

**FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 8 – May 2015**  
**Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center**



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

This month, we are going to look at records of the colonial court.

Colonial courts recorded many different types of actions that are no longer seen in our modern day court system. This is partly due to the fact that the court was not only responsible for court affairs (hearing cases, recording wills and deeds, etc.), but the court was also responsible for providing for the general welfare of its population. This would include elderly residents, but also children whose parents could not support them or who had died.

A lesser-known function of the court, therefore, was to record *indentures*, also known as *apprenticeships*. In an apprenticeship, children, usually orphaned, were bound to an individual to be taught a trade and to read and write. Some apprenticeships were recorded more formally in deed books, while others were recorded in the court’s minute books. These documents show not only the names and ages of the children, but also highlight some of the trades active during the colonial period.

The House of Burgesses passed particular laws that pertained to the responsibility of the court for “poor children” and “poor orphans.” For example, in October 1748, a law was passed in which *“the general court, and the several county courts in this dominion, within their respective jurisdictions, have and shall have full power and authority, from time to time, to take cognizance of all matters concerning orphans and their estates, and to appoint guardians in such cases.”* The law further states the orphan may *“be bound apprentice, every male to some tradesmen, merchant, mariner, or other person approved by the court, until he shall attain the age of one and twenty years, and every female to some suitable trade or employment, ‘til her age of eighteen years; and the master or mistress of every such servant, shall find and provide for him or her, diet, cloaths [sic], lodgings and accommodations fit and necessary, and shall teach, or cause him or her to be taught to read and write.”*

The original indenture below dates to 1769. John Haise bound himself to William McAtee in order to “learn the said trade, mistery [sic], or occupation of a taylor [sic].” You can see that both the apprentice and the master had to follow certain rules – the apprentice could not sell or embezzle his master’s goods, frequent taverns, or agree to marry, and the master was to provide lodging, washing, clothes, food, and drink, and teach him to read and write.

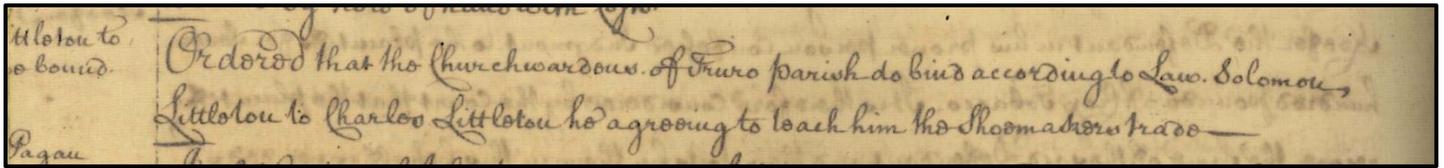
This Indenture made the fiftenth day of October in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and sixty nine. Witnesseth that John Haise of the County of Fairfax in the Colony of Virginia hath of his own free and voluntary Will, placed and bound himself Apprentic unto William M: Atee of the said County and Colony Tayler, to learn the said Trade, Mistery or Occupation of a Tayler, which he the said William M: Atee now useth; and with him as an Apprentice to dwell, continue & serve from the day of this date hereof, until the full end and Term of four Years, from thence next ensuing & fully to be compleed and ended; during all which Term of four Years, the said Apprentice his said, to wit, ~~he shall not~~ ~~do~~ ~~nor~~ ~~wilfully~~ ~~suffer~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~done~~ ~~by~~ ~~others~~, but of the same to ~~do~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~utmost~~ ~~of~~ ~~his~~ ~~power~~, shall forthwith give Notice to his said Master: The goods of his said Master he shall not imbezil or Waste, nor them lend without his consent, to any; at Cards, Dice, or any other unlawful Games he shall not play, Taverns he shall not frequent; Fornication he shall not Commit, Matrimony he shall not contract; from the Service of his said Master he shall not at any Time depart or absent himself without his said Master's leave; but in all things as a good and faithful Apprentice, shall and will demean and behave himself towards his said Master, and all his, during the said Term. And the said Master, in Consideration of the Work & Service which the said Apprens shall do him during the said Term in the said Trade, Mistery or Occupation of a Tayler, which he the said Master now useth, shall therein, & with all things therunto belonging, teach, or cause to be well and sufficiently taught & instructed, after the best Way and manner he can, and shall and will also find and allow unto his said Apprentice cloaths, Meat, Drink washing and Lodging fit and sufficient for such an Apprentice during the said Term. In Witness whereof the said Parties have hereunto interchangeably set their Hands & Seals the day and Year aforesaid

Signed sealed and Delivered  
in presence of  
A. R. D.  
Leon Moore  
Pierce Bayly

