

FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 63 – May 2020
Orchards in Early Fairfax County
Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center



One of the simple joys many of us have discovered during this stay-at-home order is the beauty of spring outside. Our lives may be on pause, but nature is moving full speed ahead with blossoming trees and bees working overtime. A few recent research requests have revealed Fairfax’s agricultural history and specifically apple growth in Fairfax County and the evidence found in the records has been quite “fruitful.”

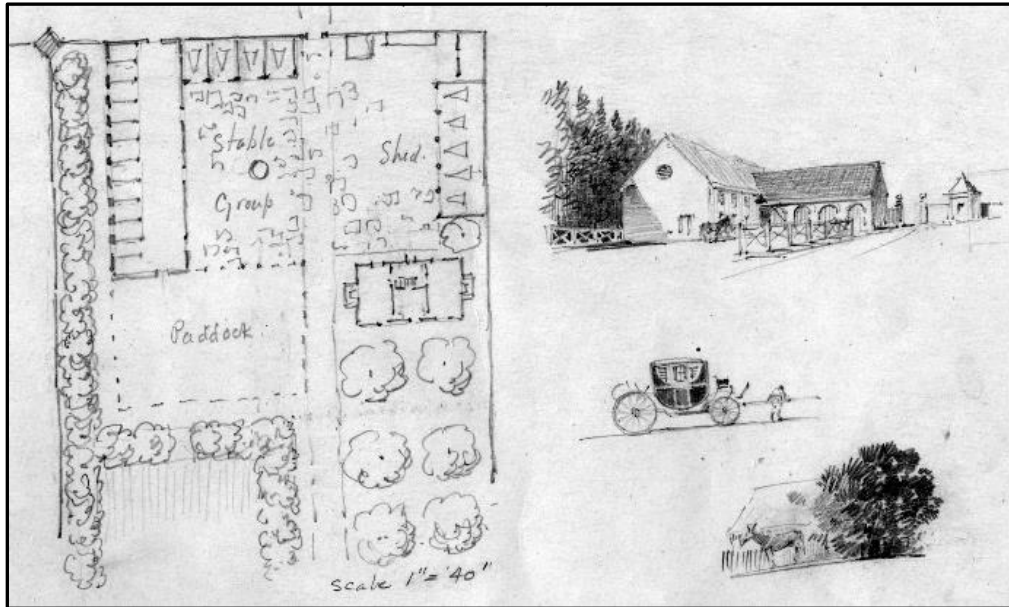
Orchards in Early Virginia

When English settlers first started establishing villages, towns and counties in Virginia, they had specific instructions from The Crown about what to build and plant in the newly-claimed land. British colonists were required to first build churches, meeting houses, and courthouses in each new county and parish, as the population spread out from Williamsburg. Next came post offices, shops, taverns, and Governor’s Houses. Interestingly, found within early Virginia laws are requirements to plant orchards, woven in with the building structure orders. In 1642, the Virginia Assembly presented Governor William Berkeley a large orchard and two houses for his “many worthy favours manifested



“Father, I Can Not Tell a Lie: I Cut the Tree,” Engraving by John C. McCrae, 1867.

towards the colony.” Almost immediately, owning land with an orchard signaled not only wealth and class, but also a taming of the wild Virginia lands.



“Palace Studies” a pencil sketch of the Governor’s Mansion grounds at Williamsburg by Andrew H. Hepburn, courtesy of the Special Collections, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

The Crown wanted its colonists to plant tobacco – and lots of it – for trading, but it also encouraged its subjects to plant orchards as they settled Virginia. Throughout early 17th century Virginia laws, several acts were created and revived to push for orchard planting in the colony. In 1710, England codified this practice, passing an Act for “finishing a House for the Governor of this Colony and Dominions,” where not only were kitchens, walls, and stables designed, but also gardens and orchards explicitly contemplated for the estate.

Orchards in Fairfax County

In the mid-1700s, Fairfax County’s most landed gentleman was William Fitzhugh, Jr. His estate, called Ravensworth, was comprised of 22,000 acres, and it would have been impossible for the Fitzhugh family to manage and develop all on their own. Fitzhugh leased portions of Ravensworth to no less than seventeen tenant farmers, and in so doing, he required at least six of them to plant orchards, many specifically apple orchards. One of Fitzhugh’s early tenants, appropriately named John Appleton, was given 112 and $\frac{1}{4}$ acres of land to farm and improve. As part of the lease agreement, Appleton had full use of the entire tract, conveyed for life (except for the mineral rights to mine and quarry).

