

FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 81 – December 2022

Conservation Update

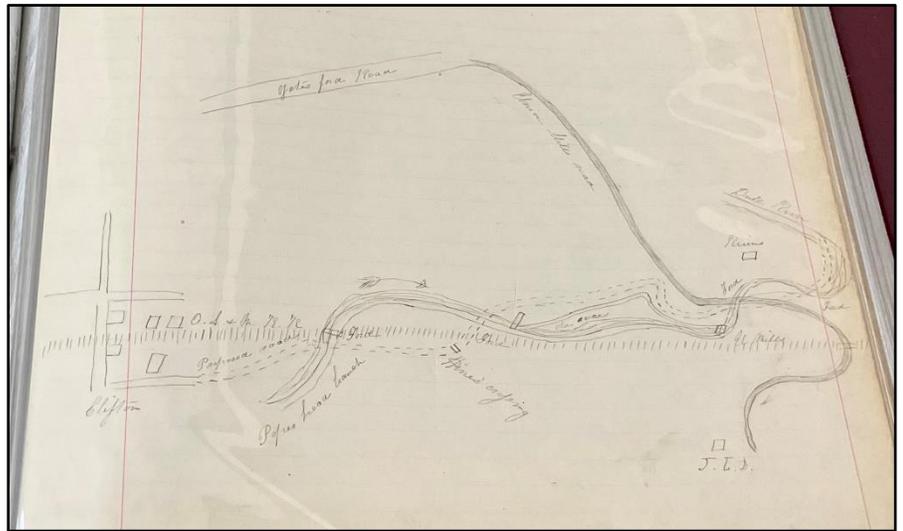
Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center



Happy Holidays, and welcome back to *Found in the Archives*! In this month's edition, we will discuss court records recently returned to the Historic Records Center after undergoing conservation work and digital reimaging.

Like many archival repositories, the Historic Records Center houses centuries-old documents that are in need of conservation. Age, heavy use, and repairs made with old adhesive tape are just some of the factors that can damage our records, resulting in paper tears, dirt buildup, and stains. Identifying which records need repair, and managing the conservation process, are part of the HRC archivists' duties.

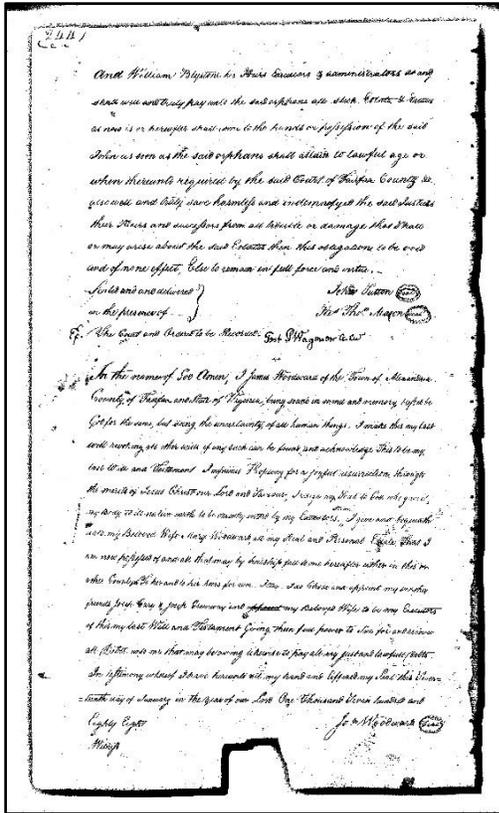
In December 2021, the Clerk's Office was awarded a preservation grant totaling just over \$20,000 from the Library of Virginia's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program. You can learn more about the Library of Virginia's CCRP fund [here](#). At the start of 2022, eight ledgers, spanning the years 1783 to 1904, were sent to a specialty conservation lab for treatment and imaging. These ledgers included Will Books E-1, F-1, and G-1; Court Order Book 1783-1788 and Court Order Book 1791-1793; the Record of Roads, 1860-1904; and two docket books dating from the 1790s.



