

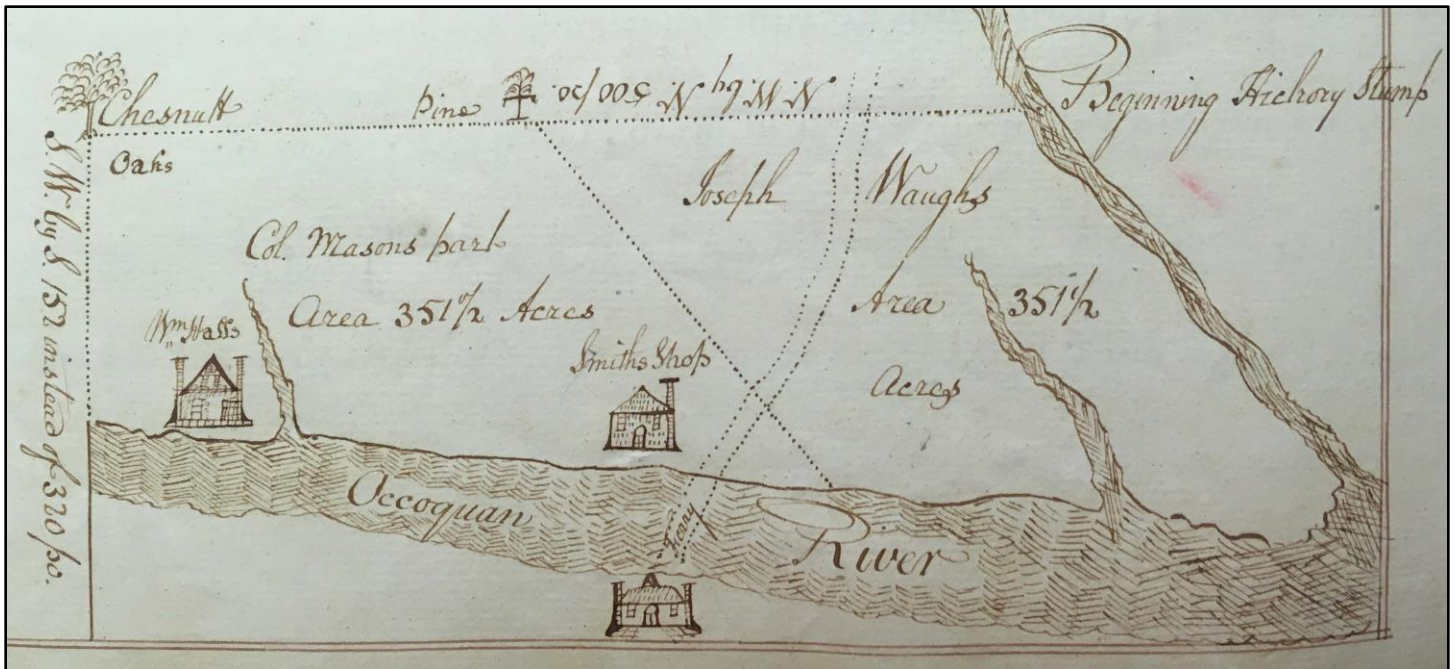
**FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 59 – January 2020**

***Doodles and Drawings in the Court Records***

**Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center**



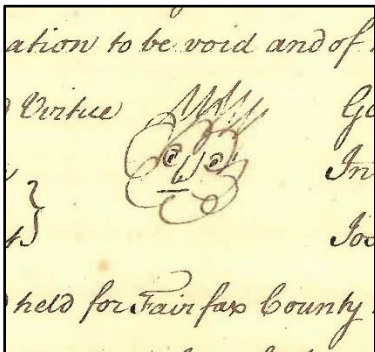
Happy New Year! This month, we take a light-hearted look at some of the unexpected images, doodles and graffiti that our past Clerks have left for posterity in our record books.



