

FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 12 – September 2015

Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center



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

In this edition, we will discuss a new indexing project recently undertaken here at the Fairfax Circuit Court archives.

The Project

Over the last few months, the archivists at the Fairfax Circuit Court HRC have begun the process of indexing the names of slaves found in our Will Books and Deed Books. Known as the *Fairfax Court Slavery Index*, our goal is to capture the names and information about the slaves that appear in our records. Because slaves (and during the colonial period, indentured servants) were considered property, they frequently appear in our probate records in wills, inventories, and estate accounts. Sales and importation of slaves, as well as mortgages and trusts involving slaves, appear in our Deed Books.

Research Implications

How might the *Fairfax Court Slavery Index* help patrons visiting our office? First and foremost, the Index may assist patrons undertaking genealogical research, when current indexes do not help. The Index will also serve those researching the subject of slavery itself. Potential avenues of more in-depth research include:

- Slave naming patterns
- Slaves with a skilled trade (blacksmithing, carpentry, etc.)
- Slaves within families (inheritance)
- Slaves sold to slave traders (often found in estate accounts)
- The care of elderly slaves (support from estates)
- The change in value of slaves over time
- Slaves as collateral in business transactions

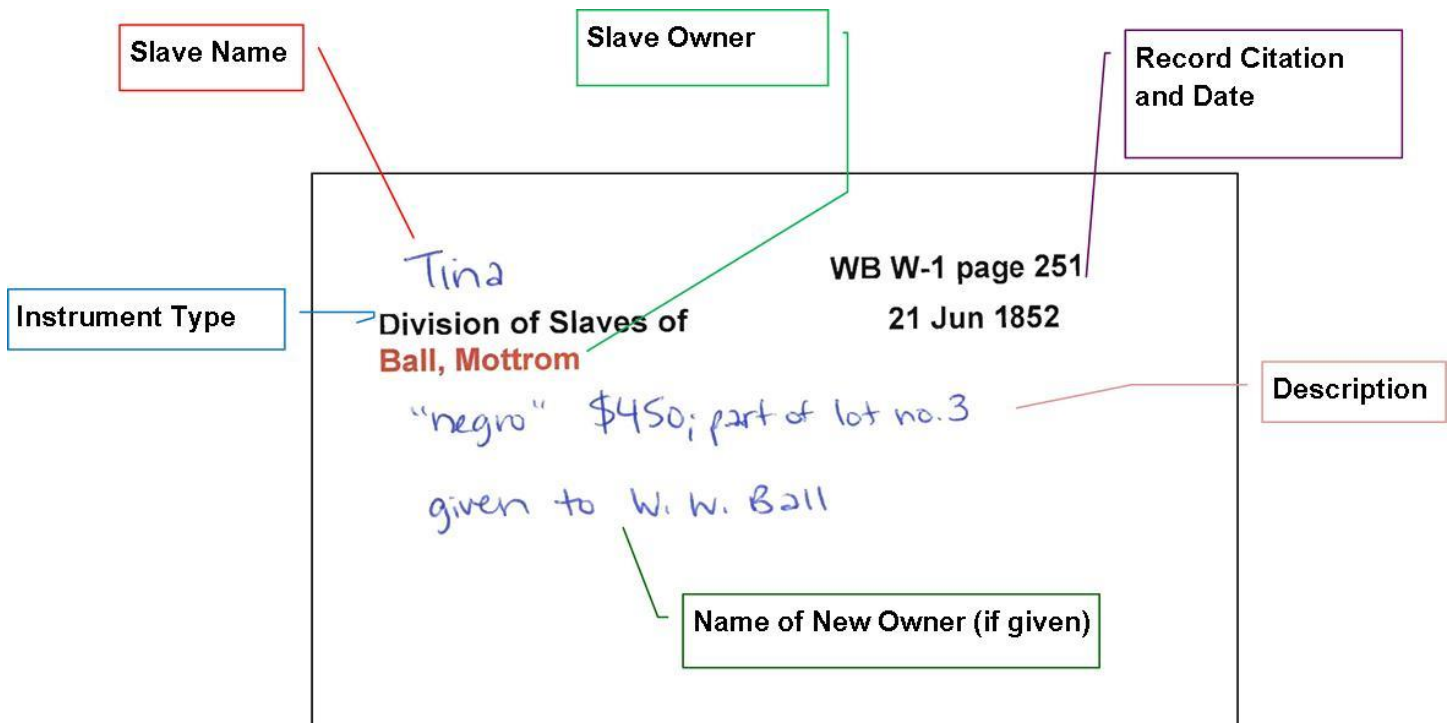
All of the aforementioned research topics are supported by recordings that can be found in the Court's historic Will Books and Deed Books—primary resource materials for anyone researching Fairfax history.

