

# FAIRFAX COUNTY

## VIRGINIA

Found in the Archives no. 105

Circuit Court Historic Records Center

### Courting Comfort:

#### Keeping Warm at the Courthouse

**Brrr, it's cold outside! How did the courthouse historically keep its occupants warm? The courthouse started by using fires. It is believed that the three fireplaces that are in the courthouse today are original to its 1799 construction (Fig.1).**

**Keeping the courthouse warm was so important that in 1843 the Sheriff was fined when he failed to obey the "order to keep good fires." Even with fireplaces the Fairfax County Court quickly moved to add stoves throughout the courthouse, for the 'comfortable transaction of the business of the Court.' (Fig.2) 'Tin troughs' were placed under stove pipes to catch any drippings.**




*March Court 1814 3<sup>d</sup> Day*

*It being the unanimous Opinion of the Court that the comfortable convenience of the Judges of the Court requires that there should be an alteration in the Court room and that two stoves should be erected in the Court room. It is Ordered that the Clerk of the Court do between this term and the next September Court purchase another stove for the use of the Court-house and cause it and the present stove to be erected in a proper manner on each side of the Court room on the Third floor between the steps of the Dusters bench and the steps of the Sheriff's box and that the pipes from each stove be extended from each of said stoves diagonally to each of the fire places and set into them. and It is further Ordered that under the pipes of each stove two troughs be placed to receive the Druggings from the said Pipes and for — sent the amount for the said Work when it is done*

(Fig. 2) Minute Book 1813 p 78 date 1814 discussing placement of stoves.

**THE CELEBRATED**



**ALL RIGHT COOK.**

*Alexandria, Va., Oct 31 1887*

*Mr. Falls Church School*

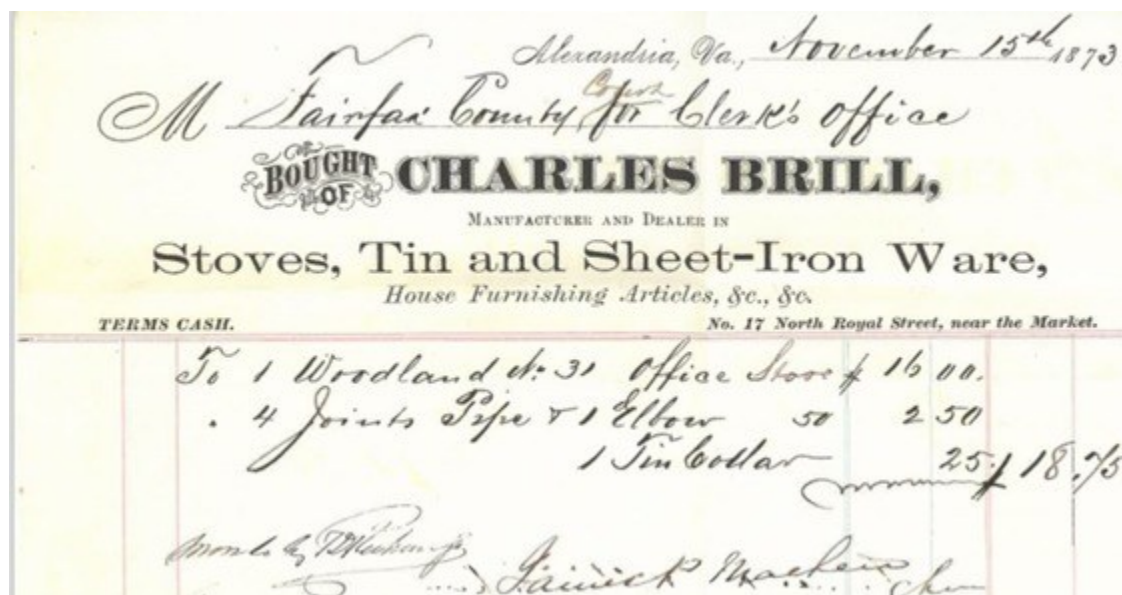
**Bought of HENRY BAADER,**  
— DEALER IN —  
**STOVES, TIN AND SHEET IRON WARE,**  
**HOUSE FURNISHING GOODS, &c.**

TERMS CASH KING STREET, BETWEEN FAIRFAX AND LEE.

<i>1 Stove</i>	<i>Approved</i>			
<i>1 Coal Ho.</i>	<i>Geo. A. Smith</i>			<i>7.20</i>
	<i>Chairman</i>			<i>25</i>
				<i>7.45</i>

(Fig.3) 1887 receipt showing an example of a local merchant who sold stoves. We do not know what the courthouse stoves looked like.

Stoves were purchased locally from Charles Brill, G. W. Hunter, and Alfred Moss (Fig.4).



(Fig. 4) Office stove purchased from Charles Brill.

Tools were purchased to assist in making “good warm fires” in the morning and to be kept up throughout the day as needed. These included shovels, hand irons, tongs and buckets would have been close at hand as well to put out fires. The court also specified what should be used in the stoves. While lumber was purchased from G. W. Hunter, in 1842, the court specified that the Sheriff should use coal instead of wood for burning.

Stoves didn’t last forever. While unclear of the motivation behind getting rid of this particular stove, a 1835 document in the archives reveals a stove was sold. It was specified that the funds acquired from the sale would go towards repair of the courthouse.

In 1922, the Fairfax Herald reported that the Courthouse was to be equipped with a modern pipeless furnace, which would allow for the removal of the "coal boxes and unsightly stoves."

Photographic evidence reveals that by the mid-20th century the fireplaces were covered up and radiators were installed in the courthouse (Fig. 5).



*Fig 5 - Detail - 1950s image shows courthouses where the fireplaces are covered, and radiators are being used. Courtesy of Virginia Room.*

**Receipts, court order books, and photographs reveal many details regarding how the courthouse was kept warm over the centuries. The addition of multiple stoves and radiator shows that the court prioritized personal comfort and perhaps suggests the difficulty of keeping the courtroom warm.**

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A correction was made in the December 2024 Found in the Archives article. Please see the corrected version on our website.

### ***About Found in the Archives***

*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. *What will you find?*

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