[Proceedings in Land Causes, Book 1, p. 22, Plat Copied by Peter Wagener, ca. 1752 - 1772](#)

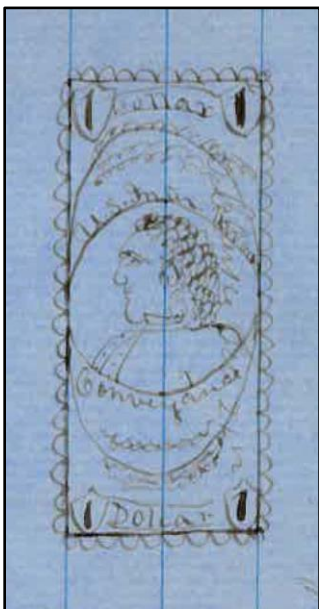
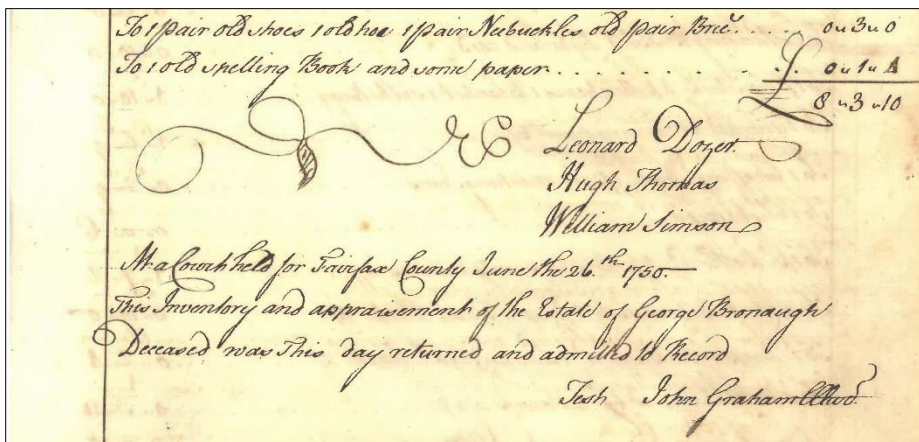
The first drawing is not so much unexpected, but it does demonstrate the skill required of an 18<sup>th</sup> century Court Clerk, in order to satisfy his job duties. Pictured above is a plat copied sometime between 1752 and 1772 by Fairfax County Clerk Peter Wagener. Stafford County's surveyor had drawn this plat in 1729 following a boundary dispute between John Doe and William and Jane Williams. Why would Fairfax County have a copy of this plat drawn for a different county? Fairfax County was formed in 1742 from part of Prince William County, and to further complicate matters, prior to 1731, Prince William County itself had been part of Stafford County. Generally speaking, the county in which a record was created was the county in which the record stayed, even after the formation of a new county, so that for the citizens of the newly-minted Fairfax County, property disputes brought to the Court often had to be solved by looking back at boundaries recorded in the deed books of Prince William and Stafford Counties. To preserve the "chain of title" and information proving land ownership, the early Clerks meticulously hand-copied deeds, plats, court rulings and witness testimony into our *Proceedings in Land Causes* ledgers. Wagener's copy of the plat shows intricate detail, such

as the “chesnutt” and pine tree boundary markers, and the hatching denoting flowing water. Most noticeable is the differentiation between the smith’s shop, William Hall’s house and the larger house on the other side of the river. The style of this larger house is regularly seen on 18<sup>th</sup> century plats, and most often denotes a manor house.



In the court’s earliest books from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, scribbles and doodles were often used to fill empty space between recordings. Notice the little face, shown at left, and the vine-like drawing below, complete with a leaf, both found in Fairfax County Will Book A-1.