Our Procedure

The first step in the process was to identify which records contained information about servants and slaves. Next, we identified a plan to index the information that would: 1) be the easiest to implement and 2) be the easiest for patrons to use. We settled on index cards; we are able to capture the pertinent information on the card and they are easy to file and use.

After reading the Probate or Deed record that references a slave, we record the name of the slave, the Book and Page of the recorded document, the owner's name, a description of the slave, if given, (for example: age, physical description, value, and familial relationships are often noted) and the name of the new owner (if available). We also note if the court record indicates that a slave was freed, through emancipation or manumission.

Here is an example of an index card:



The page below is the source page from which the card was created (WB W-1 page 251):

Total value of slaves . . . \$6300.00
 Deduct Down slaves value at . . . 2050.00
 Which leaves for distribution . . . \$4250.00
 1/3 gives to each distributee . . . \$1416.66^{2/3}

Lot No. 1. Contains Sarah a charge
 William, value at \$700.
 Harriet " " 450
 Martha " " 300 \$1450.00

Lot No. 2. " John Carpenter a charge
 " Moses value at \$700.
 " Beverly " " 350
 " Delia " " 350 \$1400.00

Lot No. 3. " Nancy a charge
 " Dennis value at \$550.
 " Tina " " 450
 " Peter " " 400 \$1400.00
\$4250.00

Lot No. 1. to pay lots No. 3 and 2. \$16.66^{2/3} each

That S. M. Ball, W. W. Ball and Lucy W. Ball, then proceeded to draw for the above lots - which resulted as follows.

Lot No. 1. was drawn by Lucy W. Ball and exchanged with S. M. Ball for Lot No. 2.


Lot No. 2 was drawn by S. M. Ball and exchanged with L. W. Ball for Lot No. 1.

Lot No. 3. was drawn by W. W. Ball.

Given under our hands this 29th day of December 1850.

William Smith.
 James A. Nelson.
 Richard First.

Dec. of S. M. Ball sixteen dollars and 66^{2/3} cents affirms of valuation of lots No. 1 & 2 in the above division.

S. W. Ball


It is important to note that our index is *not* a comprehensive index of slaves in Fairfax County. Our index only includes the men, women, and children who appear in the court records available at the Fairfax Clerk's office. Inevitably, there are servants and slaves who do not appear in our court records, but who lived and worked in Fairfax County nonetheless.

Current Status of the Project

As of August 2015, we have created approximately 6,000 individual cards for both slaves and owners. We have indexed the following will and deed books:

- Will Books A-1 to C-1 (1742-1777)
- Will Books W-1 to A-2 (1849-1870)
- Deed Books A-1 to C-1 (1742-1757)
- Deed Books V-3 to Z-3 (1854-1858)

We look forward to continuing to make these court records available to the residents of Fairfax County. For more information about the status of the project, please email the Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center at historicalrecords@fairfaxcounty.gov or call 703-246-4168.



OCTOBER 10, 2015

“The Return of Martha Washington’s Will: A Centennial Celebration”

1:00 pm to 2:00 pm, Fairfax Historic Courthouse

October 2015 marks the *100th Anniversary* of the return of Martha Washington’s Will to the Fairfax Circuit Court, after its removal from the courthouse during the Civil War!

As part of the City of Fairfax Fall Festival, the Clerk of Court, John T. Frey, cordially invites you to attend a special presentation, held in the Historic Courthouse, featuring Fairfax Circuit Court Archivists Katrina Krempasky and Heather Bollinger. The Archivists will share the exciting (and somewhat unbelievable) history of the removal of the Will, its travels, and how, with the help of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Fairfax reacquired this important court document in October 1915.

**See historic Fairfax
County court
documents!**

**Showroom open
10 am to 3 pm**

ON DISPLAY:

- Original pages from George and Martha Washington’s Wills
- Documents related to the return of both original Wills

**Free and fun
for all ages!**

**Archivists’
Presentation in
Historic Courtroom,
1-2 pm**

FAIRFAX HISTORIC COURTHOUSE

4000 Chain Bridge Road
Fairfax, VA 22030

**Historic courthouse
showroom and building
open 10 am to 3 pm!**