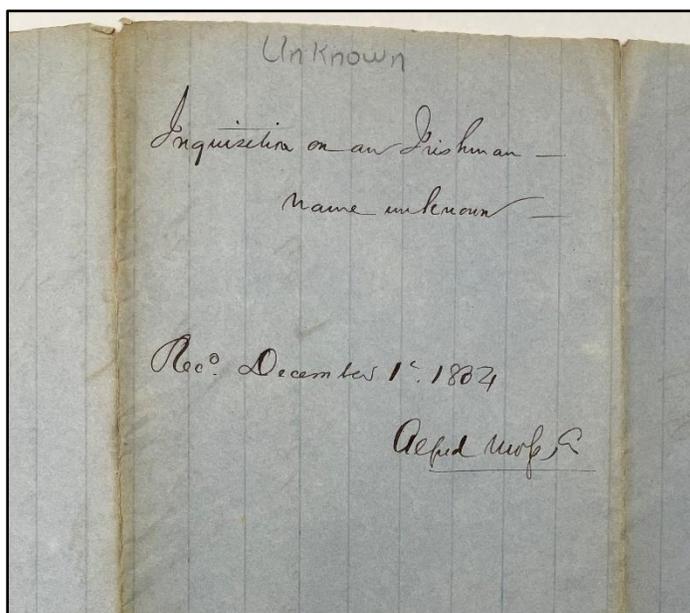


FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 72 – March 2022
Irish Immigrants in Fairfax County
Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center



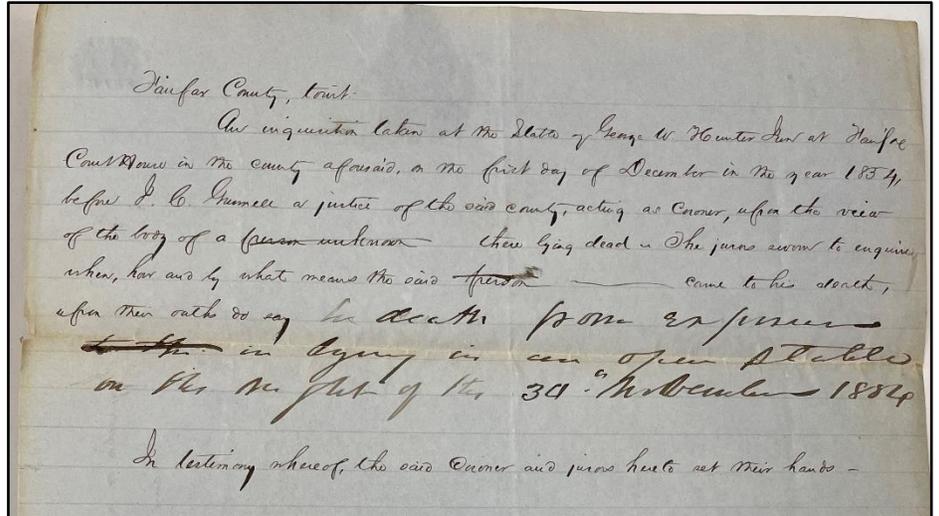
Happy early Spring, and welcome back to Found in the Archives! The Historic Records Center is pleased to announce that we are now once again taking walk-in researchers. Researchers who wish to make an appointment are still welcome to do so, but appointments are no longer required. We are also excited to announce we are resuming tours of the Historic Courthouse every Friday at 3pm, and those who are interested can meet at the green Courthouse doors, where we will begin the tour. In honor of Saint Patrick's Day, the cultural and religious holiday traditionally celebrated on March 17th, we will use this month's edition of Found in the Archives to discuss some History of the Irish in Fairfax as revealed by court records that document the large population of Irish immigrants in the 18th and 19th Centuries..

The first document we will be discussing is a Coroner's Inquest from 1884. This document is a Coroner's Inquest, which is the legal process for a group of people to gather and determine when, and how a person died after their body had been found. This particular inquest is unique because it is labeled on the original document as "Inquisition on Irishman," and no further identifying information is given about the decedent.



Coroner's Inquest CI-094, Fairfax County Circuit Court Historic Records Center

After viewing the body, the court would summon twelve people for the inquest (the same number required for a criminal jury), along with the Coroner, came to the conclusion this Irishman died from exposure, after lying in open stables. This legal determination meant an investigation into the cause of death was not necessary (which would otherwise have been required if there had been a gunshot wound or other physical trauma).



Coroner's Inquest CI-094, Fairfax County Circuit Court Historic Records Center

Like much of the East Coast, Fairfax had a large Irish Immigrant population in the mid- to late-19th Century. One of the largest attractions that drew these immigrants to Northern Virginia was the prospect of working on the rapidly growing railroad system. In 1848, the Orange &

