

**Stewart Bell Jr. Archives
Handley Regional Library
Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society**

**PATHFINDER
Researching Buildings & Houses in the City of Winchester and Frederick County, Virginia
*Revised May 2023***

The City of Winchester and Frederick County, Virginia possesses a number of historic houses and other properties. This pathfinder is designed to help researchers uncover the history of these buildings using both published and unpublished sources in the Stewart Bell Jr. Archives.

DEEDS

A deed is a physical record of the transfer of land or property that is used to prove ownership. The person who acquires the land or property is said to hold title and retains the deed. A copy of the deed is also recorded in the county or city clerk's office in what are known as deed books.

Please note that historically deeds are occasionally executed many years before they are recorded. Additionally, when researching deeds, please be aware that the **grantee** is the person who purchases a property; the **grantor** is the person who sells the property.

The best way to begin investigating the history of an old building is with the current deed. If you are not the property's owner then information about ownership will be found in the local courthouse. Winchester City and Frederick County are separate jurisdictions and have separate records. Records for both are housed at the Judicial Center, 5 North Kent Street, Winchester, Virginia 22601.

To begin, identify the present owner of the property. If you do not know who that is search the grantee index at the courthouse and make note of the volume of the deed book and page number listed for the transaction. Go to the deed book volume, turn to the page, and read the deed.

Deeds may record a great deal of information about a property, including past ownership, names of family members, and neighbors whose property abuts the one being sold. Ideally, you should make note of all of this information as it may be useful in building a fuller picture of the property's history.

Once you have located the name of the grantor who sold the property, look up their name in the grantee index to find the deed that records their original purchase of the property. Who was the seller in that transaction? Look up their name in the grantee index to determine when they purchased the property and from whom. Continue using this method until you reach a point where there are no more deeds recorded. This means that either the property was newly built and has no older records or that the acquisition of the property is unrecorded and you need to find an alternative source.

COUNTY AND CITY PROPERTY RECORDS

Deeds are the primary means to find information about a property's ownership history, but wills, land tax records, and personal property tax records are also valuable sources. Again, these records are held in registers in the local courthouse. However, the Archives holds microfilm of some of these records.

Deed indexes and copies of deeds on microfilm:

Winchester Index to Deeds, 1790-1919
Winchester Deed Books: 1789-1879, 1943, 1955-1956
Frederick County Index to Deeds, 1743-1876
Frederick Deed Books, 1743-1800

Wills:

Winchester Index to Wills, 1794-1985
Winchester Will Books, 1794-1905
Frederick County Index to Wills, 1743-1917
Frederick County Will Books, 1743-1845

Land Tax and Personal Property Tax Records for Frederick County, 1782-1850. Land Tax Records for Winchester 1787-1865 are available on microfilm. These are not indexed.

NORTHERN NECK LAND GRANTS

Winchester and Frederick County were originally part of the lands owned by Thomas, Lord Fairfax and known as the Northern Neck proprietary. Fairfax distributed land through grants. The Northern Neck Land grants are available on microfilm in the Archives. Book index and abstracts to this series are listed below.

Gray, Gertrude E., compiler. *Virginia Northern Neck Land Grants 1694-1862*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1988.

Joyner, Peggy Shomo, compiler. *Abstracts of Virginia's Northern Neck Warrants & Surveys 1635-1784*. Portsmouth, VA: Self-published, 1985.

ARCHIVE AND MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

Archive and manuscript collections may contain a variety of materials, most of which will be unpublished. Below we have listed a number of collections that have considerable materials related to historic buildings and land records. Please ask Archives staff for assistance in identifying other collections that may be pertinent to a specific property.

Materials from manuscript collections must be requested using a green sheet, available in the Reading Room. Click on the collection title to view the full inventory.

[Baker, Julian W, Papers, 87 WFCHS](#)

While working as Clerk of Court for Winchester, Baker abstracted information about various families from the court records. The inventory will guide you toward locating information about family history and property ownership in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Fairfax, Thomas, Lord. Collection, 57 WFCBS/THL

The bulk of this collection is grants and indentures to land from Thomas, Lord Fairfax as proprietor of the Northern Neck of Virginia.

Glass, William Wood. Papers, 20 WFCBS

Details of property ownership are filed by the street address for some lots of the original Old Town area of Winchester

Historic American Buildings Survey Collection, 521 WFCBS

This collection is comprised of surveys of buildings and homes in the Winchester-Frederick County area conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). There are blueprints for some sites.

Land Records and Surveys, Winchester-Frederick County, Virginia, 1126 WFCBS

This collection contains deeds, surveys, and abstracts of deeds for Winchester, Frederick County, and surrounding areas from 1765 -1926.

Mutual Assurance Society Records, 248 WFCBS

The Mutual Assurance Society Records collection contains insurance policies (1746-1838) to dwellings in Winchester, VA and Frederick County, VA, which include policyholder's names. These papers include sketch maps and descriptions of several downtown Winchester homes and the adjacent out buildings, as well as, properties in Frederick, Berkeley, Clarke, Loudoun, Shenandoah, and Warren counties. Collection dates range from 1790 to 1838.

Preservation of Historic Winchester Collection, 875 THL

This collection is comprised of records and notes of Preservation of Historic Winchester Inc., Winchester, VA, USA. The information is mainly newspaper clippings, brochures, etc. on the activities of the organization along with the general Tables 1-16 Real Estate Property Survey of Winchester, March 1936.

Scrapbooks Collection, 844 WFCBS

Scrapbooks of historic houses of the Winchester area which appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* can be found in Box 2 of this collection.

Tisinger, Catherine. Collection, 1798 THL

Land records covering the period 1763 to 1850 in the Lower Shenandoah Valley.