The marks of  
John + Haise

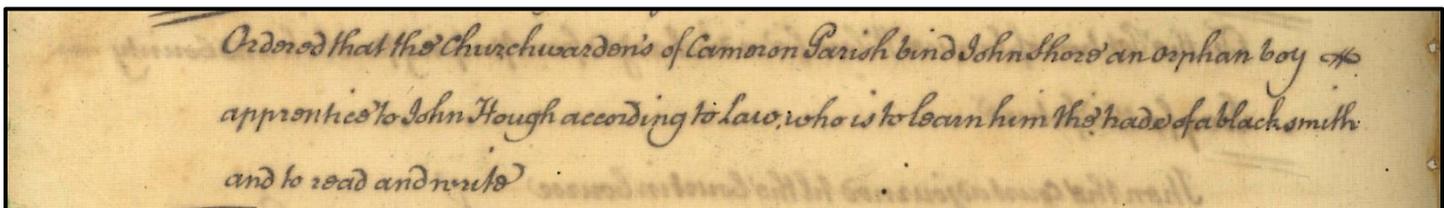
The marks of  
William McAtee

The minute books at the Historic Records Center contain many references to apprenticeships. Below is a selection of these documents, showcasing the various trades prominent during that time.



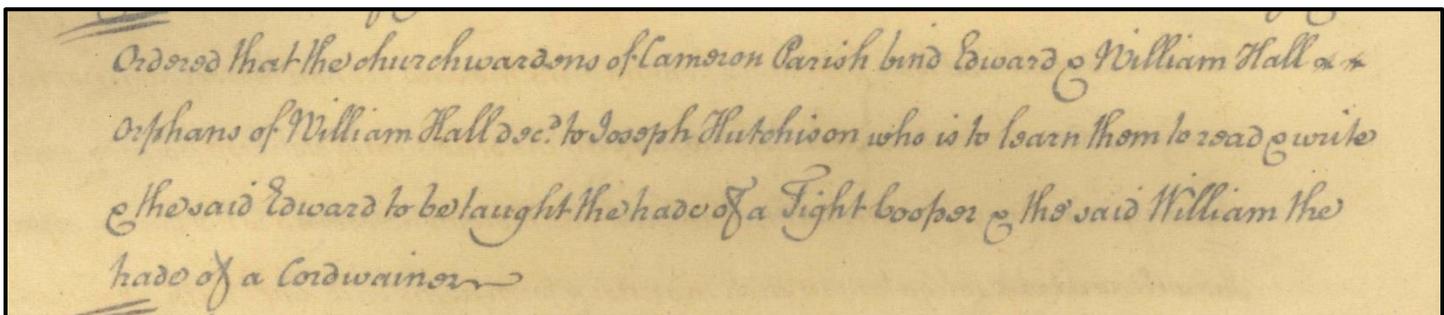
Ordered that the Churchwardens of Truro parish do bind according to Law, Solomon Littleton to Charles Littleton he agreeing to teach him the Shoemakers trade

“Ordered that the Churchwardens of Truro Parish do bind according to Law, **Solomon Littleton** to **Charles Littleton**, he agreeing to teach him the shoemakers trade.” *Fairfax Minute Book 1749*, page 194, September 20, 1752.



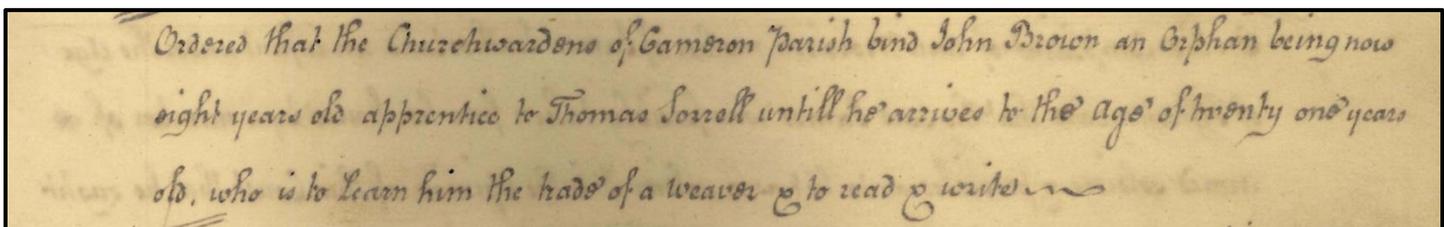
Ordered that the Churchwardens of Cameron Parish bind John Shore an orphan boy apprentice to John Hough according to Law, who is to learn him the trade of a blacksmith and to read and write

“Ordered that the Churchwardens of Cameron Parish bind **John Shore** an orphan boy apprentice to **John Hough** according to Law, who is to learn him the trade of blacksmith and to read and write.” *Fairfax Minute Book 1749*, page 422, August 17, 1753.



