



Information for Researchers

Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center

Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center

4000 Chain Bridge Road, Suite 1600

Fairfax, VA 22030

Phone: 703-246-4168

Email: CCRHistoricRecords@fairfaxcounty.gov

The [Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center](#) (HRC) holds early court records of Fairfax County. These records include deeds, wills, court minutes, chancery and law papers, marriage licenses, birth and death records, and tax records. Files in Historic Records date from the county's founding in 1742 through the mid-1900s. **Visiting Historic Records requires an appointment: to schedule a research appointment, please call 703-246-4168 or email CCRHistoricRecords@fairfaxcounty.gov.**

The record groups described below are not a complete record of the holdings in the Historic Records Center. This overview is intended to be an introduction to the wide variety of records kept by the Circuit Court.

Chancery Suits (CH#), 1803 - 1980

Chancery is a form of litigation seeking equity. These files contain the original papers of litigation and frequently pertain to divorce and real property: boundary disputes, estate divisions (land and slaves), and sales of property for the satisfaction of debts. Chancery cases dating between 1803 and 1945 are arranged chronologically by year. Cases dating from 1945 to 1980 are arranged by case number. This collection also includes suspended and pending chancery cases, and twelve Commissioners' Bond books, 1867 - 1994. Please see staff for assistance in finding chancery suits.

Churches/Cemeteries

The HRC holds various records pertaining to Fairfax County Churches and Cemeteries. Court Order Books record the appointment of trustees to church boards and Deed Books contain deeds for the establishment of churches and cemeteries. The HRC also holds Church Trustee and Encumber Church Property file collections, 1942 - 1993.

Clerk's Order Books, 1904 - 1981

Index and Volumes 1 - 45 contain records of the Circuit Court Clerk's appointments of notaries, guardians, deputies, trustees, members of county boards, and other civic officers.

Court Orders Books / Minute Books, 1749 - 1903

Court Order/Minute Books document the hearings of the Fairfax Circuit Court from the colonial period through 1903, concerning all matters of county and court business. Our ledgers span the years 1749 through 1903. Please note the following Court Order Books are **missing**: 1742-1748, 1775-1782, 1793-1796, 1798, and intermittent years during the early 19th century. Orders and Minutes 1749 - 1870 have been abstracted by the Historical Society of Fairfax County on 3" x 5" index cards and are available for research.

Deed Books (Liber), 1742 - 1942

The Circuit Court maintains all land records from 1742, when the county was founded, to the present day. Original Deed Books spanning the years 1742 - 1942 are kept at the HRC. Deeds and other land records were recorded chronologically, and [indexes for books to 1866](#) can be found on the HRC's

website. Deed book indexes post-1866 are available through CPAN (Court Public Access Network) located on the public terminal in Historic Records.

* Please note that the following Deed Books are **missing**:

In the # 1 series: F, H, J, N, and V

In the # 2 series: C, D, F, H, I, K, N, Q, T, & X pages 238 - 244

Elections/Voting, 1854 - 1936

Included in the holdings of the Historic Records Center are a variety of records relating to elections and voting. These records include, but are not limited to, a *List of Voters Registered, 1902 – 1903*, and voting registers listing precincts and poll taxes paid. An early “Poll for Election of Burgesses for Fairfax County” from 1744 can be found in Deed Book A-1. The [Voting Records of Fairfax County, 1854-1936 Collection](#) describes records related to elections and voting, such as poll books, election returns, petitions, and capitation tax lists.

Maps, 1742 - 1980

The HRC keeps surviving plats and surveys pertaining to land transactions or disputes filed in the Circuit Court, from the founding of Fairfax County, forward. Early official records of surveys can be found in the *Record of Surveys, 1742-1856*; *Land Records of Long Standing, 1742-1770*; and the *Proceedings in Land Causes*. Early 20th century plats of subdivisions and individual land ownership can be found in Plat Books 1 – 6. State Highway Plat Books hold the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) highway easements. In some instances, plats and surveys were also filed with the Court as part of the recording of deeds and as evidence in court cases.

The HRC also holds a small collection of non-court related maps, including the 1879 *Hopkins Atlas* and early 20th century county road and mail routes. Additionally, Historic Records holds the records of the *Davis-Ruffner Land Title Corp.*, a title company which operated out of Alexandria from the 1940s through the 1970s, which are available for research upon request.

