

FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 71 – February 2022

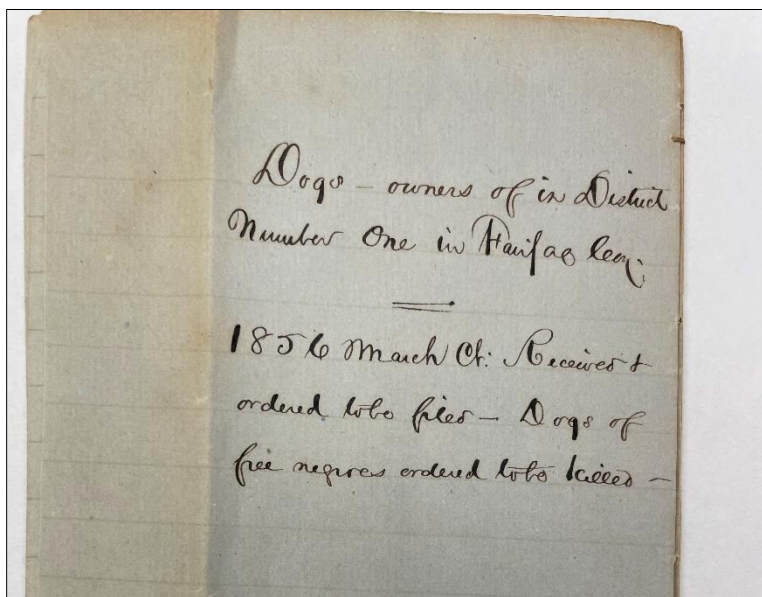
Dog Tax Lists

Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center



Hello readers, and welcome back to Found in the Archives! The Historic Records Center staff has been hard at work serving patrons virtually and in-person after enjoying the holidays. In this month's edition, we will discuss the Historic Records Center's collection of documents related to Fairfax County's Dog Tax and Registry list.

Just like today's residents of Fairfax County, past citizens of Fairfax were required to register each dog they owned and pay a tax on them. The Historic Records Center has lists of dog owners within the county as early as 1855. These lists were broken up by the each magisterial district that make up the county for ease of categorization and retrieval.



1856 Dog Registry for District One, Fairfax County

| | | |
|---|------------------|------|
| 1 | Roberts L M | 3 |
| 1 | Rose B F | 1 |
| 2 | Richardson Eleza | 1 |
| 2 | Ruter Enoch | 1 |
| 1 | Ratcliffe C W | 6 |
| 2 | Roby O L | 1 |
| 1 | Roby Gabriel | 1 |
| 2 | Rice John | 2 |
| 2 | Suddoth J S | 2 |
| 1 | Slade S M | 1 |
| 1 | Speake John | 3 |
| 1 | Carverover | 34.0 |

1855 Dog Registry

We can see on some undated documents that the tax on owning dogs was once one dollar per dog, compared to today's fee of ten dollars. The average person on these lists typically had one or two dogs, but one particular family stands out as having multiple dogs listed for different years. According to our lists, C.W. Ratcliffe had six dogs registered with Fairfax County in 1855. This is the highest number of dogs a single person had registered at one time.

| | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|-----|------|--|
| 7 | Warrant Rose | own | 1.00 | |
| 8 | Burby Elizabeth | own | 1.00 | |
| 9 | Botta Margaret | own | 1.00 | |
| 10 | George Wm | own | 1.00 | |
| 11 | Duncan Geo W | own | 1.00 | |
| 12 | Duncan Lewis ✓ | own | 1.00 | |
| 13 | Fletcher Robert | own | 1.00 | |
| 14 | Fair Jackson | own | 1.00 | |
| 15 | Gibson Elizabeth + Samuel | own | 1.00 | |
| 16 | Hughes Philip | own | 1.00 | |
| 17 | Harris Peter | own | 1.00 | |
| 18 | " Joseph st | own | 1.00 | |
| 19 | " Joseph sr | own | 1.00 | |
| 20 | " Alfred | own | 1.00 | |
| 21 | " Noxman | own | 1.00 | |
| 22 | " John W | own | 1.00 | |
| 23 | " Moses B ✓ | own | 1.00 | |
| 24 | " Walter a | own | 1.00 | |
| 25 | Hopson George | own | 1.00 | |
| 26 | Jones Richard | own | 2.00 | |
| 27 | Jackson Edward | own | 1.00 | |
| 28 | Long Joseph | own | 1.00 | |
| 29 | Lee Joshua | own | 1.00 | |
| 30 | Manly Tho ✓ | own | 1.00 | |
| 31 | Payne Ben | own | 1.00 | |
| 32 | Payne Chas | own | 1.00 | |
| 33 | Robinson Joes | own | 1.00 | |
| 34 | " Albert | own | 1.00 | |
| 35 | " Albany | own | 1.00 | |
| 36 | Richards Harry | own | 2.00 | |
| 37 | Smith Addison | own | 1.00 | |
| 38 | Scott Luther | own | 2.00 | |

Taxes owed for Dogs in Fairfax County

Fairfax County, to-wit:

TO Thomas Harris, Chas Hynson
& Simpson Pamesay

three Housekeepers of said county, (any two of whom may act), upon the application of Abel Harris an inhabitant of said county, owner of five Sheep destroyed by dogs in said county, on the 23 day of March 1894, you are commanded to appear, forthwith, on the premises where such Sheep may be, and after being first duly qualified, proceed to ascertain and appraise the value of said Sheep, and return a statement of the same, under your hands and seals to the owner. Given under my hand this 24 day of March 1894

R. Spindle J. P.

Fairfax County, to-wit:

Thomas Harris & Charles Hynson
appraisers, appointed in the above summons, personally appeared before me R. Spindle a Justice of the Peace, in said county, and made oath to execute the above order. Given under my hand this 24 day of March 1894

