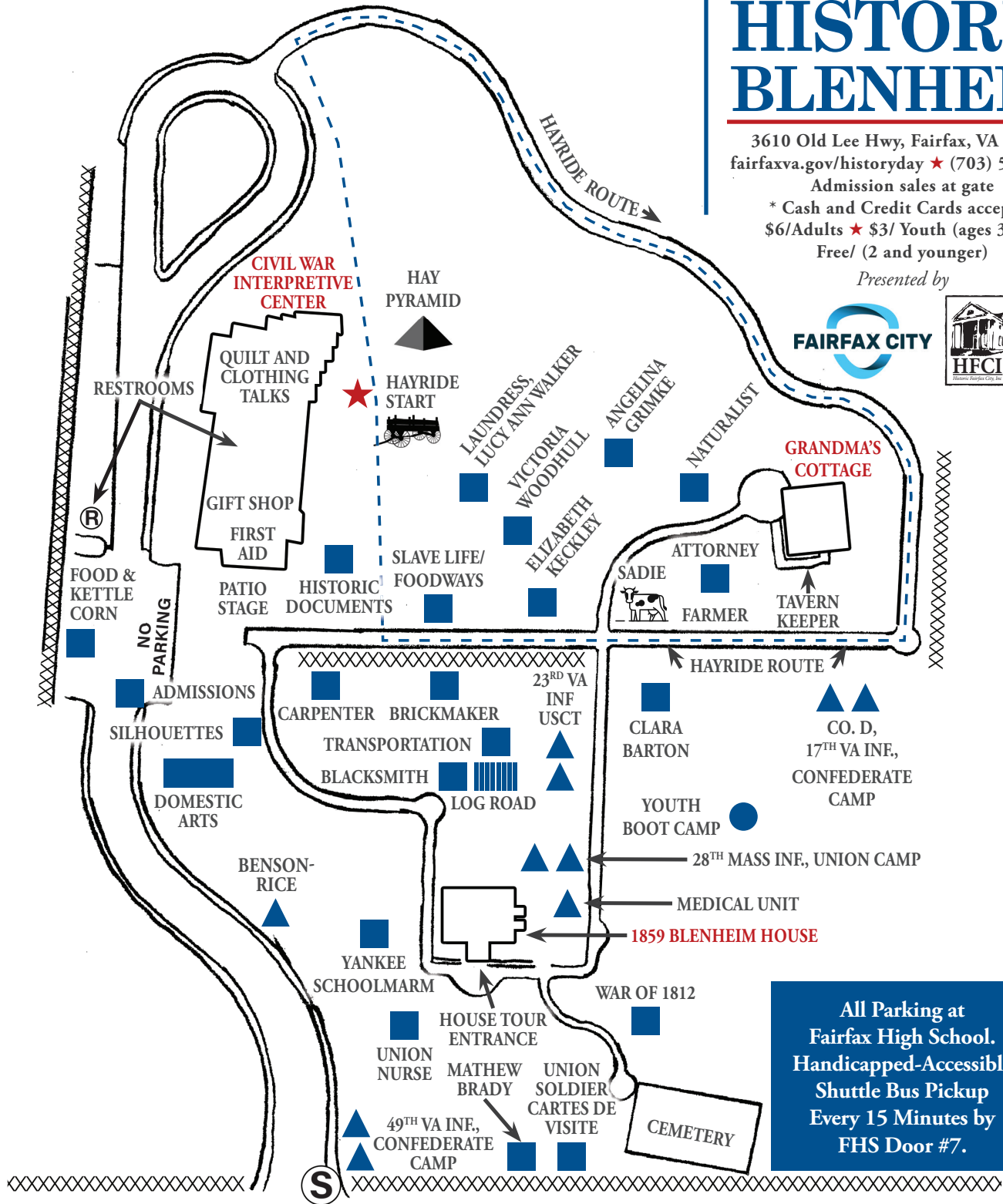
Admission sales at gate

* Cash and Credit Cards accepted

\$6/Adults ★ \$3/ Youth (ages 3-12)

Free! (2 and younger)

Presented by



All Parking at Fairfax High School. Handicapped-Accessible Shuttle Bus Pickup Every 15 Minutes by FHS Door #7.

← OLD LEE HIGHWAY →

→ TO FAIRFAX HIGH SCHOOL 4/10 Mile →

Timed Activities *(See map on reverse for location)*

11:00 am – 4:30 pm	Tours of Historic Blenheim house. Tickets available at admissions tent.
11:00 am	Cooking Demonstrations: coffee and hardtack at the 17 th Virginia Infantry
11:30 pm	Civil War Soldiers Drill, 23 rd Virginia Infantry USCT
12:30 pm	Civil War Soldiers Drill, 17 th Virginia Infantry
1:00 pm	Youth Boot Camp, 17 th Virginia Infantry
2:00 pm	Cooking Demonstrations: Johnny cake, 17 th Virginia Infantry
2:00 pm	Civil War Soldiers Drill, 28 th Massachusetts Infantry
2:30 pm	Civil War Soldiers Drill, 49 th Virginia Infantry
3:00 pm	Youth Boot Camp, 49 th Virginia Infantry
3:30	Civil War Soldiers Drill, 17 th Virginia Infantry
4:15 pm	Youth Boot Camp, 17 th Virginia Infantry

