

*Court Artifacts*

Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center



The Fairfax Historic Courthouse is over 200 years old, and many of its fittings have changed over the years as fashions have shifted and items have broken, worn out or simply become obsolete. At various times in the building's history, the actual fabric of the Historic Courthouse has needed repair or alteration. This *Found in the Archives* discusses the material record we have of changes, and also examines the artifacts that played a part in the everyday activities of the Clerk's office.



*Construction Debris from the Historic Courthouse Arcade, Found in 2017*



*Repointing Bricks in the Historic Courthouse Arcade, 1967, Courtesy of Fairfax City Museum*

The seasonal extremes of Northern Virginia weather causes building materials to swell and shrink repeatedly and sometimes rapidly. Over time, this cycle results in cracked bricks and flaking mortar, allowing damp to penetrate walls. Over the last two centuries, some bricks in the 1799 Courthouse have been replaced, and the brick façade has been 'repointed' several times. Repointing means replacing the mortar sandwiching the bricks together. The photograph above shows workmen repointing bricks on the front exterior of the Courthouse within the arcade during a massive refurbishment that occurred in 1967. Half a century later, during a repair project focused on the arcade floor, workmen found the masonry pieces and iron bracket also pictured above. The bricks look reasonably modern, the stone facing and bracket do not. The Clerk's Office cannot definitively say when these pieces found their way

under the arcade floor. The more modern bricks may have been interred during the 1967 refurbishment or when the Fairfax County Time Capsule was buried under the arcade during America's 1976 Bicentennial celebrations. The older elements may have been deposited at any time from our post-Civil War renovations in 1865 through to our additions and repairs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*Wooden Peg from Historic Courthouse, Donated in January 2019*

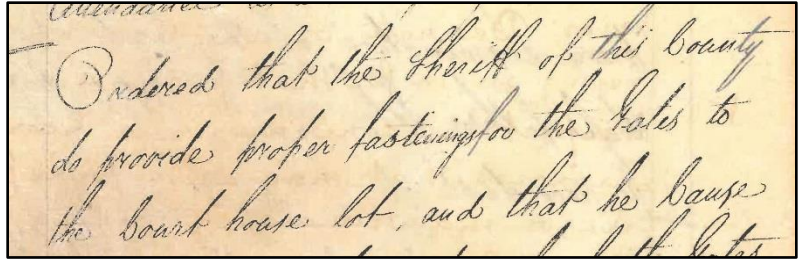


*Wooden Pegs used in Joinery, Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

When the Historic Courthouse was constructed (1799-1800), builders typically used materials that were locally available. Machine-cut nails had not been invented and hand-wrought nails were very expensive. Instead, a common method to fasten wooden beams together was to use wooden pegs, also called 'treenails' or 'trenails,' as seen in the picture above. These could be made on-site from offcuts of the wood used in the building's frame construction. This made the treenails virtually cost-free. Another advantage of using this type of fastener was that, as the wooden beams, planks and pegs expanded and contracted during climate changes, the wood's fibers created friction that effectively locked the two parts together. This type of joinery meant that both parts moved together during weather events and when the structure settled, leading to less structural stress, and a smaller likelihood of damage. The wooden peg shown above was rescued by longtime Fairfax resident during a renovation of the Historic Courthouse in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. He mounted it on a plaque to keep as a souvenir of his time in Fairfax, and it was proudly displayed on the wall of his home. On his death, his godson, Fred Forstall, brought it back to Fairfax. Fred gave us the peg in January 2019, and we are grateful and pleased to have such a visual reminder of the Historic Courthouse's architectural story.



Hand-wrought Door Knocker from Historic Courthouse, c. 1800



Order for Courthouse Lot Gate Fastenings, [Fairfax Minute Book 1801](#), p. 121, July 20, 1801

When constructing a new building, every piece of hardware fitting has to be chosen and ordered separately from the main construction materials. Doors need door knobs, locks and keys, and windows need latches. In Colonial America, like today, none of these fittings was within the carpenter’s purview. Unlike today, the Commissioners in charge of the 1799 construction project could not order machine-made hardware from a catalogue; they had to order directly from the blacksmith who hand-wrought every piece. The door knocker shown above was removed during the 1967 refurbishment of the Historic Courthouse. It has been on loan to us from Stoney Burke for many years, and likely dates to around 1800. The knocker is decorative, as well as functional, and the slight asymmetry of the edges marks this as wrought iron (shaped by hand) rather than iron cast in a mold. As was common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the knocker may have been painted to reduce corrosion; black was the most-used paint color for hardware. We do not have a specific court order for acquiring this piece, but we do have many orders for other fittings and fixtures needed over the years. The first order for hardware was given in July 1801 and can be seen above. The order asked the Sheriff to provide ‘fastenings for the gates to the courthouse lot’.

