

CCRP NEWS



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA



CCRP NEWS

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This newsletter is published twice a year to keep circuit court clerks informed about the court records preservation program for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Reader participation is invited.

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The CCRP and the Newsletter

Over the course of the past year, CCRP field archivists traveled across the commonwealth of Virginia meeting with clerks in order to aid them with their conservation needs and preservation strategies. As might be expected, the bulk of these visits involved examining books and other items in the records room for CCRP item conservation grants. However, the archivists were sometimes granted access to out-of-the-way or off-limits records storage areas such as basements, attics, and makeshift storage rooms (such as evidence rooms and broom closets). These areas were frequently populated with the less-requested or sought after records, but by delving a little deeper into these improvised storage areas, the archivists learned more about the localities and the unique variety of records associated with each courthouse. In doing so, the archivists have attempted to broaden the scope of items considered for conservation to include books and records sometimes thought to have less historic value for the clerk's office or the locality. The rationale for this transition is that items routinely sent for treatment (such as deed and will books) are sometimes less in need of conservation than are other similarly desirable research items (such as order and minute books). In encouraging this shift, the archivists have tried to assist the clerks in appraising the records by combining an assessment of the condition (or deterioration) of the items with their age and their relevance to the history of the city or county. The result is that, on the whole, the grants submitted during the last cycle contained more diversity of record books with items more in need of conservation than had been in a typical grant cycle. The articles in this issue reflect this attempt to balance the actual conservation needs of the items with their importance to the clerk's office, the locality, and the history of Virginia.

In the coming months, CCRP archivists will continue to travel to clerks' offices to offer assistance with CCRP grants and other preservation related issues, such as environmental assessments and advice on supplies and storage. On their visits to courthouses, the archivists routinely create inventories, address records retention needs, determine what might be good candidates for transfer to the Library of Virginia, and work on other locality-specific special projects. If you would like an archivist to visit your office, please contact Greg Crawford, Tracy Harter, or Eddie Woodward to schedule an appointment. ■

CHANGES TO THE CCRP GRANT PROCESS

Since 2015, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of localities participating in the CCRP grant process. Between 1992 and 2014, an average of 25 localities participated in the grants program. Since 2015, however, the average number has increased to 66 and we fully expect 80 localities to submit applications in the upcoming grant cycle. This has been exciting to witness because localities that have never participated or rarely participated in the grants program are now doing so. Given this increase in participation, the members of the CCRP Grant Review Board (four circuit court clerks and two Library staff members), the Library of Virginia, and the Executive Committee of the VCCA have all agreed that for the next couple of years there will be only one CCRP grant cycle per year, rather than the traditional two grant cycles (spring and fall). The grant award amount that would have been split between two traditional grant cycles will be combined into one amount, allowing for a maximum of four items to be submitted for item conservation grants. Benefits of having only one grant cycle include:

- Enhanced likelihood that more of the items submitted may be approved.
- The need to go through the local procurement process only once a year.
- Items that are more costly due to poor condition have a better chance of being approved.
- Easier tracking of items leaving and returning to your office. Items can be picked up by the vendor and returned on a regular schedule.

CCRP Grant notifications have been sent out and the deadline for the next CCRP grant cycle is June 23.

Tracy & Eddie's Courthouse Adventures

FIELD ARCHIVIST "ROAD CREW" EXAMINES RECORDS IN CIRCUIT COURT OFFICES ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

From the beginning of June until mid-October 2016, Circuit Court Records Preservation Program field archivists Tracy Harter and Eddie Woodward took their CCRP conservation and advocacy shows on the road by visiting the offices of the circuit court clerks who intended to participate in the CCRP grant program. On occasion they were joined in their travels by local records program

manager Greg Crawford, senior local records archivist Vince Brooks, and conservator Leslie Courtois.

All totaled, the road crew visited more than 90 localities across the commonwealth of Virginia and examined nearly 1,000 items in preparation for upcoming grant cycles. CCRP staff members also performed inventories at several of the circuit court clerks' offices.

The courthouse travels of Harter, Woodward, et al. were not without precedent. In the past, Library of Virginia archivists and others have traversed the

state surveying and reporting on the conditions of records in the circuit court clerks' offices. Existing or known surveys include those in 1873, the 1910s, the early 1970s, and the comprehensive surveys that coincided with the establishment of the CCRP Program in the early 1990s.

Background information compiled from previous visits proved useful to the CCRP field archivists as they commenced their travels prior to last fall's (2017A) grant application deadline. If you encountered any of the crew members at your courthouse, you may have noticed that they examined more than the customary six books permitted for each item conservation grant application. The purpose of this was to create a backlog of items "in the queue," so that, as the next grant cycle approached, the next batch of items eligible for conservation grants could be selected from the books and other records examined on these visits.