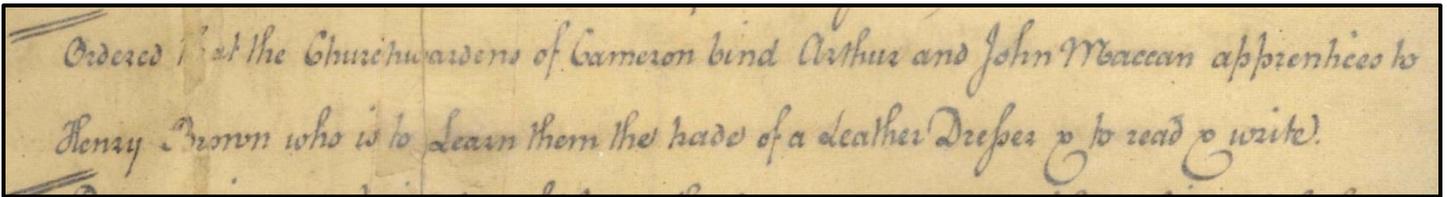
Ordered that the churchwardens of Cameron Parish bind Edward & William Hall orphans of William Hall dec'd to Joseph Hutchison who is to learn them to read & write & the said Edward to be taught the trade of a Tight Cooper & the said William the trade of a Cordwainer

“Ordered that the Churchwardens of Cameron Parish bind **Edward & William Hall** orphans of William Hall dec'd to **Joseph Hutchison** who is to learn them to read & write & the said Edward to be taught the trade of a Tight Cooper & the same William the trade of Cordwainer.” *Fairfax Minute Book 1754*, page 34, February 19, 1754.



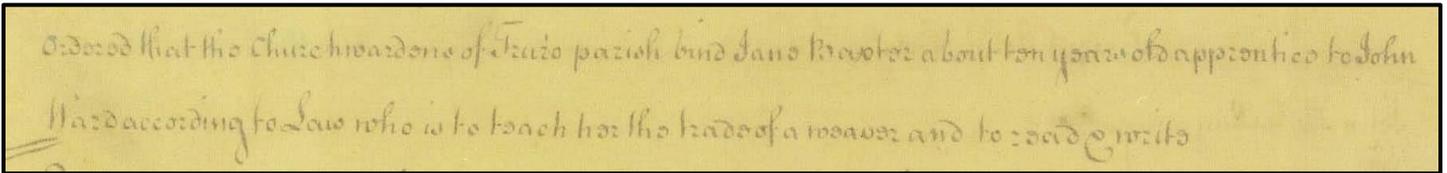
Ordered that the Churchwardens of Cameron Parish bind John Brown an orphan being now eight years old apprentice to Thomas Sorrell untill he arrives to the age of twenty one years old, who is to learn him the trade of a weaver & to read & write

“Ordered that the Churchwardens of Cameron Parish bind **John Brown** an orphan being now eight years old apprentice to **Thomas Sorrell** until he arrives to the age of twenty one years old, who is to learn him the trade of a weaver & to read & write.” *Fairfax Minute Book 1754*, page 203, January 21, 1755.



Ordered that the Churchwardens of Cameron bind Arthur and John Maccan apprentices to Henry Brown who is to learn them the trade of a leather Dresser & to read & write.

“Ordered that the Churchwardens of Cameron do bind **Arthur and John Maccan**, apprentices to **Henry Brown** who is to learn them the trade of a Leather Dresser & to read & write.” *Fairfax Minute Book 1754, page 303, June 17, 1755.*



Ordered that the Churchwardens of Truro parish bind Jane Brewster about ten years old apprentice to John Ward according to Law who is to teach her the trade of a weaver and to read & write.

“Ordered that the Churchwardens of Truro Parish do bind Jane Brewster about ten years old apprentice to John Ward according to Law, who is to teach her the trade of weaver, & to read & write.” *Fairfax Minute Book 1756, page 306, September 19, 1756.*

The excerpt above, for Jane Brewster, is the first recording in the Historic Record Center’s minute books that shows an apprenticeship for a young girl. As you can see, these documents demonstrate a variety of trades that apprentices could learn and then use to make a living once they had completed their apprenticeship, usually at the age of twenty-one. These indentures shed light on some of the more uncommon, but equally important, records that the Fairfax Circuit Court holds in its collection.

For more information about these and other documents, please visit:

[http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/courts/circuit/historical\\_records.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/courts/circuit/historical_records.htm)