W. H. Cronk & G. W. Hunter, Jr.	for ironing gates at C. H. Lot	17.25
Lamm J. Lockes	(Cross)	1.52
Mr. Williams	(O. R.)	7.50
H. T. Monroe	Hinges & hooks for gates	1.24

Court Accounts, [Fairfax Minute Book 1846](#), p. 129, June 21, 1848

The Court Order Books also show who was paid for making, or providing, hardware to the Courthouse. This accounting entry from 1848 shows that W. H. Cronk and George W. Hunter, Jr., were paid \$17.25 for ‘Ironing gates’ on the Courthouse lot. On the same page, H. T. Monroe was paid \$1.24 for providing hooks and hinges for the gates.

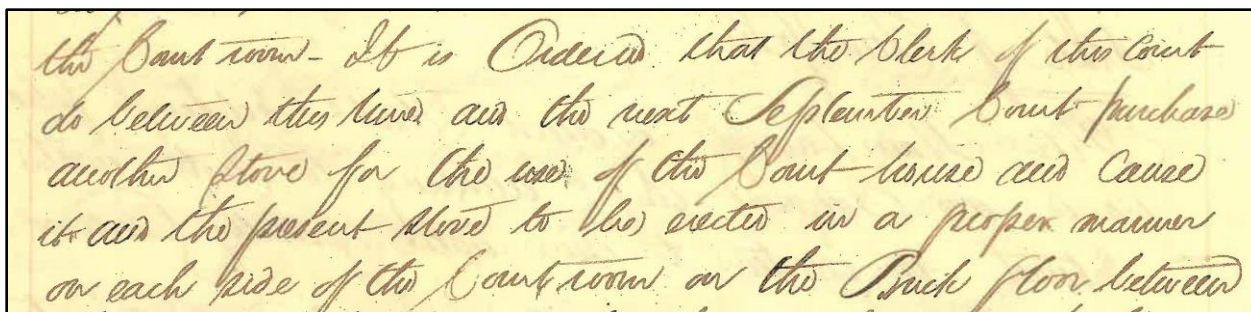


*2nd Clerk's Office Building, c. 1915, Courtesy of Fairfax City Museum*



*Pole Hook used to Open Windows in Clerk's 2nd Office and Clerk's Addition, c. 1910 - 1935*

The first Clerk's Office was built 6 years after the Historic Courthouse opened its doors, in 1805, on the green space surrounding the Historic Courthouse. It was used as the Clerk's office until 1910, when a more modern office was built. In the photograph above, we can see the rather grand dimensions and formal architecture of the Clerk's office. At the far right is F. W. Richardson, who served as the Clerk of Court for 55 years. Upon close inspection of the photograph, several of Richardson's female secretaries can be seen sitting on the window sills. Inside the building were separate office spaces with transom windows which could be opened to let in air. In the pre-air-conditioning era, opening a window, or all of them, as seen in this photograph, was the only way to cool down in the Virginia summer heat. The pole hook pictured above was used to open those internal transom windows, and it survived the move to the Clerk's office addition to the Historic Courthouse upon its completion in 1929. The second Clerk's office pictured above was used for record storage until it was finally torn down around 1935.



*Order for another Stove in the Courthouse, Fairfax Minute Book 1813, p. 78, March 23rd, 1814*

Akin to summer heat, winter and early spring cold presented challenges in the Courthouse. In March 1814, a court order was given to place two stoves at the justices' end of the Courthouse, for the 'comfortable transaction of the business of the Court.' The two stoves were to have pipes connecting them to the fireplaces at the public end of the Courthouse, with 'Tin troughs to be put under each pipe to catch the drippings.' The excerpt shown above asks that the Clerk purchase one more stove to enable this upgrade to the heating system. This cumbersome system would have given the Courthouse quite a different look when compared to today's neatly tucked-away water heater, but would have been common place in municipal buildings at that time. Maintaining the fires was also of concern, and in November 1809, the sheriff was asked to buy 'two good pair of large strong cast handirons and two pair good tongs and shovells'. In 1817 he was asked to buy more fire irons to make and maintain 'good and warm fires.'

Reminders of these sorts of chores and everyday life ways during the Historic Courthouse's past makes us really appreciate our easier modern conveniences in the Historic Records Center. And, we cherish our fantastic team of maintenance staff who strive and succeed in making our spaces and our visitors comfortable.

*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](mailto:CCRHistoricRecords@fairfaxcounty.gov).*

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