The field archivists in your office also might have attempted to expand the types of records submitted for item conservation grants. In fact, some clerks

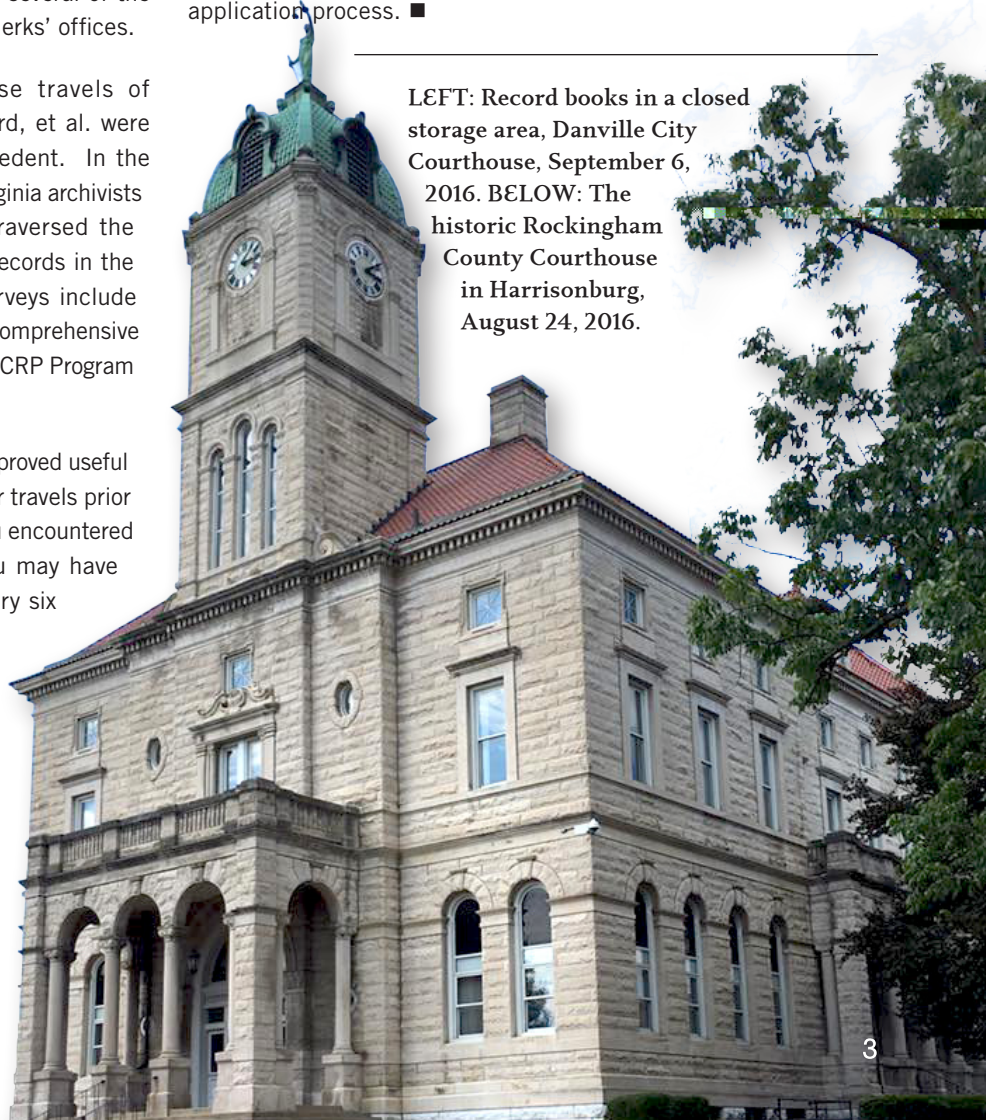
and their staff members were unaware that it was permissible to apply for conservation grants for items other than deed and will books. The CCRP item conservation grant program is open to other permanent records such as minute books, order books, road books, and oyster plat books.

As the archivists visited the courthouses, they recognized the variety and uniqueness of the records that have survived to today. Records identified include order books, estray records, execution books, judgment lien docket books, ministers' returns, road books, fiduciary records, inventories and appraisements, appearance dockets, and processioners' returns, just to name a few. All of these records contain an abundance of information relevant to the history of the city or county.

Harter and Woodward will soon be hitting the road again. Please contact CCRP program manager Greg Crawford (gregory.crawford@lva.virginia.gov or 804.692.3505) to schedule a visit or if you have any questions about your records, CCRP, or the grant application process. ■



LEFT: Record books in a closed storage area, Danville City Courthouse, September 6, 2016. BELOW: The historic Rockingham County Courthouse in Harrisonburg, August 24, 2016.



