



The year 2017 marks Fairfax County's 275th Anniversary – thank you for celebrating with us all year long!

.....

With December's festivities in mind, this month's *Found in the Archives* explores the connection between the Circuit Court and the games and entertainment enjoyed by county residents in 19th century Fairfax County.

Victorians, both here and in the United Kingdom, were fascinated by the medieval period. This interest included art, architecture, literature, pageants and chivalric or knightly behavior, and was known as the Gothic Revival. In the American South, 'ring tournaments' became very popular: men on horseback, masquerading as knights, rode down a track carrying a lance which they wielded to spear rings suspended from a frame. The winners had the honor of crowning a Queen and her Maids. Fairfax County played host to over 80 such tournaments between the 1850s and 1940s.

The earliest ring tournaments in Fairfax County were held on courthouse grounds. The riding competitions took place in the fields immediately behind the courthouse and the evening festivities (usually the coronation, an address, banquet and dancing) were moved to the Willcoxon Hotel. This excerpt, left, from the *Alexandria Gazette* details a tournament held in September 1867. The event was sponsored by the Ladies Memorial Association, and the profits went towards the new Confederate Cemetery located nearby. The post-tournament celebration was held in the courthouse where "the feet of many dancers kept time until the small hours of the morning."

TOURNAMENT AT FAIRFAX COURT HOUSE.—
A grand tournament was held at Fairfax C. H. yesterday. The attendance was large, numerous visitors being present from all the adjoining country, and the neighboring counties in Maryland. Alexandria was well represented, as were also Georgetown and Washington. About twenty knights—who were charged in a neat and appropriate address by James Sangster, Esq.—entered the arena as contestants for the chivalric honors, of whom six, being declared victorious, selected the following named ladies, as Queen of Love and Beauty, and her Maids of Honor:

Mr. S. F. Gardiner, Knight of Prince George's, crowned Miss Rose Thomas, Queen of Love and Beauty.

Mr. C. A. Fox, Reckless Knight, crowned Miss Annie Gunnell, 1st Maid of Honor.

Mr. N. S. Ball, Knight of Fallen Braves, crowned Miss Alice Jackson, 2d Maid of Honor.

Mr. Jerome Emigh, Outlawed Knight, crowned Miss Lavinia Lydecker, 3d Maid of Honor.

Mr. Philip Gooding, Knight of the Swamp, crowned Miss Amelia Jackson, 4th Maid of Honor.

Mr. Charles F. Taylor, Knight of Hiawatha, crowned Miss Mollie Chapman, 5th Maid of Honor.

At an early hour in the evening Col. M. D. Ball delivered a chaste and beautiful coronation address in the Court-House building—which, had been prepared for the occasion—after which to the music of an excellent band from Georgetown, the feet of many dancers kept time until the small hours of the morning.



Fives Court, courtesy of Wellcome Images

Ball games were as popular in the 19th century as they are now. The picture at left shows a group of men playing ‘fives’. The game is similar to squash, but players use the palm of their hand, rather than a racquet, to hit the ball against a wall. Though official fives courts do exist, the game can be played any where there is a wall and some space to run around.

Our court records show that fives was a regular pastime in Fairfax. An entry in the Court Order Book from June 1801 states that fives and other games were explicitly forbidden on the courthouse lot. A deposition from a chancery case in 1832 contains a reference to a game of fives being played in “Five-alley near the Courthouse.” One of the men playing is Ferdinand D. Richardson, Deputy Clerk and future Circuit and County Court Clerk.

