

FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 4 – January 2015
Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center



Happy New Year! This is the fourth installment of “Found in the Archives,” where the Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center will highlight interesting and unique documents in our custody.

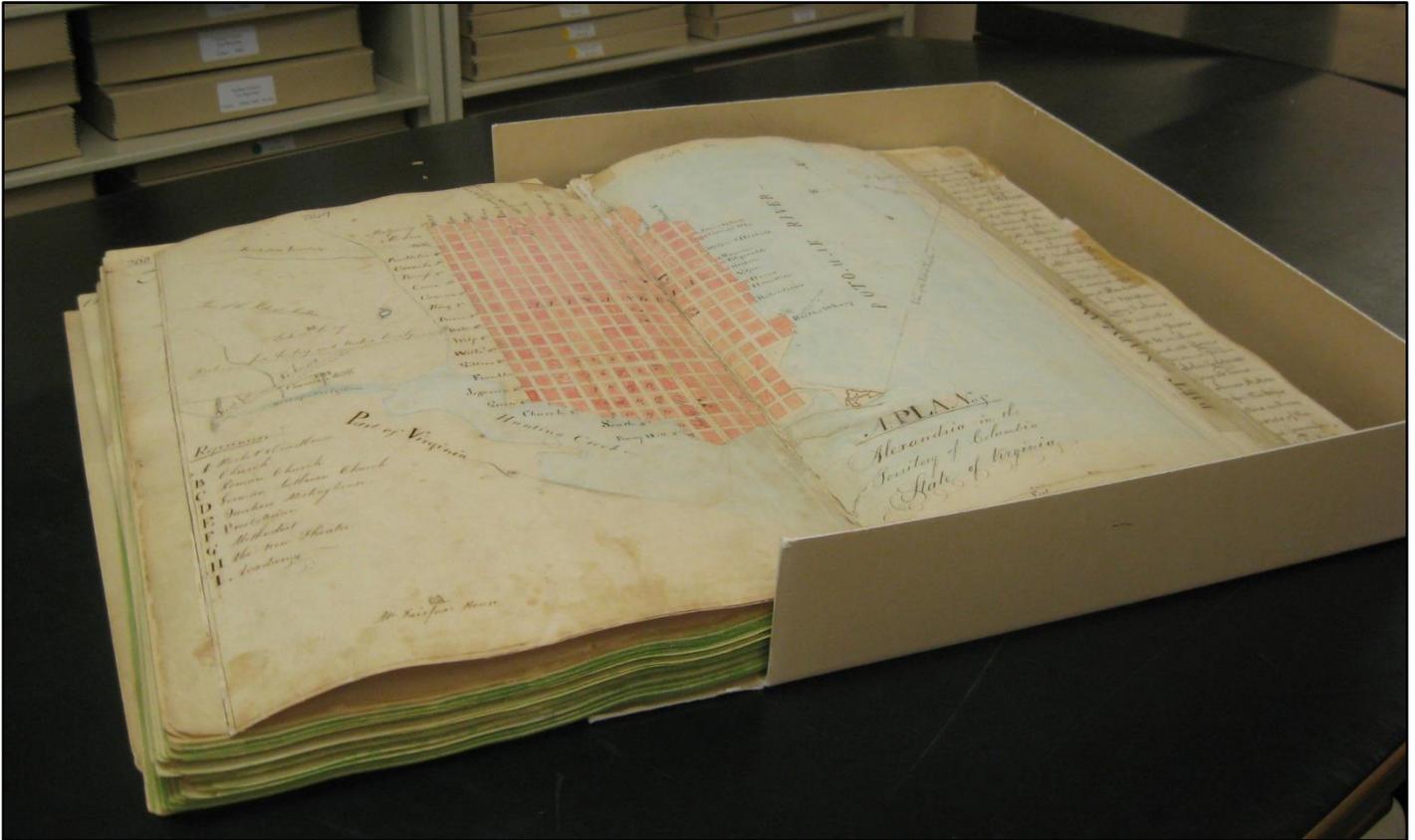
At the Historic Records Center, sometimes we get lucky, and we come across documents that not only have historical significance, but aesthetically, are true works of art. Such is the case with the document below.

This is a plat, created around 1804, of the Town of Alexandria.



The plat is hand-drawn and colored, and shows amazing detail. It measures 20 inches wide and 17.5 inches tall. Unfortunately, the name of the surveyor was not recorded, but it is clear that he had incredible skill.

Here is the plat as it is recorded within deed book E-2.