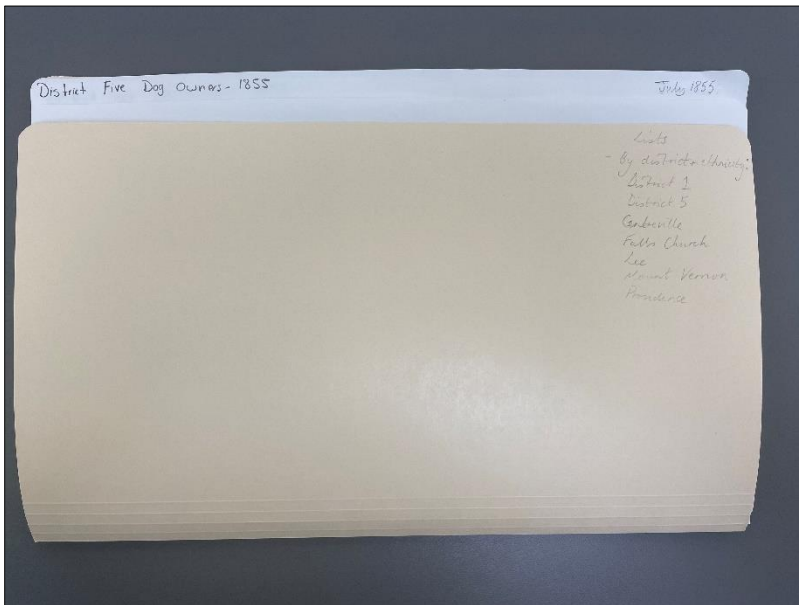
Pursuant to the above order, after having first viewed on the premises Abel Harris the owner thereof at 2.00 each. Total damages, \$12.50. Given under our hands and seals this 24 day of March 1894

Thomas Harris SEAL
Charles W. Hynson SEAL

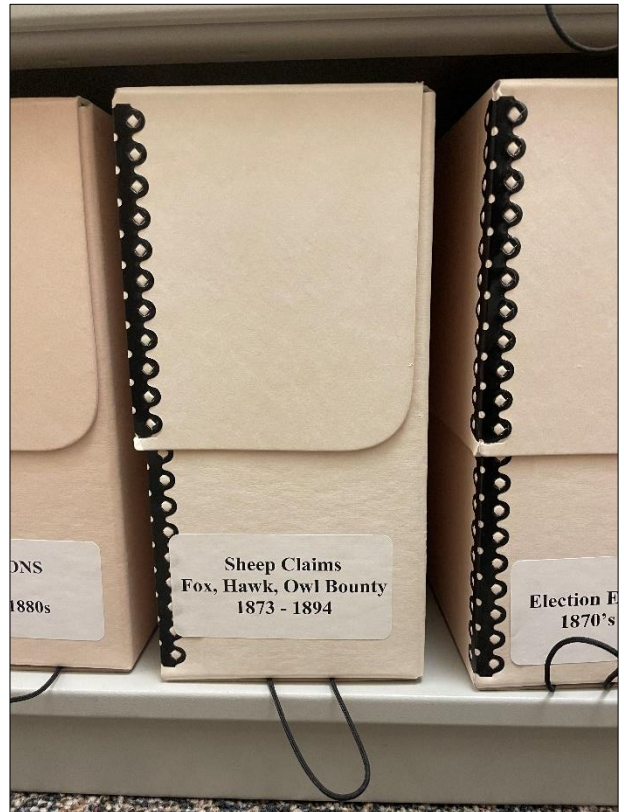
Fairfax County Sheep Claim for five sheep killed by dogs

While Fairfax County still requires dog registration to track rabies vaccinations, one reason the county originally kept track of dog owners was the threat of dog attacks on sheep. This problem was so prevalent that the county had its own form for citizens to file for damages after losing sheep to a dog attack. If dog owners had registered their dogs with the county, it would then theoretically be possible to figure out whose dogs were responsible for the attack, and they could repay the costs of the lost sheep since they failed to keep their dogs on their own property.

While these lists do provide information on who owned dogs, how many they owned, and which magisterial district of Fairfax County they lived in, there were surely those who did not register their dogs, so it should not be assumed this list is a complete account of every dog in the county. It is also likely there were stray dogs who wandered around unclaimed. These lists also do not tell us what these dogs were used for, so we cannot be sure how many, if any, of these dogs were strictly kept as indoor pets or if they were used as working dogs to protect crops and animals in the rural countryside of the county. We also do not know the breeds of these dogs, which would give clues about the roles they held within the families they lived with.



District Five, Fairfax County Dog Owners, 1855 Stored in Acid-Free Folder



Fairfax County Sheep Claims Stored in Hollinger Box

The Dog Tax Lists are part of the Historic Records Center’s collections and are available to researchers. After being processed by an archivist, these documents were properly stored in acid-free folders and are kept in our facility. Fairfax County’s sheep claims are kept in boxes with similar records relating to livestock documents, and the County’s dog registers, most of which are older and in worse condition than the sheep claims, are kept in one of the Historic Records Center’s climate-controlled rooms.

Many things have changed in Fairfax County since its inception in 1742. It’s hard to imagine a small, rural town of 10,000 people in place of the sprawling metropolis we know today. One thing that has not changed, however, is residents of Fairfax having dogs. Documents like these lists and registries help the past feel more tangible; they serve as a reminder that the many historical figures who called Fairfax home were real people, and so were the farmers, craftsman, and artisans who also lived and worked here with their dogs.

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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.

At this time, the Historic Records Center is open to the public **by appointment only**. You can make a research appointment by calling 703-246-4168.

Tours of the 1799 Historic Fairfax Courthouse remain suspended.

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