

History of East Falls Church

Historical Overview

The first European settlers arrived in the Falls Church area while Virginia was but a British colony. The derives its name from the Falls Church, a church built in 1733. In 1791, surveying was conducted to set the boundaries of a ten mile square for the new federal capital, Washington, DC. Part of East Falls Church was within those boundaries. One of the stone markers laid to mark the boundary of the new capital is in East Falls Church Park. Benjamin Banneker participated in the surveying work that determined its placement. In 1846, the residents of the portion of the District of Columbia that was on the western banks of the Potomac, which included a portion of East Falls Church, voted to return the land to Virginia jurisdiction.

A large part of what became East Falls Church was fashioned out of the extensive Crossman estate. The Crossman family's holdings encompassed 1,000 acres of land that straddled Falls Church and Arlington. The Church and Eastman families owned sizable amounts of property in East Falls Church as well.

... Growth was promoted and supported by the railroad and trolley lines that coursed through East Falls Church. They provided a means for the development of commerce and made it possible for people who worked in Washington to live in the more peaceful suburbs and commute to their places of employment downtown.

... The portion of Falls Church that lay on the Arlington side of the county line became known as East Falls Church. Residents of East Falls Church experienced conflicting government jurisdictions, owing to their location in a boundary zone. This created an "intolerable confusion of overlapping government agencies in this area," in the words of Commonwealth's Attorney Lawrence Douglas. The first suggestions that East Falls Church secede from Falls Church and become part of Arlington County came in 1921.

In 1932, disgruntled citizens of East Falls Church presented a petition to the courts to allow them to become part of Arlington County. The circuit court granted the petition in 1935. After rejecting an appeal by the City of Falls Church, Circuit Judge Walter T. McCarthy signed a decree that, on April 30, 1936, East Falls Church would be legally separated from Falls Church and become part of Arlington County.

Jurisdictional Evolution

1791

Surveying was conducted to set the boundaries of a ten mile square for the new federal capital. The original square extended into Virginia. All of today's Arlington County is within that square, as is a portion of today's City of Alexandria.

1801

The new District of Columbia is established and divided into Washington County and Alexandria County. The City of Falls Church grew over time to straddle the line between what was then Fairfax County, Virginia and Alexandria County, DC. The area of the City of Falls Church within Alexandria County, DC became known as East Falls Church. As a result, today's East Falls Church was in both the City of Falls Church, but also in Alexandria County, DC.

Jurisdictions: City of Falls Church
Alexandria County, DC
Mailing address: Falls Church, DC

1836

Residents of Alexandria County voted to be returned to the jurisdiction of the State of Virginia. The area of today's East Falls Church was now part of Alexandria County, Virginia, but still also part of the City of Falls Church.

Jurisdictions: City of Falls Church
Alexandria County, VA
Mailing address: Falls Church, VA

1920

Alexandria County, Virginia was renamed Arlington County, Virginia, to avoid confusion with the City of Alexandria. The area known as East Falls Church was now part of Arlington County, but still also part of the City of Falls Church. The mailing address would still be Falls Church, Virginia.

Jurisdictions: City of Falls Church
Arlington County, VA
Mailing address: Falls Church, VA

1936

The area known as East Falls Church moved from the jurisdiction of the City of Falls Church to Arlington County. In 1932, citizens of East Falls Church presented a petition to Virginia courts to allow them to become part of Arlington County. A 1935 circuit court decision in favor of the split was upheld by the Virginia Supreme Court in 1936, and the legal separation occurred on April 30, 1936.

Jurisdiction: Arlington County, VA
Mailing address: Arlington, VA

Source: "The Neighborhood That Was: The History of East Falls Church, VA." *Arlington Historical Magazine*. October 1995.