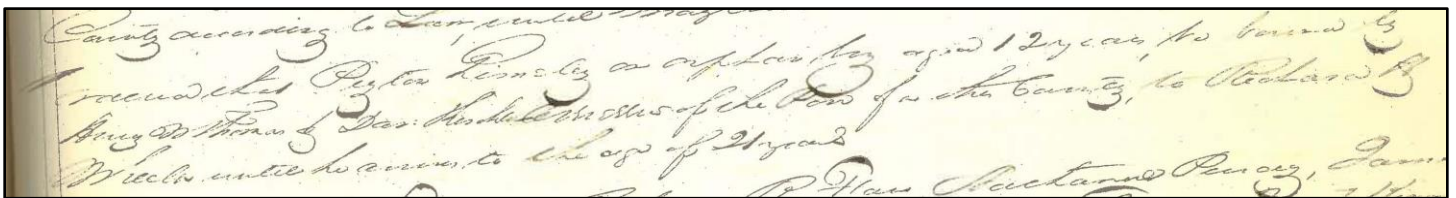


FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 41 – March 2018

Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center

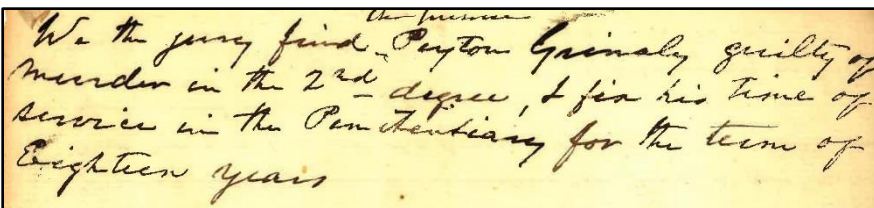


In last month's *Found in the Archives*, we examined historical sources of public welfare in Fairfax County, specifically the offices of the Overseers of the Poor. This month we will take a deeper look into the lives of some of 19th Century Fairfax's 'paupers,' some of whom are memorialized solely because of their interactions with the Overseers.



Peyton Grimsley bound to Richard H. Wheeler, Court Order Book 1835, p. 380, June 20th, 1842

In June 1842, 12-year old orphan Peyton Grimsley was 'bound out' to Richard H. Wheeler by Henry Thomas & Daniel Kincheloe, Overseers of the Poor. Wheeler, a farmer, had charge of Peyton until he reached the age of 21. We know that Peyton had an older brother, Thomas, as he is recorded in later documents; we do not know anything else about his early background or circumstances.