Military Records

The HRC holds some original military service records for Fairfax County. Muster rolls and pension applications survive for the American Civil War, and draft lists and board minutes exist for World War I. Abstracts of original records held in state and federal repositories have been compiled for the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the 1848 Mexican-American War, and the Spanish-American War. Additionally, the HRC holds the original Fairfax County Ordinance of Secession Polling Lists from May 23, 1861. View more information about our military records [here](#).

Roads/Transportation, 1844 - 1927

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the Court held responsibility for the maintenance and construction of county roads and bridges, as well as the legal processes involved with the construction and

operation of railroads. Transportation records can be found in Historic Records, including [Road Petitions, 1844 - 1908](#), [Railroad Files, 1866 – 1927](#) and three Road Docket books, 1860 – 1908. The Court maintained its position as the primary overseer of county roads until the Byrd Act passed in 1932, and road building and maintenance responsibilities were transferred to the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Sheriff's Records, 1799 - 1945

The Sheriff of Fairfax County has served as a public servant of the Court since the county's founding in 1742. Most duties of early county sheriffs continue today, and the Historic Records Center maintains the historic records related to those functions. *Execution Books, 1799 – 1903* record the sheriff's process to carry out a judgment of the court. One duty of the Sheriff was to collect debts, and as such, information found in these records include the types of property seized (sometimes animals and the enslaved) and how citizens reacted to the process. This collection also contains *Process Books, 1809 – 1831*, and *Witnesses Summoned, 1834 – 1945*.

Tax Records, 1817 - 1942

The Historic Records Center holds physical copies of Real (Land) Property tax records from 1854 through 1980; Personal Property Tax Lists from about 1870 to 1938; and Delinquent Land Books from 1817 to 1942. Each land tax list includes the name of the property owner, magisterial district, land in acres, value of the land, value of buildings, and the tax assessed on those combined values. Personal Property tax lists account for the owner's name and holdings in enslaved persons (pre-Civil War), herd animals, carriages, clocks, and other items of wealth.

Note that in Virginia, buildings or "improvements" were not assessed until 1820.

Original Land and Personal Property Tax Lists from 1782 to 1870 are held at the Library of Virginia. These records have been digitized and are available to researchers at the Historic Records Center upon request.

Term Papers (Judgments), 1818 – 1952

These records are the loose paper filings for cases heard during monthly court terms. The HRC is missing most of its loose papers dating to before 1865 due to looting and fire during the Civil War. Currently, Term Papers from 1818-1889 have been fully processed and indexes to those records can be found [here](#). As each decade of Term Papers is processed, the index will be added to the [Term Papers information page](#).

Vital Records, 1853 - 1917

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, vital records were not officially recorded by the Court until 1853. *Births and Deaths were not recorded between 1861 and 1865 (American Civil War) and between 1897 and 1912 (state funding issues)*. After 1917, birth and deaths were, and continue to be, recorded at the state level. See the HRC's [Vital Records](#) page.

[Marriage Licenses](#) – Original marriage registers and licenses from 1853 - 1957 are found in Historic Records. See indexes for [Brides](#) and [Grooms](#).

Birth Records – Fairfax County Historic Records holds a *Register of Births, 1853-1869* and Birth Certificates for the years 1912 – 1917. Available for research on index cards.

Death Records – Historic Records holds a *Register of Deaths, 1853-1869* and Death Certificates for the years 1912-1917. Available for research on index cards.

Probate Records

Will Books, 1742 – 1965

The HRC holds original Will Books from 1742 – 1965, comprising the complete probate record: wills, inventories, estate and sale accounts, guardianship bonds and accounts, and administrator and executor bonds. The HRC's holdings are [indexed](#) to 1935. For records after 1935, please use the CPAN terminal located in Historic Records.

Fiduciary Bonds, 1752 – 1919

The HRC holds fiduciary bonds from 1742 through the early 20th century. When an individual acts as a trustee for another, the relationship is described as a fiduciary one. Bond books record the bonds of administrators, executors, and guardians, who could be appointed by the court or requested by an individual to ensure property was distributed fairly and according to the wishes of the deceased. Starting in the 1850s, the Fairfax Court bond books include not only administrator, executor, and guardian bond books, but also liquor, business, and public servant bonds. Several volumes have been indexed and those indexes can be found on our [Fiduciary Bond Books](#) page.