Sewing bee —bring your own needlework from home and join in with the 19th-century presenters

Talks

10:45 am	Meet abolitionist Angelina Grimke at her tent.
11:45 am	“Dressing a 19 th -Century Woman,” “Newbie Richardson, Past Crafts and Costumes, Civil War Interpretive Center
12:00 pm	Fairfax Attorney and Farmer Albert Willcoxon, porch of Grandma’s Cottage
1:30 pm	Meet Lauren Munev at her tent, “Physiognomy and Phrenology”
2:15 pm	“19 th -Century Virginia Quilts,” Alicia Thomas, Director, Virginia Quilt Museum, Civil War Interpretive Center

Patio Performance Stage

10:00 am – 10:45 am	The 8 th GM Regiment Band, brass band music
11:00 am – 11:45 am	Civil War Dance Foundation
12:00 pm – 12:45 pm	Calvin Earl, “History of The Spirituals”
1:00 pm – 1:30 pm	Roustartout <i>(presented by the Washington Revels)</i> , string band music
1:45 pm – 2:15 pm	The 8 th GM Regiment Band
2:30 pm – 3:15 pm	Civil War Dance Foundation
3:30 pm – 4:15 pm	Calvin Earl
4:30 pm – 5:00 pm	Roustartout

*Food by
Knights of
Columbus
AND
Colonial
Kettle Corn*

19th-Century Living History Presenters (10 am - 5 pm)

Education & Professions

The Yankee School Marm: Susan Kelly
African American childrens’ school experience,
“A STEM Time Travel Through History”
– Women of the Civil War Era
Naturalist: Dean Howarth
Silhouette Portraiture, Physiognomist/
Phrenologist: Lauren Munev (silhouettes
for sale)
Farmer Albert Willcoxon: Jon Vrana
Attorney: John Murphy
Tavernkeeper: Charles Rauch

Domestic Arts

Slave Life and African American Foodways:
Marion Cohen
Laundress and Union Spy Lucy Ann Walker:
Yvette Blake
”Modiste”/Seamstress Elizabeth Keckley:
Jaimie Perdue
Basketweaving: Kim Harmon
Weaving and Spinning Demonstrations:
Waterford Weavers Guild
★ **TRY IT!** Women’s needlework teaching and
demonstration; discussion of women’s
domestic work: Karen Lewis
Crochet demonstrations and instruction:
Ellen Murphy
★ “MAKE AND TAKE” quilt square design
activity: Alicia Thomas

*Bring your own needlework projects
and join the domestic arts activities*

Building Arts

Blacksmith: Jeff Dunkleberger and Liam Garvey
Brickmaker: Kenneth Tappan,
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
Carpenter: Ayinde Martin,
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Women Suffragists and Abolitionists

Angelina Grimké –Southern abolitionist,
political activist, women’s rights advocate:
Lynne Garvey-Hodge
Victoria Woodhull – Suffragist, politician,
feminist, stockbroker, journalist: Kim
Harmon

Military

War of 1812:

Civilian/Militia presenters:
Chesapeake Independent Blues

Civil War:

Co. D, 17th Virginia Infantry, “Fairfax Rifles”
(youth boot camp; soldier drills and camp
cooking demonstrations)
23rd Regiment United States Colored Troops
(camp life and soldier drills)
28th Massachusetts, Volunteer Infantry, Company
B, “Irish Brigade”
(camp life and soldier drills)
Gen. John Caldwell, 1st Division,
II Corps U.S.A.: Patrick O’Neill
49th Virginia Infantry Regiment, Companies A-K
(youth camp and soldier drills)
54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry USCT
(camp life and soldiers drills)
Union Nurse Marilla Hovey: Beverly Pelcher
Patients: Jeffrey Joyce and Drew Pallo
Union Doctor Capt. Turner Kitt: Von Barron
Clara Barton and friends:
Sue Sodomini and family
“Benson-Rice Story: A Story of Reconciliation”:
Benson Rice Storytellers,
Sudley U.M. Church
Mathew Brady, Photographer: Peter Vaselopulos
Civil War Carte de Visite display and discussion:
Joseph Stahl and Matt Borders

Historical Research

Fairfax County Courthouse records:
Fairfax Circuit Court
Historic Records Center
Historical and genealogical research:
Virginia Room, FCPL
Archival and rare book collections:
George Mason University
Special Collections

Schedule subject to change



TUESDAY, APRIL 26, 2022
Fairfax Historic Courthouse
OPEN HOUSE

12 pm to 4 pm
Come see our special collection
of historically significant
court records!

As part of *Historic Garden Week* in Fairfax, the Historic Fairfax Courthouse is **opening our showroom & 1799 Courthouse to the public, the afternoon of Tuesday, April 26!** Visit with archives staff and see historic Fairfax Court records up-close!

Come see history
for yourself!
18th & 19th Century
HISTORIC DOCUMENTS
from the Court's Archives!

ORIGINAL pages of
GEORGE & MARTHA
WASHINGTON'S
Handwritten Wills
ON DISPLAY!

Archives Showroom
OPEN
12 PM TO 4 PM

ALL AGES WELCOME!

**HISTORIC FAIRFAX
COURTHOUSE**

4,000 Chain Bridge Road
Fairfax, VA 22030

Parking available in the
City of Fairfax public lots.