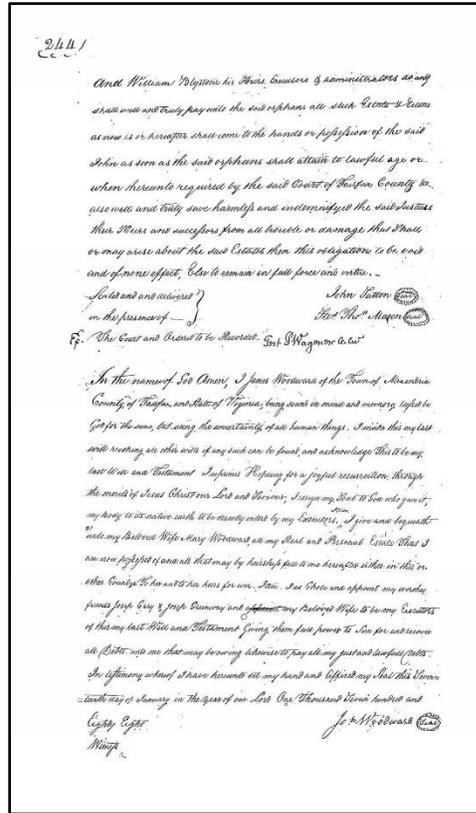
Fairfax County Record of Roads, 1860-1904, page 95. Newly cleaned and conserved, this plat looks better than ever!

During conservation, each page of these records receives highly specialized treatment by trained conservators. The process includes removal of the pages from the original bindings, a physical and chemical cleaning of each page, removal of any tapes and adhesives, and deacidification of pages with a neutralizing spray. When necessary, tears are repaired using wheat paste and archival-safe tissue paper. After cleaning and repair, each page is digitized, and then encapsulated in Mylar sleeves.

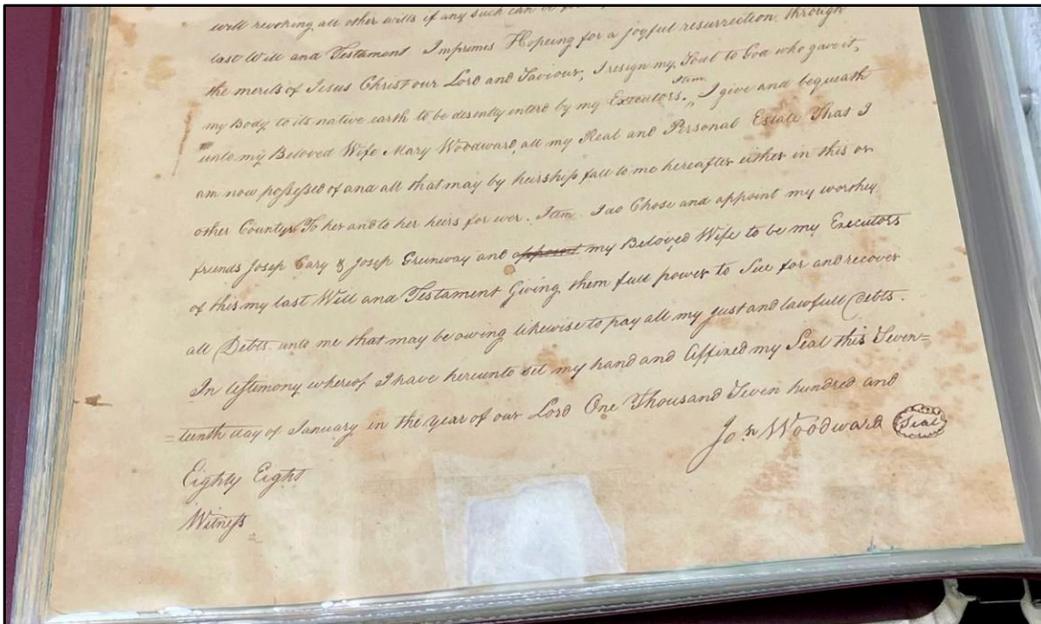
The documents conserved in this specific grant cycle account for over 3,000 pages of court record. The benefit of conservation is two-fold: first, with the encapsulation of each page, these records can be safely used by researchers in-person when necessary; and second, digitization further protects the documents by limiting the need for use of the physical books.