NOTES

INDEXES

Below are the indexes available in the Historic Records Center. Not all of these indexes are available as hard or digital copies – please see staff if you would like information from an index that is not printed or available [online](#) (under the “Finding Aids/Indexes” dropdown menu).

- **1890 Census** – Spreadsheet that recreates the destroyed 1890 census using Fairfax court records preceding the year 1890.
- **American Revolution-related Indexes** – includes [Participants in the American Revolution](#), an index to a binder of pension abstracts and other documents related to Fairfax County residents’ service during the American Revolution; [Participants in the American Revolution Supplemental Indexes](#); and [American Revolution Pension Applications](#), transcribed from records held by the Library of Virginia.
- **Birth Register, 1853-1869** – an index of births registered with the court. Includes enslaved births.
- **Birth Certificate Index, 1912 – 1917** – an index of birth certificates issued when recording of births resumed at the County Court level in 1912.
- **Book Inventory** – List of Secondary Source materials found in the Historic Records Center.
- **Chancery Cases** – Cases 1805 - 1930s are indexed through the Library of Virginia’s [Virginia Memory website](#). Chancery Cases #5405 – 5999 have online [plaintiff](#) and [defendant](#) indexes. Physical indexes for Chancery and Common Law Cases from 1953-1980, as well as Clerk’s Order Books, can be found in the Historic Records Center.
- **Civil War Pensions** – [collection of pension applications](#) from veterans and/or their widows to the Commonwealth of Virginia in Richmond (if a Confederate soldier) or the federal government in Washington, D. C.
- **Coroner’s Inquests, 1831-1915** – [collection of inquests](#) performed for suspicious deaths in the county. Includes inquests for enslaved and free African Americans.
- **Death Register, 1853-1869** – an index of deaths registered with the court. Includes enslaved deaths.
- **Death Certificate Index, 1912 – 1917** – an index of death certificates issued when recording of births resumed at the County Court level in 1912.
- **Deed Book Indexes, 1742-1866** – index to deeds, leases, releases, bills of sale, Governor’s commissions, public servants’ bonds, powers of attorney, apprenticeship indentures, deeds of manumission, and other contracts. Grantor and grantee index books from 1866-1946 can be found in the Historic Records Center or on the CPAN terminal.
- **Drawer X** – [a collection of loose court records](#) that have, over time and for various reasons, been separated from their original record groups. Drawer X is divided into two categories: [“Individuals”](#) and [“Subjects”](#) (currently in process).

- **Estrays, 1784 – 1828** – ledger recording the advertisement of estrays, such as horses and cows, found on private property. After advertising the recovery of the animal, if no owner came forward, the property owner could claim the animal as his or her own.
- **Law Files, 1854 – 1917** – a collection of mostly criminal cases filed by the Commonwealth of Virginia against individuals. These records were separated from the Term Papers (Judgments) for reasons unknown.
- **Marriage License Index** – two indexes, one organized by Bride, the other by Groom. Sometimes, additional documentation, such as parental approval or proof of divorce, was filed with the license. If the record contains additional documentation, it is noted in the index.
- **Ordinary Bonds, 1816 – 1842** – ledger recording bonds taken out for the operation of ordinaries, public establishments that provided food and drink throughout the county. Ordinaries, also called taverns, were central to social, political, and cultural life in Fairfax County, especially during the 18th and 19th centuries.
- **Railroad** – concerns the expansion of railroads in Fairfax County from the period of Reconstruction to the late 1920s. Contains plats, judgments, condemnation files, and lawsuits from those who suffered injury or death because of railroad construction or operation. Loose railroad files prior to 1866 are considered lost.
- **Roads** – concerns expansion of the public roads. Petitions were filed with the court to have new roads constructed or old roads repaired. Indexed by landowner making the motion and includes geographical information on the road being built or repaired. May include dates, plats or other drawings, and names of neighbors or businesses, schools, etc.
- **School Census** – Transcription of the school census records from 1890 and 1900. Contains information about all school-aged children in the county aged six to twenty, along with their parents. Also includes a record of teachers contracted to work in Fairfax County, 1886-1891.
- **Southern Claims Abstract** – Copies of Southern Claims Commission files related to Fairfax County. Originals can be found at the National Archives.
- **Term Papers** – Court paperwork filed during each court term. Currently indexed through 1890 and processed through 1907. Later court cases can be found by looking in the individual minute books for the term information.
- **Vertical Files** – Subject and Individual indexes of copied material in the Historic Records Center. Includes secondary source articles and other published materials, as well as primary source and genealogical information, held in other repositories.
- **War of 1812 Pension Applications** - Index to binder of material on the War of 1812.