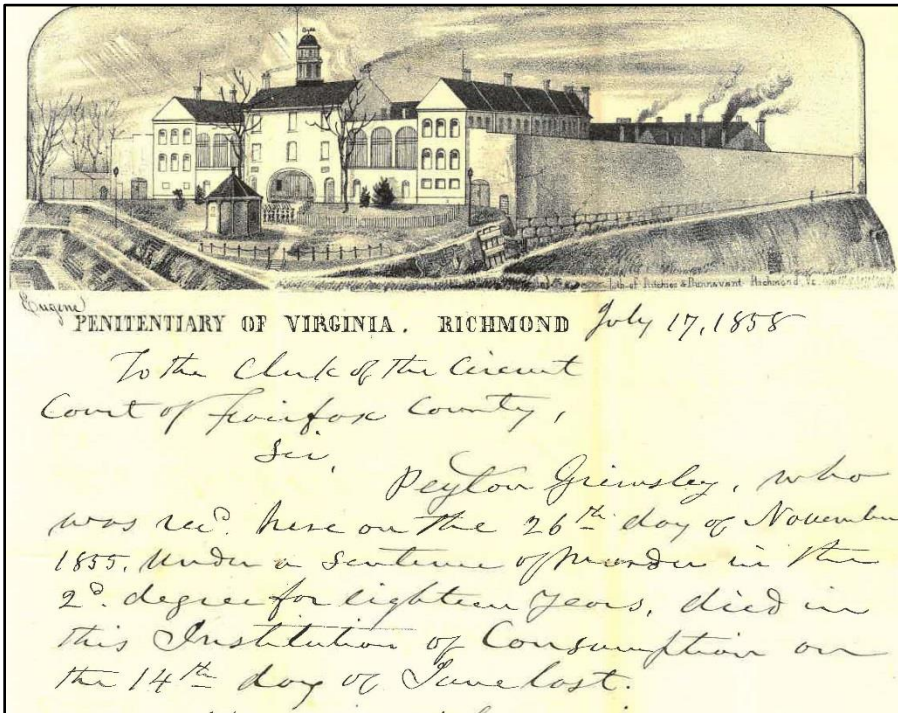


Verdict from Commonwealth of Virginia vs. Peyton Grimsley, November 6, 1855

On January 15, 1855, Peyton was taken to Fairfax County jail, awaiting trial on suspicion of the murder of Charles Sheppard.

Witness accounts state that on December 16, 1854, Peyton and a number of others were drinking at Hindly Nelson's house. Peyton arrived in a belligerent mood, became very drunk and verbally and physically assaulted Sheppard. At first, Sheppard ignored him, then followed him outside. During the resulting fracas, both men fell on the ground and Peyton's 3-inch knife blade was plunged between Sheppard's shoulder blades. Sheppard died six days later, and a Coroner's Inquest was held the following day. Peyton's brother, Thomas, testified at the Inquest, and said that he had unsuccessfully tried to pacify his brother. Other witnesses stated that Peyton tried to blame his brother, and then the victim

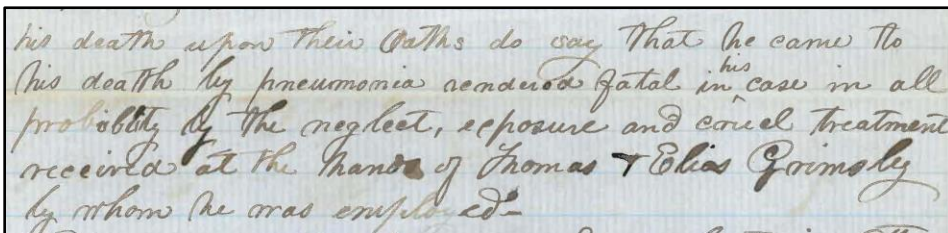
Sheppard, for provoking him to violence. On February 19, 1855 Peyton was charged with murder. He was indicted by a Grand Jury for the Commonwealth of Virginia in June and pleaded not guilty. On November 6, the jury found him guilty of murder in the 2nd degree and he was sentenced to 18 years in the State Penitentiary in Richmond.



Peyton did not serve his full sentence. This letter from Superintendent Morgan of the State Penitentiary in Richmond tells us that he died of consumption in June 1858, aged just 28 years old.

Letter from Superintendent of Virginia State Penitentiary, July 17, 1858

Thomas Grimsley, Peyton's older brother, was about 15 or 16 when his brother was first 'bound out'. It appears that another Grimsley, Elias Grimsley, took Thomas in. Our records do not state their relationship, but it may be that Thomas was taken in by Elias and spared being bound out like his little brother Peyton had been.



Coroner's Inquest for Andrew Bell, April 6th, 1858

In April 1858, just a few months before Peyton died in the Penitentiary in Richmond, Thomas and Elias Grimsley, were implicated in the death of a free African American

man named Andrew Bell. Bell worked for the Grimsleys, doing hard physical labor. According to Elias and Thomas' statements, while loading and unloading a boatful of supplies in Washington, D.C., Bell had done very little work. Elias and Thomas both whipped Bell, despite the fact that he had a very bad cold. Other witnesses said that Elias had whipped Bell on a number of occasions during the rest of the week. Bell's illness worsened significantly enough

for Elias to call on the services of a doctor. Dr. Colin Lambert attended Bell from Thursday to Sunday and saw his condition turn to pneumonia, and, finally, death. Following a post-mortem examination and inquest into Bell's death, the verdict was 'he came to his death by pneumonia rendered fatal in his case in all probability by the neglect, exposure and cruel treatment received at the hands of Thomas and Elias Grimsley.' That is where the records on the matter end. But it is not the last of the court records on Thomas Grimsley.