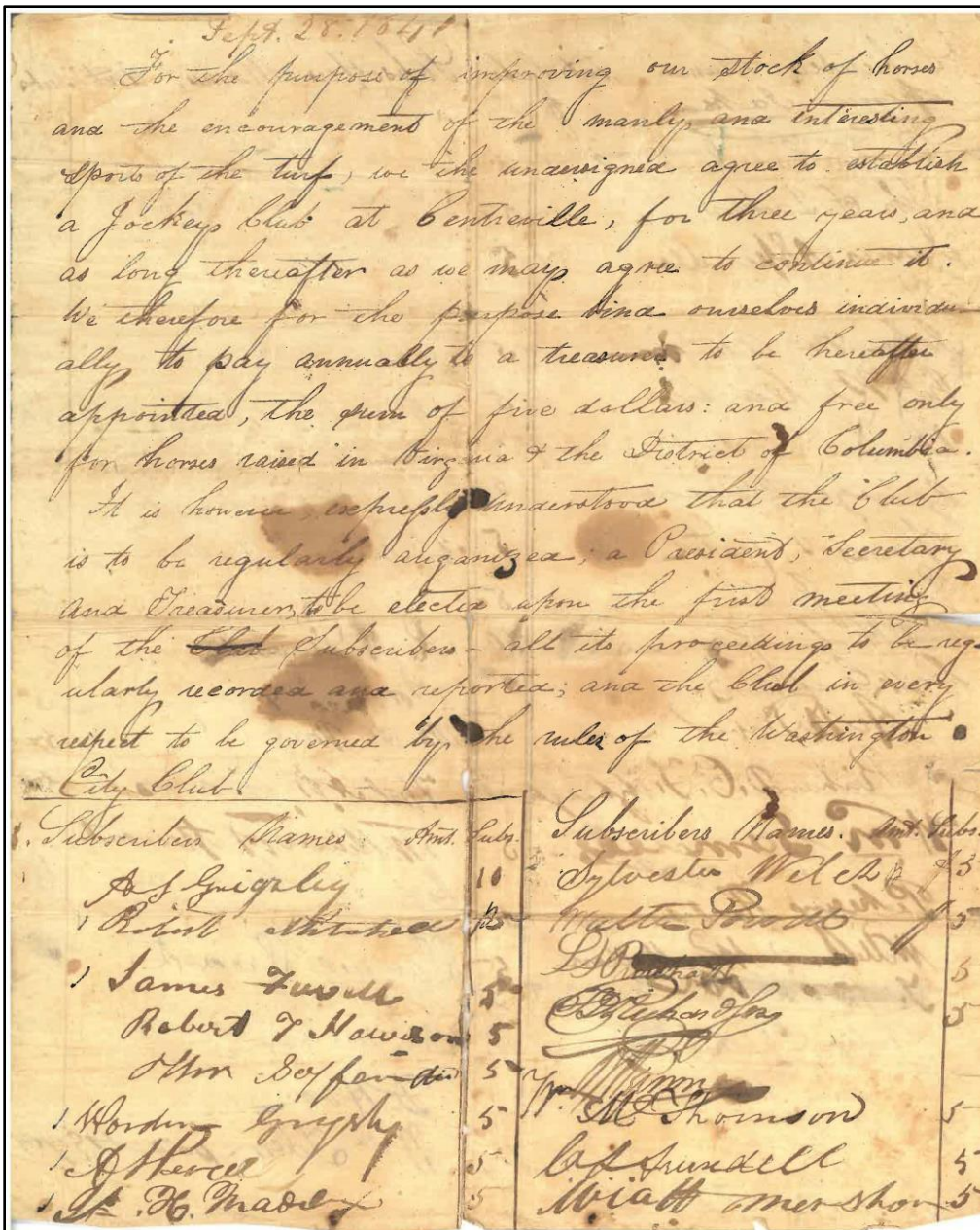
*William. As he passed the Five-alley, this Deponent saw
Ferdinand Richardson & other persons playing at Fives.*

Deposition of Bernard Hooe, July 12th, 1832, Chancery Case CFF 36Q

Our records also highlight the popularity of horse-racing in the 1800s. In 1831, Simpson Pettitt was put on trial by the Commonwealth for betting on a horse race run on a public road. The race itself was not against the law, but the venue was considered unlawful. Horse-racing was allowable only at a licensed track, based on a statute created in the mid-1700s. Information on Fairfax County race courses comes from several debt cases in our collection. In 1846, William Mershon sued Joseph Bruin for non-payment of rent on a clubhouse and tavern at Mount Vernon Race Course. The race course only operated for a few years, from 1841 to 1845, and was not a well-run establishment.

Centreville Jockeys’ Club is another mid-19th century race course that appears, in several sources, in our records. A chancery case file and Court Order Book entry from the 1850s show that James R. Millan was in debt to the Centreville Jockeys’ Club. After his death, his administrator was sued at least twice to recover separate sums of money. The treasurer of the club, William T. Allen, was sued in connection to members’ dues that he had collected, and which had subsequently gone missing. The papers connected to this case are notable as they

contain the original subscribers' list created at the founding session of the club, and the treasurer's accounts. The subscribers were local citizens who appear repeatedly in our records, as can be seen below. Interestingly, William Mershon (of Mount Vernon Race Course) was also a subscriber.



The Eagle Tavern in Centreville was the meeting place for the Centreville Jockeys' Club, and the tavern also provided services for race spectators. Established in 1768 by William Carr Lane, the tavern was originally called Newgate Tavern. After the name change and extensive expansion in the early 1800s, the tavern's large rooms provided ample space for dining, drinking, entertainments such as dances, and accommodation. The tavern's and horse-racing club's relationship was mutually beneficial.

Centreville Jockeys Club Subscribers' List, September 28th, 1841

Taverns at this time were also known as Houses of Entertainment, such as James W. Hensell's House of Entertainment, which is listed on a Deed of Trust from October 1858. The trust lists personal property including many items of guest room furniture, and "bar fixtures, and everything pertaining to and used in carrying on his house of entertainment."