1773
This Indenture, made this twenty fifth day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy three Between M^{rs} Fitzhugh of Stafford County, Gentleman of the one part and John Appleton of Fairfax County: of the other part. Witnesseth that the said M^{rs} Fitzhugh, for and in consideration

Fitzhugh to Appleton Lease.

Fairfax Deed Book J-1 page 97, lease from William Fitzhugh to John Appleton

Through his life tenancy, Appleton paid Fitzhugh 750 pounds of tobacco yearly, and planted one hundred “good apple trees” within the first three years of the lease. Assuming all contracts were fulfilled, this meant that at least 600 apple trees were planted by Fitzhugh’s tenant farmers in Fairfax County alone.

the demised premises, or upon some part thereof three hundred
good fruit Trees, whereof one third, at least to be good apple Trees.

Properties with existing orchards, meadows and forests increased values significantly as evidenced by Fairfax County residents advertising in the *Virginia Gazette*.

To be SOLD, in Fairfax County, Virginia, for Sterling Money, Bills of Exchange, or Virginia Currency,

TWO Tracts or Parcels of Land, one Tract lying on Patowmack River, opposite to the Mouth of Broad Creek, in Maryland, containing about 600 Acres, well timber'd, and handsomely situated, fit for any Gentleman, with good Orchards thereon, the other Tract lying in the Fork of little Hunting Creek, about half a Mile from the above Tract, and containing 555 Acres, with the like Conveniencies. Any Person inclinable to purchase both, or either of the said Parcels of Land, may apply to the Subscriber, in Fairfax County, or at Williamsburg, on the 21st, 22d and 25th of this Instant.

William Clifton.

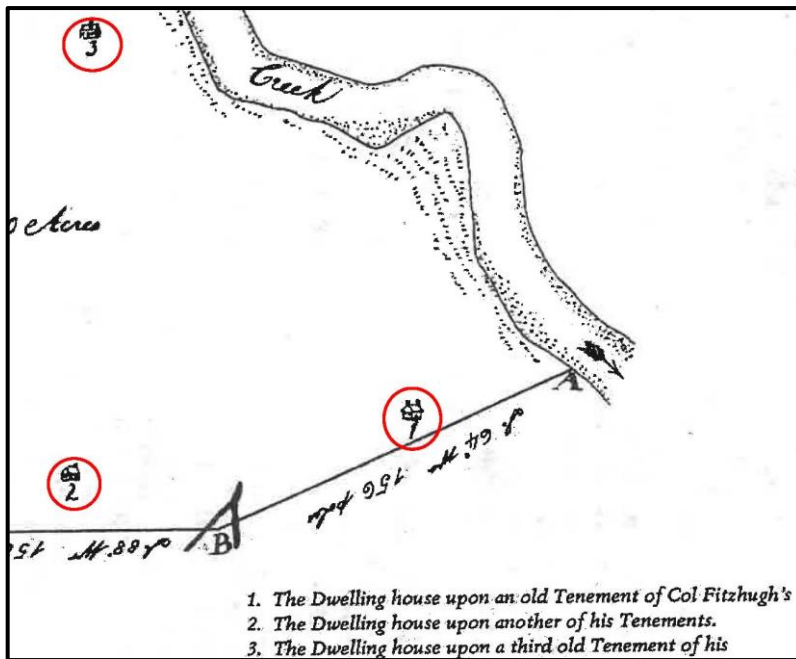
Virginia Gazette, October 11, 1751, page 3

In the above advertisement, William Clifton promised that his lands on the Patowmack and the Fork of Little Hunting Creek contain “good Orchards” and are

“fit for any Gentleman.” Similar language appears in other advertisements, with the most common fruit trees being apple and peach, and always with an underlying connection between the fertile lands able to grow orchards and potential status and prosperity in the county.

Finding Orchards in the Archives

Although fruit trees had been mentioned and drawn on plats in our land records, pointed research proved difficult because that level of detail would not typically be captured in any index entries. And, because orchards are part of a Real Estate parcel, they are not itemized in Personal Property records. Land Tax records usually only mention acreage and so they were not found in those collections, either. Despite the fact that Fitzhugh’s tenant farmers were contractually bound to plant orchards, in this image, only three tenant farmer houses are captured on the plat.