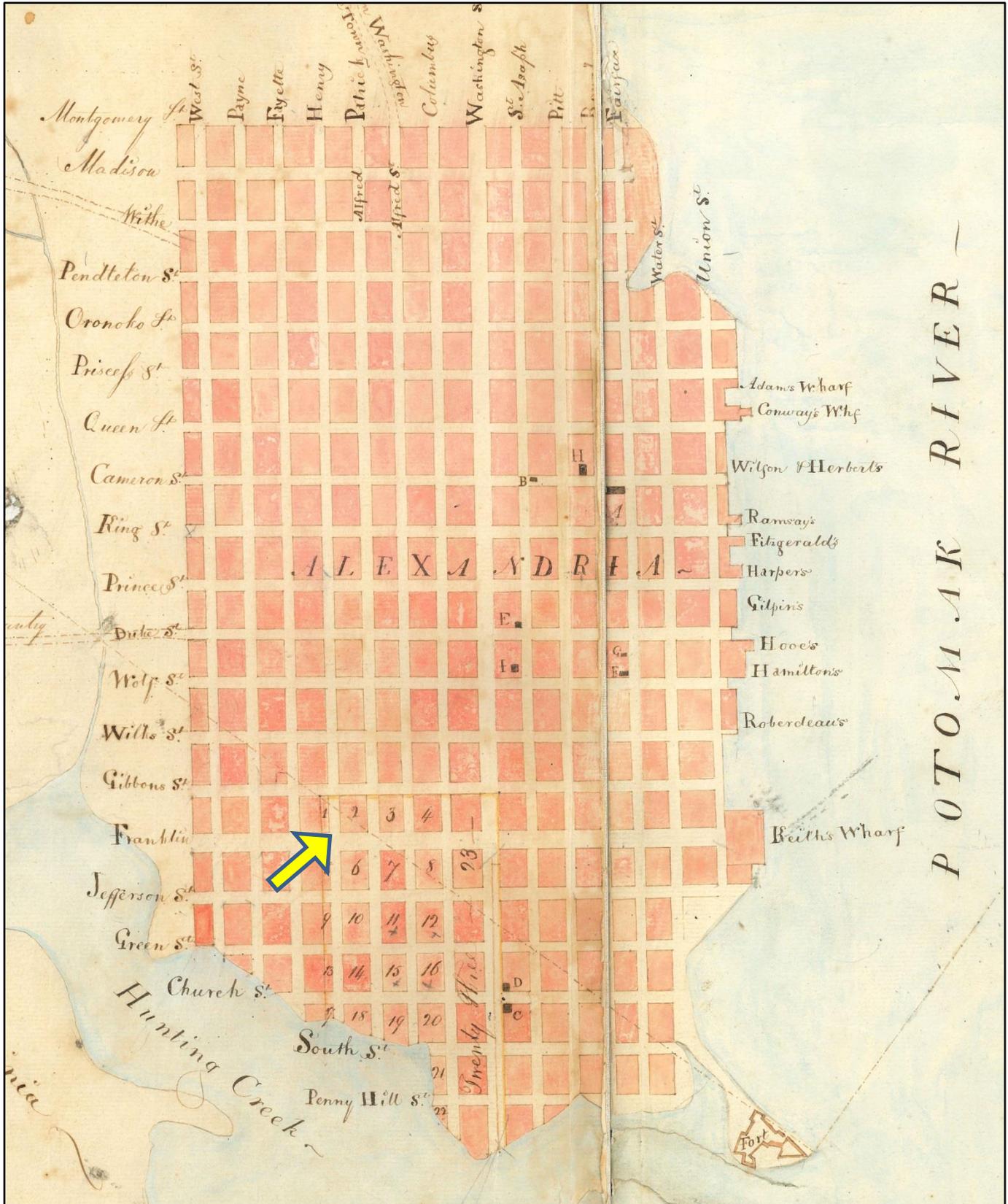


The plat was actually adhered to the accompanying deed at the time of recording, and over time, the glue has worn away, separating the plat from the deed.

So why does the Historic Records Center have custodianship of a plat of Alexandria from 1804 – considering that by this point, Alexandria was part of the District of Columbia?

Well, it all comes down to boundary lines between federal territory and the county of Fairfax. In a deed filed at the Fairfax County Court in November 1804, Lot #2 (shown on the map; see close-up below) was sold at auction to former Clerk of Fairfax Court George Deneale (1798-1801). The lot had been owned by a man named John Gill, who had unfortunately gone bankrupt. Two administrators, William MacCreery and James H. Hooe, were appointed to seize Gill's assets and property, with Lot #2 offered up at auction to the highest bidder. The deed explains how the property came to be acquired by George Deneale (See Fairfax Deed Book E-2, pages 270-274).