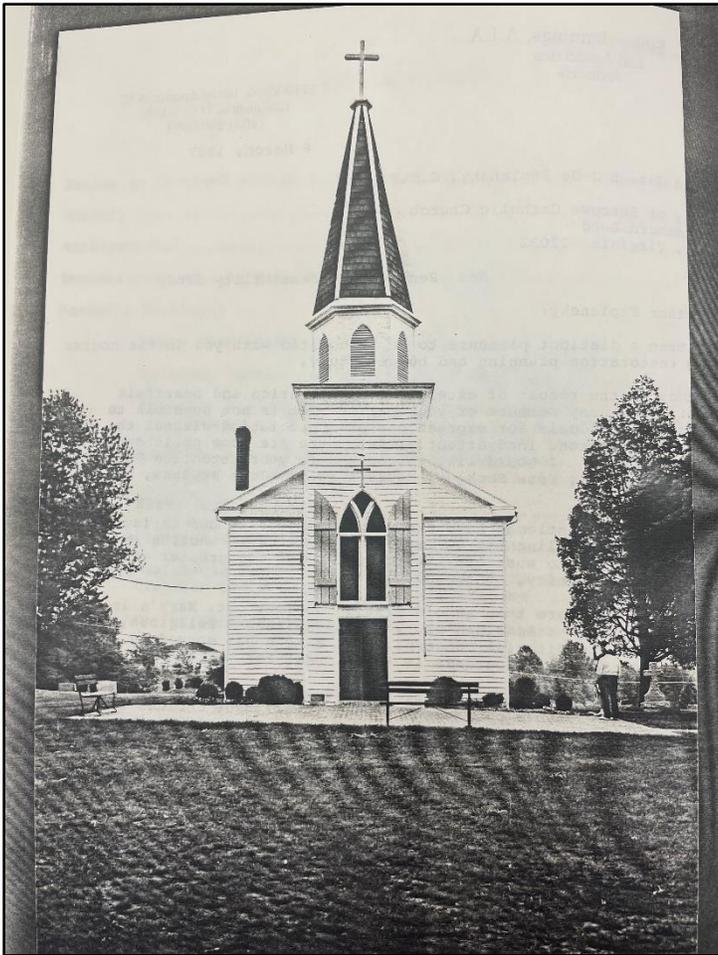


Herman Haupt was commissioned...

Construction of Devereux Station, Fairfax Station: All Aboard! page 40

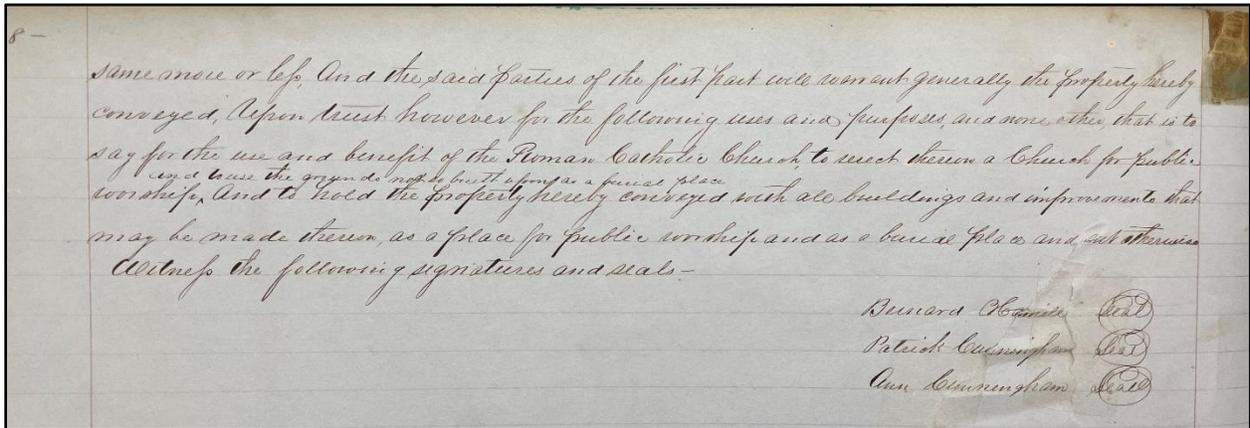
Alexandria Railroad Company was formed to build a railroad connecting Alexandria to Gordonsville, Virginia. This railroad was set to run clear across Fairfax County and necessitated a large amount of laborers to accomplish the job. Many immigrants took labor-intensive jobs because they did not require experience or skill-qualifications. New arrivals in America would not have a long work history, nor

would many immigrants have entered guild-systems for other, skilled trades. Because major infrastructure projects like rail, required a large amount of workers, the communities around the rail works would experience immigrant booms, seemingly overnight.



St Mary of Sorrows Roman Catholic Church Fairfax Station, Va Feasibility Study page 2

One impact this Irish population had on Fairfax was the establishment of the county's first Catholic Church, St. Mary's, which was built in 1858 and dedicated in 1860. As seen in a Fairfax County Deed Book from 1858, the church was constructed on land donated by the Hamill and Cunningham families for the sole purpose of being used by the Roman Catholic Church. The original Saint Mary's Church came to almost immediate notoriety in Northern Virginia, after the Church was used as a makeshift hospital during the Second Battle of Bull Run in 1862. Clara Barton, who ran the erstwhile-hospital during the battle, later went on to found the American Red Cross in 1881, but some people describe old Saint Mary's, as the first home of The Red Cross. . Although Saint Mary's expanded to a larger building in 1980, the original Church still stands and holds Mass six days a week.



Fairfax Deed Book A-4 page 27

Fairfax is known for being one of the most diverse localities in the United States, and that legacy includes its Irish Immigrants who helped usher-in the industrial revolution, by building railroads, and establishing the historic architectural chameleon, Saint Mary's Church Happy Saint Patrick's Day!

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.

At this time, 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 3pm. Please meet Historic Records Center staff at the green doors of the 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>