Fairfax Will Book E-1 page 244, "before" scan



Fairfax Will Book E-1 page 244 "after" scan



Fairfax Will Book E-1 page 244, repair to bottom of page

In the above comparisons, note the higher quality image in the "after" scan. The document has been cleaned, and a repair made to the tear at the bottom of the page is invisible in the digital version. The physical repair has been done to prevent further damage to the paper.

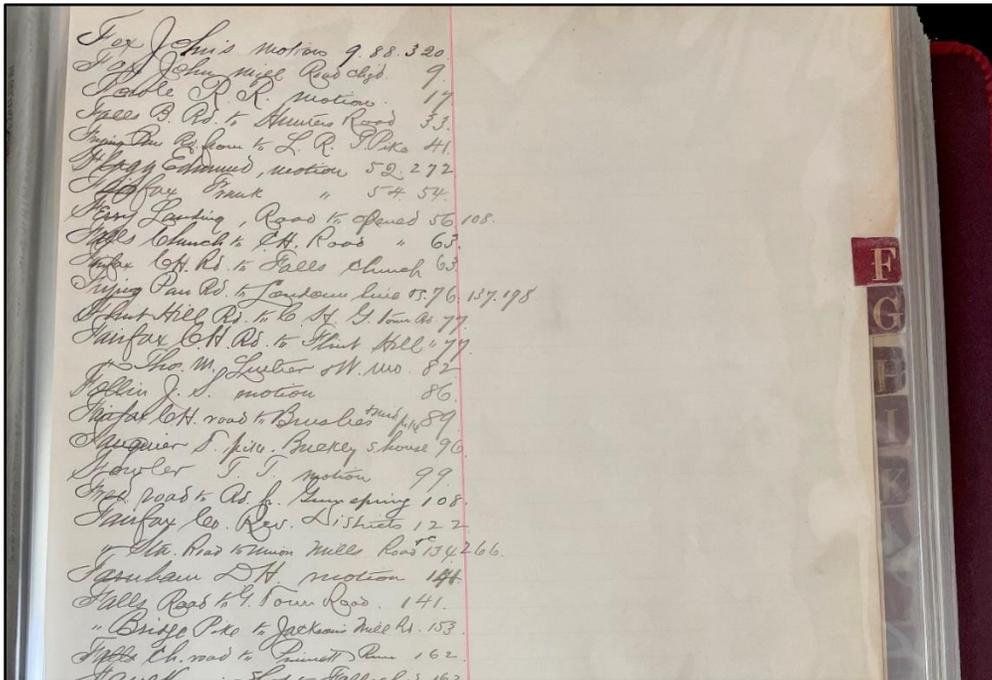


Some of our 18th and 19th century ledgers contain close to 500 pages each and must be split into two or three separate volumes to allow for the Mylar encapsulation. Some examples of this include Will Books E-1 and G-1, and our Record of Roads ledger.