The Draper House, 1962, courtesy of Historic Fairfax City, Inc.

After her husband's death, Catherine Draper ran a House of Private Entertainment out of her home. Her establishment was well-respected, and probably more genteel than the average tavern. It is reported that Mrs. Draper employed musicians to entertain her resident and non-resident guests. The Draper house still stands in the City of Fairfax, at the corner of Main Street and East Street/ Old Lee Highway.

Taverns were also popular venues for gaming and illegal gambling. Our records are full of prosecutions for running and playing illegal games. Gambling was considered to be betting on games of chance, rather than games of skill. Betting on a game of skill was not gambling.

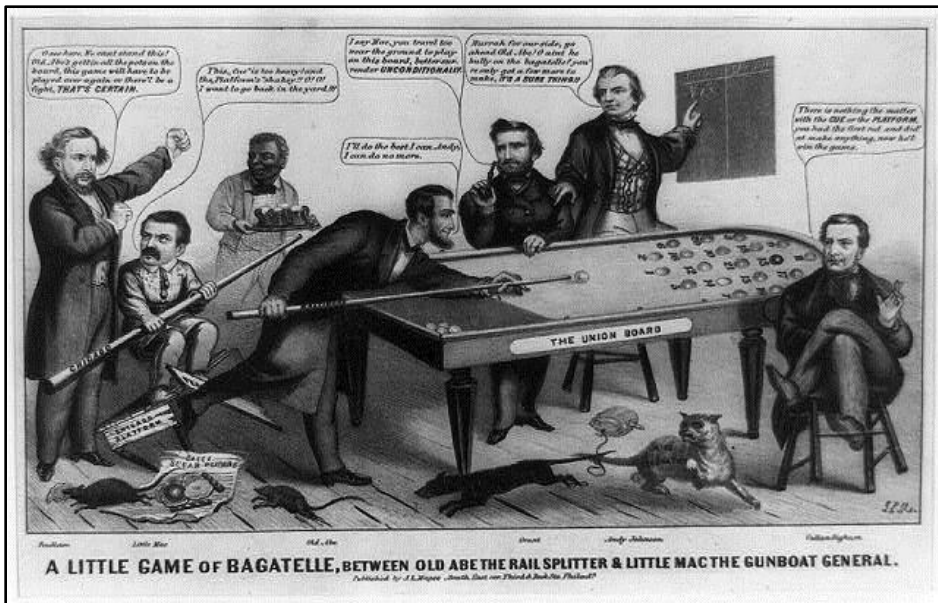


Faro Card Game, 1895, courtesy of www.legendsofamerica.com

Card games were regularly used for gambling and they often appear in our records. The Superior Court Order Book from 1831 shows Alexander Hall being prosecuted for running a Faro table, such as seen at left. Faro was extremely popular throughout the United States in the 1800s. In 1854, the Commonwealth indicted Henry C. St. Claire, H. H. Slack, William P. and John Dickey for gambling at the card games Bluff and Seven Up (also called All Fours). The object of Bluff is to be the first person to get rid of all your cards; Seven Up involves matching the numbers of the cards in your hand with cards on the table.

Gambling on dice games was endemic in the 1800s. The most surprising evidence we have of these games is from an 1849 case, where an illegal game took place at a religious camp meeting. Sheriff Joshua C. Gunnell seized the gambling money, dice and dice box; the Commonwealth ordered him to burn the game equipment and forfeit the money to the State. Another interesting case took place in 1851. Charles Coleman sued James Whaley, the landlord of a "tipling house" for taking advantage of him when drunk to "induce [Coleman] to

engage in play.....in the said game of Sweat or Chuckaluck.” Sweat was such a divisive game that the Commonwealth banned it entirely (whether or not gambling took place). The unlawful game was still going strong in 1897, when H. H. Blunt was sued by the Commonwealth for owning a “Sweat Cloth” which was the cloth that served as the game board.



[A Little Game of Bagatelle](#), John L. Magee, 1864, courtesy of the Library of Congress

John L. Magee shows a fictional game between Abraham Lincoln and George B. McClellan, respectively Republican and Democratic candidates for the 1864 National Election. Just as today, pastimes were a big part of 19th century popular culture and reference.

Enjoy your holiday fun, and we will see you in the New Year!

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.

Sign up for *Found in the Archives*, the monthly newsletter of the HRC:

http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/courts/circuit/historical_records.htm

Fortunately for our 19th century ancestors, games of skill were not considered unlawful, and were openly played at home, in taverns and gentlemen’s clubs. Bagatelle, a mix of pool and the modern pinball, was played by men and women alike. The object of the game was to hit a ball with a cue and attempt to avoid obstacles to get the ball in various holes. This political commentary cartoon print by