SECONDARY SOURCE MATERIAL

- 1760 Map and Booklet - shows Property Owners, Tenants and other information about the land and people living in Fairfax County in 1760
- 1860 Biography – Edith Sprouse + 1860 Tax Map and Tax Map Key - shows Property Owners as determined by the United States Census of 1860. Searchable by Tax Map Number or by name of resident.
- 1890 Census - See Staff for assistance. No official 1890 Census exists - this is a database using other references to determine who lived in Fairfax County in 1890.
- Alexandria Lot Histories – information about original purchases of lots in Alexandria
- Books/studies relating to Fairfax County communities and historic sites.
- Fairfax Cemetery Survey – last conducted by Fairfax Genealogical Society, 1996
- *Fairfax Historical Society Yearbooks, 1951-2008*
- Vertical File: Copies of documents held in other repositories relating to Fairfax County or articles from newspapers, magazines or other sources dealing with Fairfax history.

TABLE OF CHAINS, RODS AND FEET

1 Link = 7.92 inches

100 Links = 1 Chain = 66 feet = 4 rods

1 Pole = 1 rod = 1 perch = 5 ½ yards = 16 ½ feet = 25 links

1 Chain = 4 rods = 66 feet

1 Perch = 1 rod = 1 Pole = 30 ½ square yards

1 Rood = ¼ acre = 40 square rods

1 Acre = 160 square rods = 43,560 square feet

208.708 x 208.708 = 1 square acre

1 Section = 1 square mile = 640 acres = 1/36 of a Township

Chains	Rods	Feet	Chains	Rods	Feet	Chains	Rods	Feet
	1	16.5	14	56	924		111	1831.5
	2	33		57	940.5	28	112	1848
	3	49.5		58	957		113	1864.5
1	4	66		59	973.5		114	1881
	5	82.5	15	60	990		115	1897.5
	6	99		61	1006.5	29	116	1914
	7	115.5		62	1023		117	1930.5
2	8	132		63	1039.5		118	1947
	9	148.5	16	64	1056		119	1963.5
	10	165		65	1072.5	30	120	1980
	11	181.5		66	1089		121	1996.5
3	12	198		67	1105.5		122	2013
	13	214.5	17	68	1122		123	2029.5
	14	231		69	1138.5	31	124	2046
	15	247.5		70	1155		125	2062.5
4	16	264		71	1171.5		126	2079
	17	280.5	18	72	1188		127	2095.5
	18	297		73	1204.5	32	128	2112
	19	313.5		74	1221		129	2128.5
5	20	330		75	1237.5		130	2145
	21	346.5	19	76	1254		131	2161.5
	22	363		77	1270.5	33	132	2178
	23	379.5		78	1287		133	2194.5
6	24	396		79	1303.5		134	2211
	25	412.5	20	80	1320		135	2227.5
	26	429		81	1336.5	34	136	2244
	27	445.5		82	1353		137	2260.5
7	28	462		83	1369.5		138	2277
	29	478.5	21	84	1386		139	2293.5
	30	495		85	1402.5	35	140	2310
	31	511.5		86	1419		141	2326.5
8	32	528		87	1435.5		142	2343
	33	544.5	22	88	1452		143	2359.5
	34	561		89	1468.5	36	144	2376
	35	577.5		90	1485		145	2392.5
9	36	594		91	1501.5		146	2409
	37	610.5	23	92	1518		147	2425.5
	38	627		93	1534.5	37	148	2442
	39	643.5		94	1551		149	2458.5
10	40	660		95	1567.5		150	2475
	41	676.5	24	96	1584		151	2491.5
	42	693		97	1600.5	38	152	2508
	43	709.5		98	1617		153	2524.5
11	44	726		99	1633.5		154	2541
	45	742.5	25	100	1650		155	2557.5
	46	759		101	1666.5	39	156	2574
	47	775.5		102	1683		157	2590.5
12	48	792		103	1699.5		158	2607
	49	808.5	26	104	1716		159	2623.5
	50	825		105	1732.5	40	160	2640
	51	841.5		106	1749		161	2656.5
13	52	858		107	1765.5		162	2673
	53	874.5	27	108	1782		163	2689.5
	54	891		109	1798.5		164	2706
	55	907.5		110	1815			

NOTES