Virginia Department of Historic Resources Collection, 1547 THL

This collection contains thirteen reports on archaeology and architectural history of various sites in Frederick and Clarke Counties, VA.

Virginia Historic Landmark Commission Records, 1350 WFCBS

The Virginia Historic Landmark Commission Records is a collection of surveys performed in Frederick County, VA. These surveys evaluated the architectural and historic significance of each chosen landmark. The Virginia Historic Landmark survey was first created in the early 1930s by the Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society.

Winchester City Records, 519 WFCBS/THL

The collection also includes maps of the city and tax and local books for the years 1870-1910.

Survey of Buildings and Properties within the National Register Winchester Historic District by EHT Tracerics Inc. in collaboration with Maral S. Kalbian, LLC for the City of Winchester, Virginia August 2011, 1 item, printed, 274 pages, text only

Real Estate transfers, 1915-1930

WPA Records, 303 WFCHS/THL

This collection contains a series of reports on historical subjects of the Winchester-Frederick County area prepared by the Works Progress Administration of Virginia in the years 1936-37. The reports cover subjects such as deeds, churches, homes, cemeteries, wills, etc. An index is included with the records.

MICROFILM

Frederick County, Miscellaneous Reports 1739 – 1869, Survey of Properties, Reel #201.

Census records for Winchester and Frederick County. Census records can tell you names of people living at a particular address, and other information such as boarders, country of birth, and number of children. Agricultural censuses record the owners of farms, and type of crops and livestock produced by that farm.

PUBLISHED BOOKS

Howe, Barbara J. *Houses and Houses*. Nashville: Amer. Assoc. for State and Local History, 1987.
Call Number: 973 Hou

Kalbiam, Maral S. *Frederick County, VA History Through Architecture*. Winchester, VA: Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society Rural Landmarks Publication Committee, 1999.
Call Number: 975.599 Kal

Kalbiam, Maral S. *Clarke County, Va.: History through Architecture*. USA: Clarke County, 2022.
Call Number: 975.598 Kal

Light, Sally. *House Histories*. Spencertown, NY: Golden Hill Press, 1989.
Call Number: 973 Lig

Miller, Virginia and John G. Lewis. *Interior Woodwork of Winchester, Virginia 1750-1859 with Some History and Tales*. Stephens City, VA: Self-published, 1994.
Call Number: 975.599 Mil

Morrison, James R. and Walter C. Kidney. *Winchester: Limestone, Sycamores and Architecture*. Winchester, VA: Preservation of Historic Winchester, 1977.
Call Number: 720.975591 M83

Quarles, Garland R. *Some Old Homes in Frederick County, VA*. (Rev.) Stephens City, VA: Commercial Press, 1971.
Call Number: 975.599 Q22

Quarles, Garland R. *Story of One Hundred Old Homes in Winchester, VA*. Winchester, VA: F&M Bank, 1967.
Call Number: 975.5991 Q222

Russell, William Greenway. *What I Know About Winchester: Recollections of William Greenway Russell, 1800-1891*. Staunton, VA: McClure Publishing Co., 1953.
Call Number: 975.5991 R911

MAPS

The Archives holds maps of Winchester and Frederick County from the eighteenth through twentieth centuries. Aerial photographs used for surveying and map making are also available. Please ask Archives Staff for our list of Winchester and Frederick County maps.

Some maps that are especially useful in researching historic properties include:

The Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps show streets and buildings as of 1908, 1912, and 1921. MC2 D9. The Archives also has the following *Sanborn Maps* for Winchester on microfilm: October 1885, June 1891, February 1897, January 1903, October 1908, December 1912, March 1921, and August 1927.

Scheel, Eugene M. *Frederick County, City of Winchester*. Board of Realtors, 1974. (Also for sale.)

Lakes Atlas includes a large-scale map of the downtown area and smaller scale maps of the several magisterial districts with locations of home owners of 1885.

STREET & BUSINESS DIRECTORIES

Directories for Winchester and Frederick County from 1878 to the present are available in the reading room. Directories list names of inhabitants along with their home and business addresses. They may also include a business directory and advertising. Occasionally, they provide supplemental lists of people organized by street. They can be useful for determining when someone moved in or out of an address (except in cases where you had to pay to be listed).

PHOTOGRAPHS

The Archives holds an extensive photograph collection of houses and other buildings. Winchester photos are filed by street address. County photos are indexed by name of the home. Many of these photographs have been digitized and are available to view through our PastPerfect database: <https://handley.pastperfectonline.com/>

NEWSPAPERS

Real estate advertisements in newspapers include descriptions of buildings. The Archives has copies of *The Winchester Star* from 1896 to the present on microfilm as well as a collection of historic local newspapers published as early as 1786. Selected historic newspapers are available online: <http://handleyregionallibrary.advantage-preservation.com/>

MAGAZINES & JOURNALS

Historical journals and popular magazines often feature distinguished or interesting buildings. The Archives hold the following titles:

Winchester-Frederick County Historical Journal, published by the Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, 1986 to present.

ONLINE RESOURCES

City of Winchester GIS Maps
<https://gis.winchesterva.gov/propertysearch/>

An interactive map with information about current properties in the City of Winchester useful for exploring the layout of the City.

Preservation of Historic Winchester, Inc.

<http://www.phwi.org/>

Non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the history and architecture of Winchester, Virginia.

Survey of Buildings and Properties within the National Register Winchester Historic District

https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/pdf_files/SpecialCollections/FK-106_Survey_Winchester_HD_2011_TRACERIES_report.pdf

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

<https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/>

Government organization concerned with preservation of significant historic, architectural, or cultural resources in the state of Virginia.