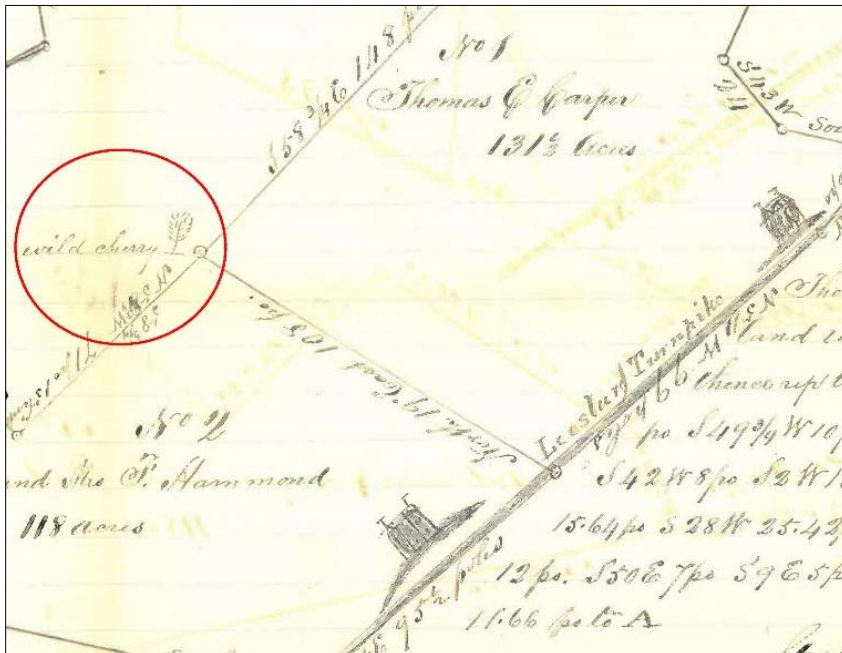


Additionally, inventories, estate accounts, and tax records are not indexed by their contents, so researchers must review every record individually, for mentions of orchard produce.

William Payne's survey for William Fitzhugh, 31 March 1791, Record of Surveys

While a rare find, Richard C. Mason's 1860 Agricultural Census offers some statistics, as found in Edith Moore Sprouse's "Fairfax County in 1860: A Collective Biography" below.

817:332					
MASON, RICHARD C.*	67	\$25000/25000	VA	physician	
Lucie B.*	63		VA		
Landon R.*	20		VA	in school	
Randolph F.*	33		VA	surgeon, USN	
William P.*	17		VA	USN	
Eliza L.*	24		VA		
Mary A.*	22		VA		
Tax Map # <u>92:1,3</u> ; 100:2; 101:1					
Agricultural Census	249:2	\$25000/500	600 - 200 acres		
Horses	7	Wheat	325 bu		
Milk Cows	8	Indian Corn	1000 bu		
Working Oxen	2	Oats	400 bu		
Cattle	6	Ir. Potatoes	150 bu		
Sheep	13	Orchard Produce	\$150		
Hogs	15	Wine	30 gallons		
Livestock	\$1175				



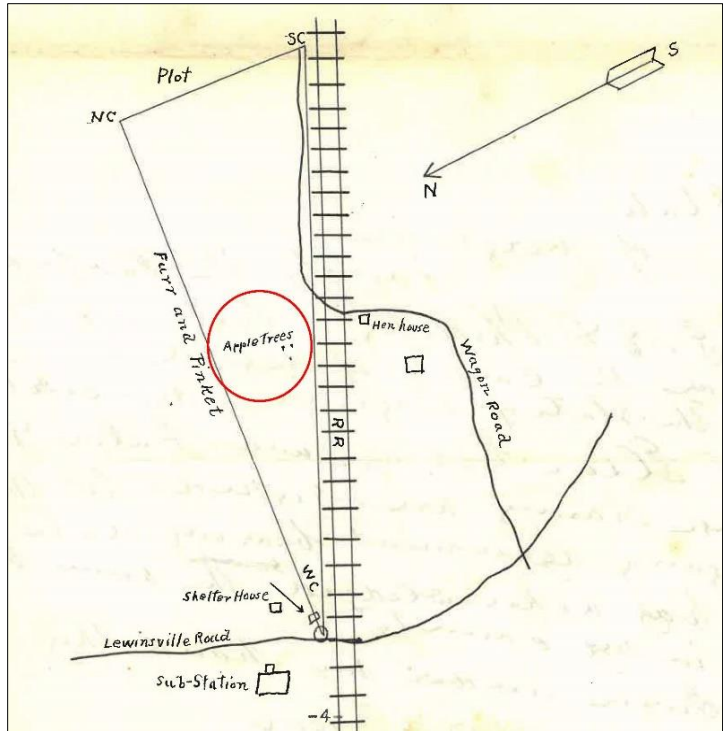
Trees are often used as boundary line markers in Land Records, but rarely fruit trees. However, in this plat of a boundary of Frederick Carper's Estate, a cherry tree is the point of reference for the heirs' property lines.

