

FAIRFAX COUNTY

VIRGINIA

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Circuit Court Clerk's Office Historic Records Center

Fairfax County Historic Courthouse Attic and Bell



While Fairfax County's 1799 Courthouse has gone through many renovations throughout the centuries, the original attic construction still supports the roof today. Seen below, the attic was put together using hand-hewn beams, and the ceiling joists are secured by wooden pegs. The beams were made offsite and brought to the courthouse; roman numerals were used to mark which beams fit together during construction



It is hard to imagine the cupola not standing atop the courthouse, however, it is not an original feature. Added on in 1844, the cupola is 180 years old and still houses the original bell that was installed along with it. Prior to this installation, the court paid a crier to ring a hand bell to signal when court was in session, or before sharing news and announcements.

Cast by TW & RC Smith foundry in Alexandria, the courthouse bell is likely one of the only surviving bells in the area from its original time frame. Many bells and other metal objects were melted down during the civil war to be used for various war efforts.



Fairfax County Historic Courthouse Cupola, as seen during the Civil War





The bell and cupola have gone through various renovations and conservation efforts throughout the years. Notably, the cupola windows have been screened in to prevent birds from nesting inside. The most recent work was performed in 2021, when the rope was replaced and the bell was oiled. The current wooden construction of the cupola is still original to 1844.



Fairfax County Historic Courthouse Cupola, as seen today

Other modern touches can be seen in the cupola, including this message in white paint that reads “Chris 89 November,” presumably left in 1989



Visible all around old town Fairfax, the cupola and bell remain an iconic part of the courthouse. While the bell is only rang ceremoniously today, feel free to ask staff to ring it on your next courthouse tour!

Found in the Archives is a monthly publication of the Clerk of the Fairfax Circuit Court, 19th Judicial Circuit, who proudly serves The City of Fairfax and Fairfax County. The Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center (HRC) holds the early county and court records including deeds, wills, court minutes, chancery and law papers, marriage licenses, birth, death, and tax records dating from 1742 through the early 1900s housed in approximately 2300 books and roughly 750 boxes of loose paper files. HRC is open Monday – Friday 8 am to 4 pm. and offers tours at 3pm on Friday. Click below to plan your next visit

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