

# Fact Sheet: Rename Falls Church to Little Falls

## Indigenous History:

- The area around Falls Church was occupied by Algonquian-speaking peoples for at least 10,000 years. The Powhatan dominated the southern portion of the Chesapeake up to the Fall Line, while the Piscataway controlled a smaller area of Maryland.<sup>1</sup>
- Several tribes inhabited the area now known as Falls Church, such as the Doeg (or Dogue) Indians, Tauxenents (also known as the Doegs or Dogue), Patawomekes (Potomacs), and Matchotics. The Powhatan Confederacy controlled 28-32 groups or tribes along riverside towns and villages, ruled by their own weroance or chiefs.<sup>2</sup>
- The Indian tribe that is supposed to have originated the name for Analostan Island and Anacostan River is the Necostins. The island mentioned is Analostan Island, which is now known as Theodore Roosevelt Island. Other tribes mentioned in the snippet are Moyaones, Nacoochtanks, Toags, Nameroughquena, Tauxenant, Assomek, Namasingakeut, and Piscataways, although their specific relation to the Falls Church area is not clear from the text.<sup>3</sup>
- 1606 map depicts the location of various Algonquian-speaking tribes living along the rivers and coastline, such as the Powhatan, Piscataway, and others mentioned in earlier<sup>4</sup>.
- The Little Falls of the Potomac River were highly significant to the Native American peoples, marking the first barrier to navigation on the river and serving as a gathering place for trade and communication.<sup>5</sup>
- The Pamunkey tribe, one of the six core tribes of the political alliance Tsenacomoco, also played a significant role in the area.<sup>6</sup>
- Native American trails connected the area to Little Falls, which later became major colonial transportation routes<sup>7</sup>.

## Colonial History:

- English colonists arrived in the area as early as the late 17th century, disrupting the lives of the native inhabitants<sup>8</sup>.
- The colonists and Virginia Company members hoped to evangelize the local Native American population, but their efforts were largely unsuccessful. They believed that Christianity required an English cultural context to thrive, so they tried to make potential native converts learn English and adopt English lifestyles before becoming Christian. Many settlers felt little obligation to proselytize the indigenous peoples and even used money donated for that purpose to build an ironworks instead.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MILLER, Henry M. "THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS ALONG CHESAPEAKE BAY: AN OVERVIEW." *Revista de Arqueología Americana*, no. 23, 2004, pp. 231–90. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27768492>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2023.

<sup>2</sup> <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/colonial-virginia/>

<sup>3</sup> Duhamel, James F. "Analostan Island." *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Washington, D.C., vol. 35/36, 1935, pp. 133–45. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40067513>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2023.

<sup>4</sup> (John Smith's Map) "Virginia, discovered and discribed by Captayn John Smith, 1606"

<sup>5</sup> City of Falls Church. About Falls Church. <https://www.fallschurchva.gov/758/About-Falls-Church>

<sup>6</sup> <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/patawomeck-tribe/>

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Department of Education. Virginia's First People. <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/k-12-standards-instruction/history-and-social-science/virginia-s-first-people-past-and-present/history>

<sup>8</sup> <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/colonial-virginia/>

<sup>9</sup> "The Episcopal Church in Virginia, 1607-2007." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 115, no. 2, 2007, pp. 163–344. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4250388>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2023.

- The Falls Church was founded in 1734 at the intersection of the Native American trails, serving as a place of worship and an outpost of the colonial government<sup>10,11,12</sup>.
- George Washington and George Mason were vestrymen of the church<sup>13,14</sup>.
- Architect James Wren designed the current brick Falls Church, built from 1767 to 1769<sup>15</sup>.
- The Falls Church served not only as a place of worship but also as an outpost of the colonial government, with the church vestry acting as a local governing body<sup>16</sup>.
- Broad Street, Lee Highway, and Little Falls Street, which intersect at the location of The Falls Church, were originally important Native American trails that were later paved and named by the colonists<sup>17</sup>.

### **Enslaved Labor:**

- Both the original wooden church and the current brick Falls Church were built using enslaved labor<sup>3</sup>.
- The Falls Church maintained a segregated seating arrangement for enslaved individuals and free Black people in the church, with a separate gallery reserved for them<sup>18</sup>.
- The Falls Church congregation today acknowledges its past use of enslaved labor and has made efforts to address this history by creating a memorial for the enslaved people who contributed to the church's construction and by participating in educational programs to raise awareness about their role in the church's history<sup>19</sup>.
- Records indicate Wren owned slaves and likely used enslaved labor to construct the church<sup>20,21</sup>.

### **Inclusivity and Religious Plurality:**

- Today, Falls Church is home to a diverse population with various religious affiliations, as well as non-religious individuals<sup>22</sup>.
- Renaming the city to "Little Falls" would remove the connection to a specific church and religion, making the city more welcoming to people of all faiths, beliefs, and non-believers.

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<sup>10</sup> Slaughter, P. & Goodwin, E. L. (1908) The history of Truro Parish in Virginia. Philadelphia: G.W. Jacobs & Co., 1908. [Pdf] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/08014829/>.