In 1862, he married Rebecca Davis and they had two children. Our records show that in 1865 and 1867 he worked on the road from Accotink Run to Dogue Run. Census records list Thomas as a laborer; the physical toll doesn't seem to have affected his health too much, as he outlived his wife and died in 1920, aged 94. Thomas is buried in an unmarked grave next to Rebecca, in Pohick Episcopal Church Cemetery.

Overseers Poor for Fairfax County Dr
To W. P. Gunnell
 1853
 July 24th Visit + medicine for Mrs. Sheid's child 2.00 (25th) Dr. for same 2.00 4.00
 " 26th " " " 2.00 (28th) " " 2.00 4.00
 " 29th " " " 2.00 (30th) " " 2.00 4.00
 Aug 2nd " visit + med for Betsy Govin (Hall's) child (3rd) Dr. for same 2.00 4.00
 " 4th " Dr. for same 2.00 (4th) visit + med Mrs. Sheid's child 2.00 4.00
 " 5th " Dr. for Mrs. Sheid's child 2.00 (6th) Dr. for same 2.00 4.00
 " 6th " Dr. for Betsy Hall's child 2.00 (7th) Dr. for same 2.00 4.00
 " 7th " Dr. for Mrs. Sheid's child 2.00 (9th) visit + med same 2.50 4.50

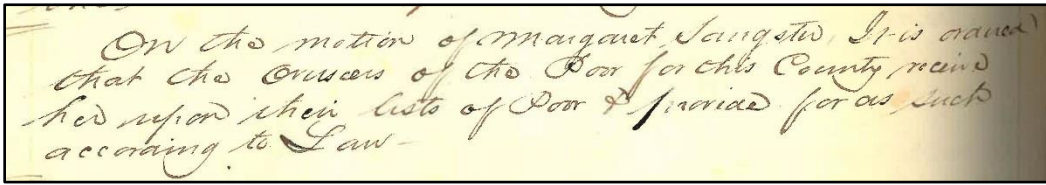
Most of the Fairfax poor who appear in our records we know by name only. We have a number of reports, accounts and bills connected to the Overseers of the Poor, which detail who received aid, and of what kind. One person who appears with regularity in Overseers' records for 1853 is Mrs.

Dr. W. P. Gunnell's bill for medical services, 1853

Susan Sheid. In the summer of 1853, Mrs. Sheid experienced a parent's worst nightmare. A collection of bills to the Overseers tells us that two of her children were incredibly ill. Dr. W. P. Gunnell visited and dispensed medicine to both children on a number of occasions in late July, tapering to the care of one child in early August. E. R. Ford billed the Overseers on July 13 for a bottle of port requested by Dr. Gunnell for Mrs. Sheid's daughter. George W. Roberts' bill charges for board and care of Mrs. Sheid's two other children during the sickness of the first two. The most telling bill is that of the coffin maker, J. E. Mitchell – at the end of July he made one coffin for 'Mrs. Sheid's child', and on August 15, he made another one.

Mrs. Sheid also became ill after the death of her children. Dr. E. Jones charged for multiple visits and medicines dispensed to Mrs. Sheid throughout the latter half of August 1853. Mrs.

Sheid appears on the County levy for 1853 as 'outdoor poor,' rather than an inmate of the poorhouse. She does not appear on the 1852 levy, nor the levies after 1853.

A snippet of a handwritten court order in cursive script on aged paper. The text reads: "On the motion of Margaret Sangster, It is ordered that the Overseers of the Poor for this County, be and they are hereby directed to add her name to their list of Poor & provide for as such according to Law -".

Margaret Sangster added to the poor lists, Court Order Book 1829, p. 166, January 18th, 1830

Our earlier records have many single mentions of paupers. Court order books record orders to the

Overseers to support individuals with one-time payments. In January 1800, they were ordered to provide a jail inmate, Elizabeth Davis, with clothing. In March of that same year, they were ordered to support Anne Waters because of her age and infirmity. It appears that the poor could also advocate for themselves if they were not included on the poor lists – in January 1830, Margaret Sangster petitioned the court and was put on the lists.

Our records, due to their nature as court records, often document only the saddest aspects of the citizens' lives. The Court's historic records can, taken together, help shed light on Fairfax's earliest struggles with the most vulnerable in society.

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.

Sign up for *Found in the Archives*, the monthly newsletter of the HRC:

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/circuit/historic-records-center>