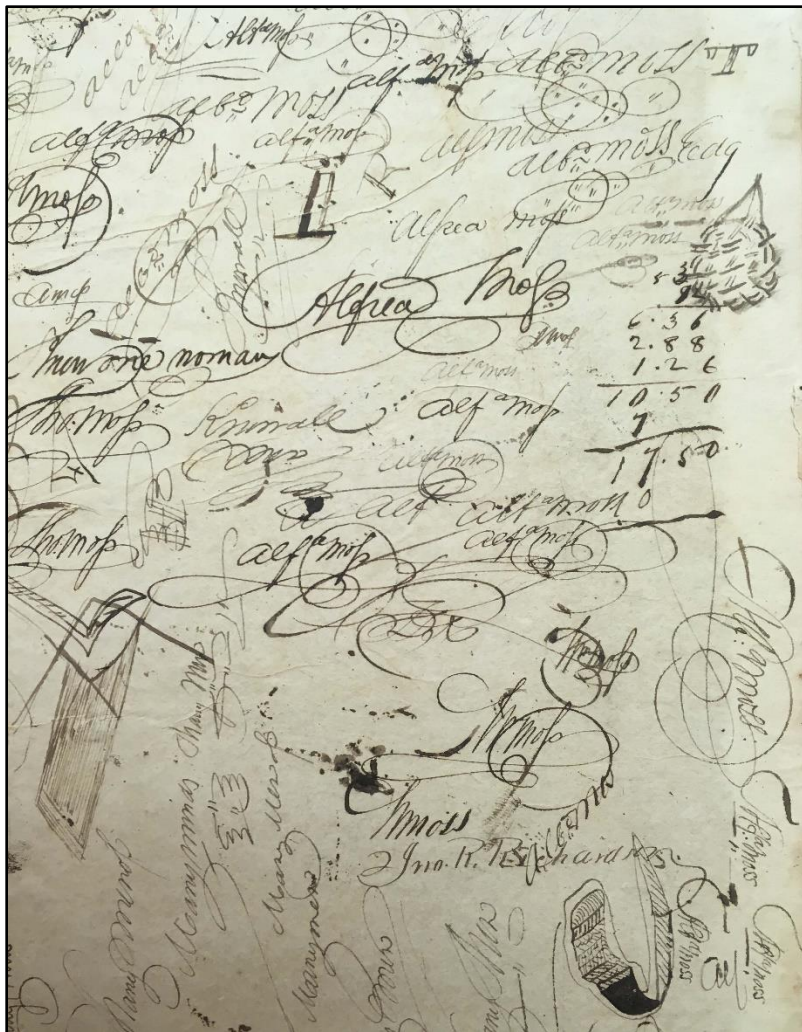
Fairfax Will Book A-1, pages 349 and 366, ca. 1750.



During the Civil War, court operations ceased at the Fairfax County Courthouse, and under Union oversight, the court moved to Bruin’s Slave Jail in Alexandria. The Union-appointed Clerk, Henry T. Brooks, was an outspoken supporter of the Union cause, voting against Secession in the Ordinance of Secession poll, one of which had been taken at Fairfax Court House. During his tenure as Clerk, Brooks conducted the same duties as his predecessors, including recording deeds. What is unusual about Brooks’ copies is that he drew the recording fee and tax stamps into the deed books, rather than pasting the actual stamps, or leaving them out, as most Clerks did.

Images from Deed Book E-4, (left), p. 49, (right), p. 49. Drawn by Henry T. Brooks, 1863.