<sup>11</sup> Gernand and Netherton, Falls Church, p. 13, citing Fairfax Harrison, The Landmarks of Old Prince William, pp. 143, 148. Via Wikipedia [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Falls\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Falls_Church)]

<sup>12</sup> Mann, J. (1907) Some old colonial churches in Virginia. [Norfolk, Va] [Pdf] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/68049427/>.

<sup>13</sup> Slaughter, P. & Goodwin, E. L. (1908) The history of Truro Parish in Virginia. Philadelphia: G.W. Jacobs & Co., 1908. [Pdf] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/08014829/>.

<sup>14</sup> Slaughter, P. & Goodwin, E. L. (1908) The history of Truro Parish in Virginia. Philadelphia: G.W. Jacobs & Co., 1908. [Pdf] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/08014829/>.

<sup>15</sup> Historic American Buildings Survey: The Falls Church. <https://resources.umwhisp.org/RESOURCE/vahabs/catalog.htm>

<sup>16</sup> The Falls Church History. [<https://www.thefallschurch.org/history>]

<sup>17</sup> City of Falls Church. About Falls Church. <https://www.fallschurchva.gov/758/About-Falls-Church>

<sup>18</sup> The Falls Church Episcopal. [<https://www.thefallschurch.org/history>]

<sup>19</sup> City of Falls Church. About Falls Church. <https://www.fallschurchva.gov/758/About-Falls-Church>

<sup>20</sup> The Falls Church History. [<https://www.thefallschurch.org/history>]

<sup>21</sup> "The Episcopal Church in Virginia, 1607-2007." The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, vol. 115, no. 2, 2007, pp. 163–344. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4250388>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Who Practices What Religion Where in Virginia? [<https://statchatva.org/2021/06/08/who-practices-what-religion-where-in-virginia/>]

- The change would also foster a greater sense of unity and inclusivity by acknowledging the city's diverse history and its evolution from a single colonial church to a community encompassing various denominations and secular perspectives.

### **Name Origin:**

- The name "Falls Church" originates from the church's location near the Little Falls of the Potomac River.<sup>23</sup>
- The church was founded in 1734, and its name was later adopted for the surrounding community and, eventually, the city.<sup>24</sup>
- The colonial road that connected the church to the surrounding area was called "The Falls Church Road" or "The Road to the Falls Church," which further linked the church's name to the community<sup>25</sup>.
- The name "Falls Church" was informally used for the community even before it was officially incorporated as a city in 19484.
- The city's proximity to the Little Falls of the Potomac River and the importance of the falls as a meeting point and trading area for the Native American tribes that inhabited the region before European colonization provides historical context for the proposed name change<sup>26</sup>.

### **Boundaries of Falls Church:**

- The City of Falls Church has official boundaries, as it is an independent city and not part of Fairfax County.<sup>27</sup>
- The term "Falls Church" has historically referred to more than just the current boundaries of the city.<sup>28</sup>
- From 1875 to 1887, the Town of Falls Church included what is now the City of Falls Church, South Falls Church, and East Falls Church.<sup>29</sup>
- In 1890, the Town Council of Falls Church voted to cede its other majority African American districts to Fairfax County.<sup>30</sup>
- The boundaries of the City of Falls Church have changed slightly in recent years due to a deal involving the transfer of the Falls Church City water system to Fairfax Water.<sup>31</sup>
- The term "Greater Falls Church" is often used to describe the City of Falls Church and its surrounding areas, but there is no formal boundary definition.<sup>32</sup>
- Some physical features, such as I-66, the Beltway, and Holmes Run/Columbia Pike, have been proposed as potential boundaries for Falls Church.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The Falls Church History. [<https://www.thefallschurch.org/history>]

<sup>24</sup> The Falls Church Episcopal. [<https://www.thefallschurch.org/history>]

<sup>25</sup> City of Falls Church. Historic Preservation. [[www.fallschurchva.gov/DocumentCenter/View/696/Chapter-9?bidId=](http://www.fallschurchva.gov/DocumentCenter/View/696/Chapter-9?bidId=)]

<sup>26</sup> Encyclopedia of Virginia. [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/indians-in-virginia/>]

<sup>27</sup> City of Falls Church. About Falls Church. [<https://www.fallschurchva.gov/758/About-Falls-Church>]

<sup>28</sup> Where is Falls Church, exactly? [<https://ggwash.org/view/43792/where-is-falls-church-exactly>]

<sup>29</sup> City of Falls Church. About Falls Church. [<https://www.fallschurchva.gov/758/About-Falls-Church>]

<sup>30</sup> The City of Falls Church. Planning commission. [<https://www.fallschurchva.gov/DocumentCenter/View/852/Background>]

<sup>31</sup> The Water War Between Fairfax County and the City of Falls Church. [<http://www.virginiaplaces.org/watersheds/fairfax-fallschurch.htm>]

<sup>32</sup> Where is Falls Church, exactly? [<https://ggwash.org/view/43792/where-is-falls-church-exactly>]

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