Frederick Carper's Estate Division, ca. 1847, Drawer X

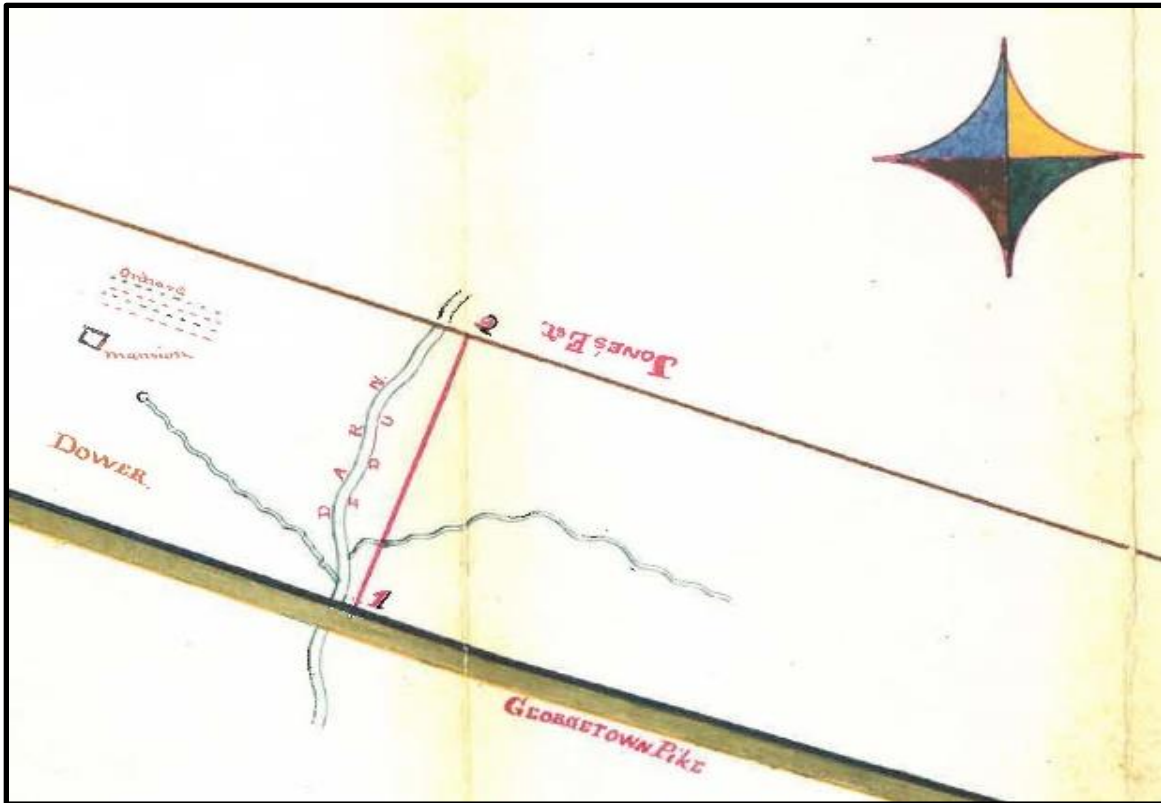
In other plats, orchards and fruit trees were drawn in, even when there was no mention in the corresponding deed, as seen in the survey below.

But eventually, after researching almost every survey and plat in our Drawer X Collection, a beautiful plat that included an orchard appeared. James Nelson lived near Langley in 1847 and R. R. Farr's survey of his estate shows a large orchard behind his mansion house, seen below.

Although sometimes hard to find in archival records, Fairfax County's early orchards are there and some of the trees still exist today.



Purchase Agreement between Ellen Eskrige and Julia Lewis, 1907, Drawer X



Survey of the Estate of James Nelson, 1874, Drawer X

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.



On Tuesday, April 21, 2020, the Fairfax Circuit Court celebrated the 220th Anniversary of the first court session at the Historic Courthouse. To read more about the event, please click [here](#) or check it out on Twitter: @ffxcircuitcourt