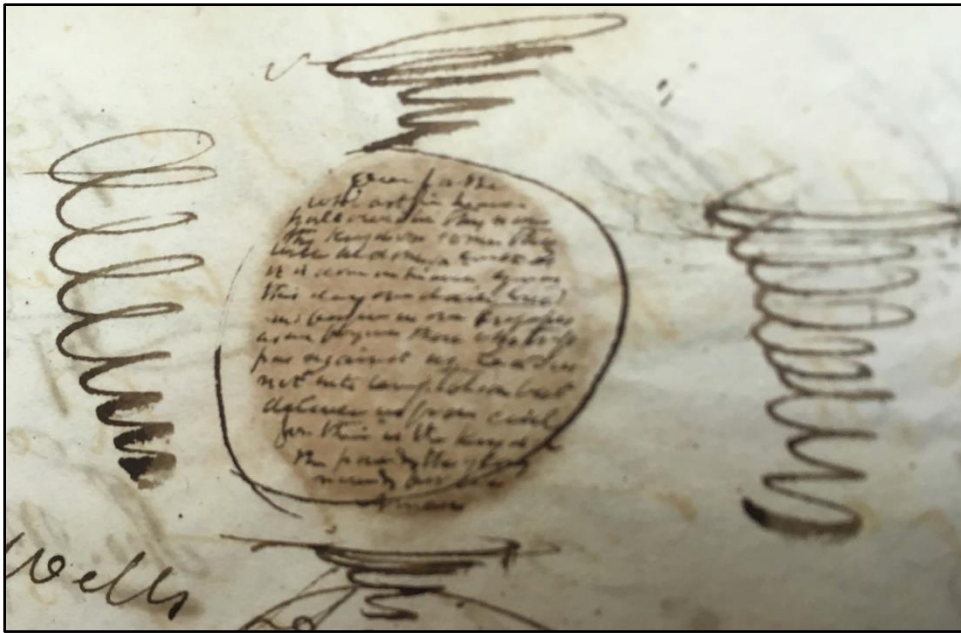


Our record books also contain some interesting graffiti; some undoubtedly left by Clerks, but still others left by the Confederate and Union soldiers who occupied the courthouse while the war raged. The graffiti scribbled on the notebook page, pictured left, could be either. The signatures on the page are for Clerks William Moss (1831 – 1835), Thomas Moss (1835 – 1839) and Alfred Moss (1852 – 1861). The grandfather, son and grandson trio all had very similar handwriting, and some of the practice signatures look authentic compared to known signatures in our record books. The doodles and many different styles used for Alfred Moss' signature, however, suggest that this could be the work of Civil War soldiers. The Historic Records Center holds other records that demonstrate how soldiers used the records for writing practice, and this notebook contains several examples, such as the one below, where the writer practiced spelling the word "Commonwealth".

Clerk's Notebook, beginning 1831, Inside Front Cover



Clerk's Notebook, beginning 1831, p. 3

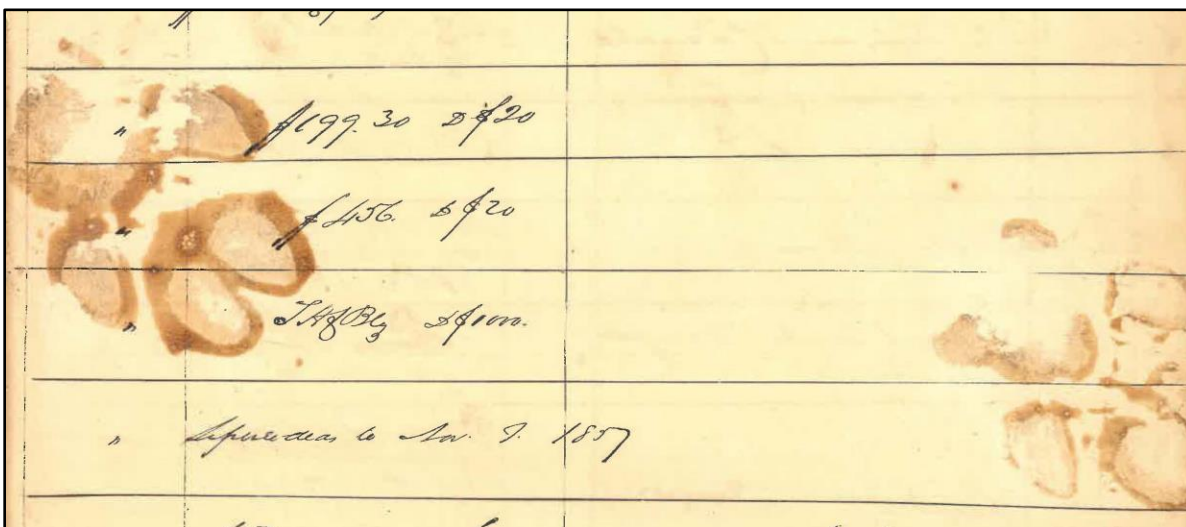


A circular grease mark left by a dab of adhesive overleaf contains a minuscule version of the Lord's Prayer. The writing is too small to read without the aid of a strong magnifying glass!

**Clerk's Notebook, beginning 1831, p. 42, the Lord's Prayer**

Our most endearing addition to a record book was not created by a person, but by a dog. Despite being created in 1857, the muddy paw prints are startlingly fresh, and even display the impressions of little air bubbles left behind as the prints dried.

As always, these and other court records may be accessed at the Historic Records Center during our regular business hours, Monday through Friday, 8 am to 4 pm.



**Rule Book 1850, p. 65, Paw Prints**

For more information on these and other records held at the Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center, please call 703-246-4168 or email [CCRHistoricRecords@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:CCRHistoricRecords@fairfaxcounty.gov).

**Sign up** for *Found in the Archives*, the monthly newsletter of the HRC:  
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/circuit/historic-records-center>