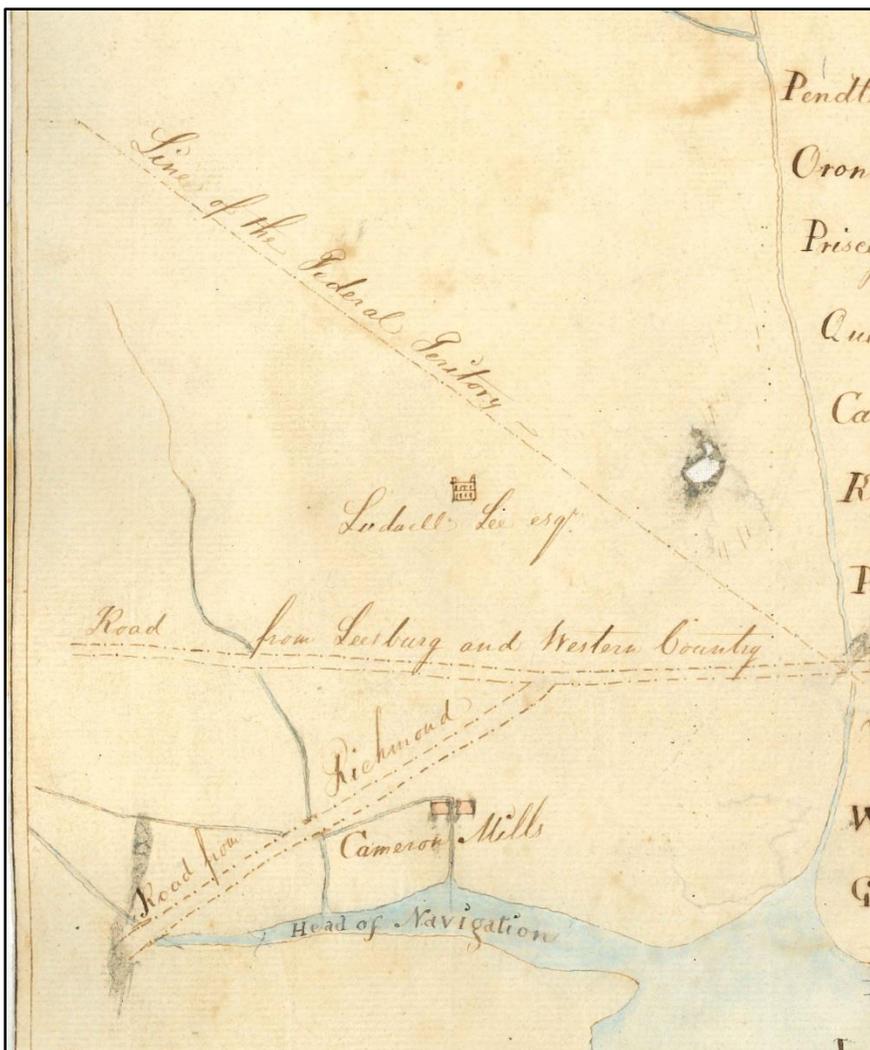
If you look very closely at the picture below, you can see that Lot #2, in the southern portion of what we would today call Old Town Alexandria, straddles the line between federal territory and Fairfax County.



While the plat was filed in order to settle the transfer of property, we can now look at the document as a snapshot of Alexandria at the turn of the 19th century.

There are many interesting points to discuss on this 1804 plat. Note how many wharves existed along the Potomac River – these wharves no longer exist today. The surveyor also drew in the places of worship and provided a key in order to indicate denomination. Notice that Hunting Creek was a much larger body of water than it is today.

Perhaps most interesting is the point at the lower right of the map labeled “Fort,” with a clear fort outline drawn. Based on current maps, this fort was located at what is now known as Jones Point Park. According to NorthAmericanForts.com, the unnamed federal fort was begun around 1796 but never completed, and was reported “abandoned and in ruins” by 1807. Being that our map is from around 1804, clearly a fortification existed on the point, but its status at the beginning of the 19th century is unknown.



Another interesting part of the map actually concerns parts of Fairfax County. Roads from Leesburg and Richmond into Alexandria are shown, as is the line of the federal territory (the District of Columbia). Places of interest, such as Cameron Mills and the home of Ludwell Lee are also shown, as is the head of navigation for Hunting Creek.

The Historic Records Center is proud to be custodian of such a beautiful document, and one that provides such unique information about a certain period of time in Fairfax County and the greater D. C. area.

For more information about this and other documents, please visit the Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center website: http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/courts/circuit/historical_records.htm