



The year 2017 marks Fairfax County's 275th Anniversary – check out www.fairfax275.com for a calendar of upcoming events this spring, all celebrating the County's historic birthday!

This month's edition of *Found in the Archives* is dedicated to the Historic Fairfax Courthouse and its role in the upcoming fair, "Historically Fairfax", celebrating Fairfax County's 275th anniversary. The fair is taking place on Saturday, June 17th, on the Historic Fairfax Courthouse grounds. Our green spaces and surrounding lot are a fitting place for celebrating 275 years of Fairfax history, as the courthouse complex has been a witness to local and national events since its construction in 1799, and members of the court have always been actively involved in the wider Fairfax community.



Confederate Memorial Day, 1915, courtesy of Fairfax City Museum

As one of the few municipal buildings in nineteenth century Fairfax, the courthouse was a focal point for town and county residents. Court was held for two or three days each month, and in addition to people involved in court business, it drew spectators eager for entertainment. Important legal notices were posted on the courthouse doors (as they still are today at the modern courthouse), as well as declarations of a more secular nature. Likewise, the courthouse green served both court business and the town social life: the Clerk's office was located here, and families attending court picnicked on the grass. This photograph shows a Memorial Day celebration held on the courthouse grounds; the stone memorial in the center commemorates John Quincy Marr, the first Confederate officer killed in the Civil War. Other early photographs of the courthouse also show its dual use, some are solemn portraits of the judicial building and others show promenading couples and little boys playing on the cannons!



The courthouse played a central figure during the Civil War in Fairfax County. For the first year of the conflict, the Confederate army camped on the grounds and used the courthouse for various purposes. Jefferson Davis stayed at the Wilcoxon hotel opposite the courthouse and reviewed troops on the green. From the summer of 1862, the

Union Troops at the Courthouse, courtesy of Fairfax City Museum

Union held the courthouse and converted it into a commissary and telegraph station. Both sides did extensive damage to the building, and destroyed a number of court records. The courthouse was repaired and renovated after the war, and court resumed.

The people who staff the courthouse have also had a big impact on Fairfax County lives. During the nineteenth century, judges and justices of the peace were not salaried. They performed their duties as public service, paying for their own expenses. Members of Fairfax County's most prominent families sat on the judge's bench, including generations of Masons, Gunnells and Burkes. Richard Bland Lee of Sully and Richard Ratcliff (who sold the courthouse lot to the county for a nominal fee of \$1) are notable names from our list of judges.



Town Officials, 1915, F. W. Richardson 2nd from Right on Front Step, courtesy of Fairfax City Museum

Other court staff who devoted their free time to serving the local community were our clerks. Frederick Wilmer Richardson, Circuit Court Clerk for over 50 years, sat on many local boards and committees whose purpose was to benefit and enrich the lives of Fairfax town and county residents. He served on the County Health Board, the Fairfax Confederate Monument Association, the Great War Memorial Fund Committee, the Bicentennial

Committee, the Farmers' Institute Committee and the Homecoming Day committee. In 1917, F.W. served as clerk for the Local Board for the Selective Service System Draft (WWI military service), and was later Secretary and President of the Town Hall Association and Secretary and President of the Cemetery Association. He was elected Fairfax Lyceum Recording and Corresponding Secretary in 1874 and elected to the Zion Church Vestry in 1931. He was also a member of the Red Cross. In addition to his monumental public service, F.W. made large donations to the Confederate Reunion, Fairfax fairs and agricultural shows, roads, the War Relief Fund, the YMCA Fund, the Library building, the Fire Department and a new school building.

Washington, Arlington and Falls Church Ry.

Only line to Fort Myer, Va., and short line to Ballston, Falls Church, Dunn-Loring, Vienna, Fairfax Court House, Va. Fairfax Court House has many Colonial and Revolutionary war memories. Here is where General Washington's will is recorded.

Also short line to
Arlington National Cemetery

Tram Advertisement from Industrial & Historical Sketch of Fairfax County, 1907, courtesy of the Library of Virginia

Then, as now, the Fairfax Court Complex still has a dual role: as the judicial branch of our state government, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Fairfax County citizens, *and* as a physical complex populated by public servants from local and state agencies, devoted to public service. Two hundred years ago, the courthouse was reachable only by horse or on foot; a century ago, an electric tram brought visitors from the District and

eastern Fairfax County; today, cars and modern public transport provide access to the Court Complex from all around the Northern Virginia Region. On Saturday, June 17th, Historic Fairfax Courthouse invites you celebrate **your** history at "Historically Fairfax". Come and be a part of 275 years (and counting) of Fairfax County history!

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

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

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

Save the Date! June 17, 2017
HISTORIC FAIRFAX COUNTY COURTHOUSE



Celebrate FAIRFAX COUNTY'S 275TH Birthday!

Saturday, June 17, 2017

10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Historic Fairfax Courthouse

The day's events, which are free and open to the public, will include:

- Family-friendly activities
- Entertainment
- History Exhibits
- Living History
- Performances

...and more!

Visit www.Fairfax275.org
for more information.



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To request reasonable ADA accommodations, call 703-324-5421 or 703-449-1186 (TTY).