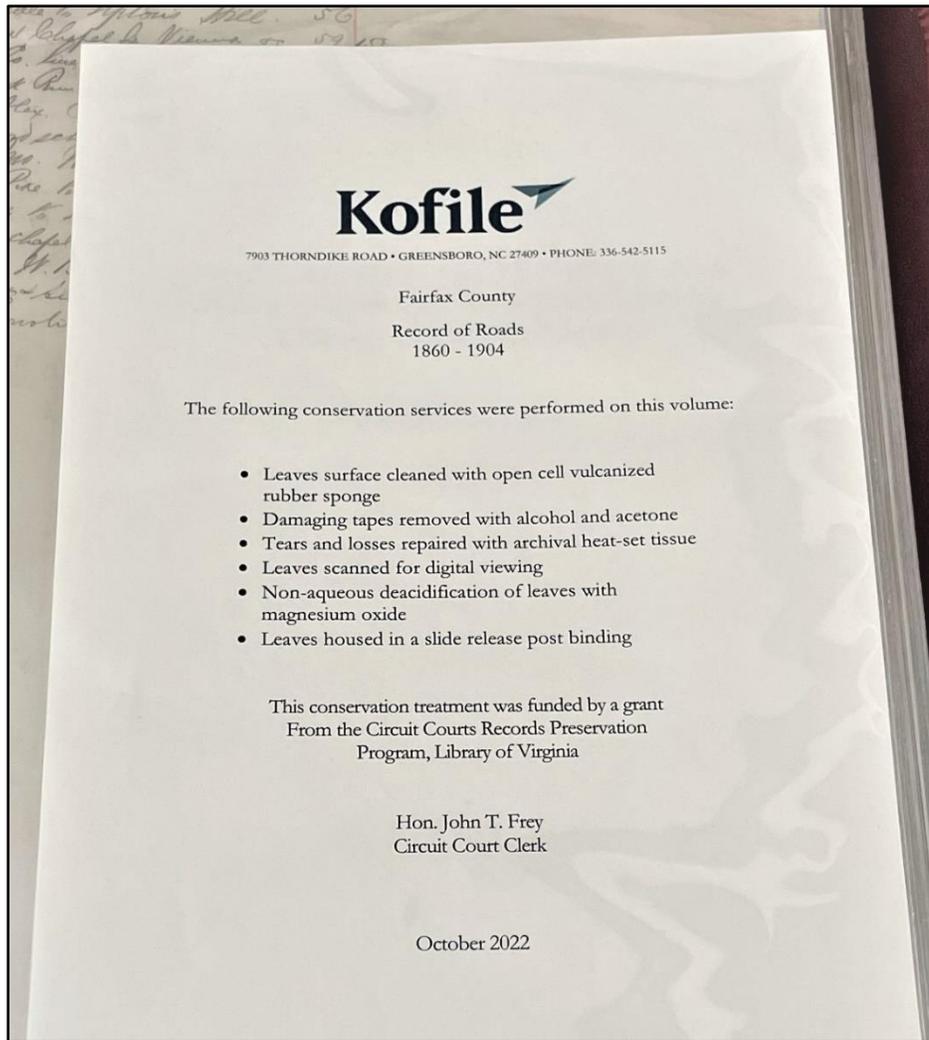
If you visit the Historic Records Center and see bindings like the ones pictured at left, you'll know that these records have been recently conserved!

Fairfax County Will Books E-1 through G-1

The Record of Roads, 1860-1904 (pictured below) also includes an index. The alphabetical tabs at the front of the ledger have remained attached and encapsulated, so they can be used as intended. This is very helpful to researchers and archivists to make document identification faster in a manual search.



Fairfax County Record of Roads 1860-1904, "F" index page



Fairfax County Record of Roads 1860-1904

When conservation is finished, each document is returned with a cover sheet that specifies the services performed. While many of our historic records have been conserved, countless documents at the Historic Records Center are still in need of repair. The Clerk’s Office updates our 5-year Preservation Plan regularly, methodically identifying records needing conservation and reimaging, all in the name of accessibility and usability.

When the HRC’s archivists get court records back from the conservation, it’s feels like we’re opening gifts for us and our researchers! Happy Holidays!

Please note: the Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center will be *CLOSED December 23, December 26 and January 2* for the Christmas and New Year holidays.

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 pm. 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>