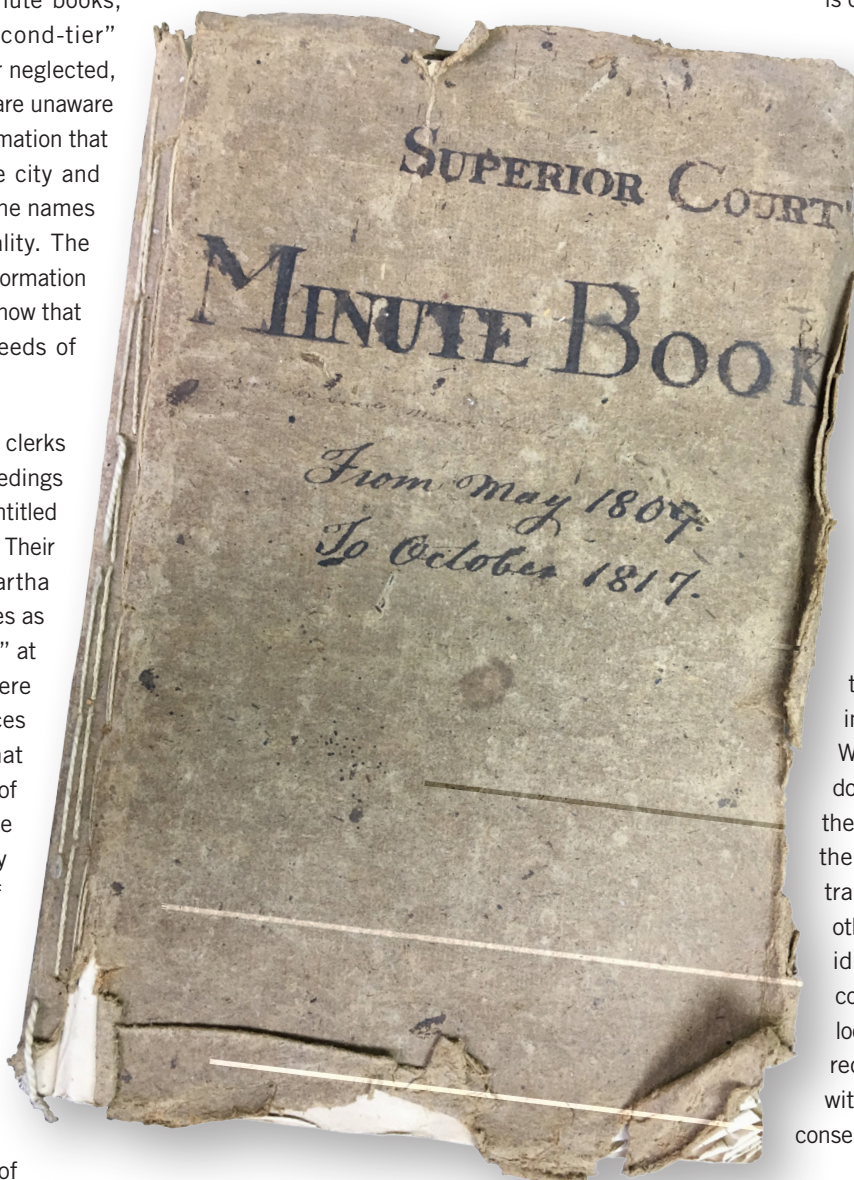
The Books in the Basement

OFTEN OVERLOOKED, CLERKS' MINUTE BOOKS CONTAIN VALUABLE INFORMATION

The records in Virginia's courthouses offer a wealth of information as local history resources. Researchers, including genealogists and title searchers, routinely use marriage, birth, and death records; will books; and deed books in circuit court clerks' records rooms. Chancery court records have also become popular research tools because of the unique information that equity suits provide. Minute books, sometimes considered "second-tier" resources, are often unused or neglected, however, because researchers are unaware of them or of the valuable information that they can contain. All of these city and county court records include the names of the inhabitants of the locality. The key is knowing what types of information these records can provide and how that information might suit the needs of the researcher.

Minute books were kept by the clerks as a record of all court proceedings and transactions. In an essay entitled "Virginia County Court Records: Their Background and Scope," Martha Hiden describes clerks' minutes as "brief notes of what took place" at the courthouse. The notes were later "read to one of the justices who had been present, so that he could sign them as proof of their correctness." Because the court administered not only the law, but also the affairs of the locality, topics covered in minute books might include the "condition of the highways, the protection of the public in case of pestilential epidemics, slave uprisings and Indian raids, robbery, counterfeiting, the purchase of blank record books and of furniture for the Court House, of standard weights and measures for the county, the welfare of servants, the protection of widows and orphans," and more. After they were approved, the minutes were then written out more formally and in a less abbreviated form in "Court Orders, "Court Orders and Judgments," or simply "Orders." When comparing a minute book to an order book, the differences are fairly easy to distinguish. The

minute book might be sloppier in appearance, looking more like a rough draft than a finished product. There may be notations such as lines, "X"s, or checkmarks next to the entries denoting that they had been approved or transcribed (or that some other action was taken). With an order book, the page layout shows more structure, the handwriting is clearer and more legible, and the overall appearance is cleaner and more formal.



From a historical and preservation standpoint, minute books may be considered second-tier resources because the information they contain should also be available in another record book. If that is the case, a minute book's conservation might not be considered urgent. If the other records—in particular, the order books—have not survived, however, the minute books can provide that lost information, albeit in a rougher, draft form. When more formal records do not exist, minute books then become the record of the court proceedings and transactions. For this and other reasons, it is a good idea to have a full and complete inventory of each locality's collections, so that records can be prioritized within the locality's overall conservation strategy.

According to Hiden, "[To the clerks,] who so faithfully and voluminously preserved this life of the past, we owe a great deal." ■

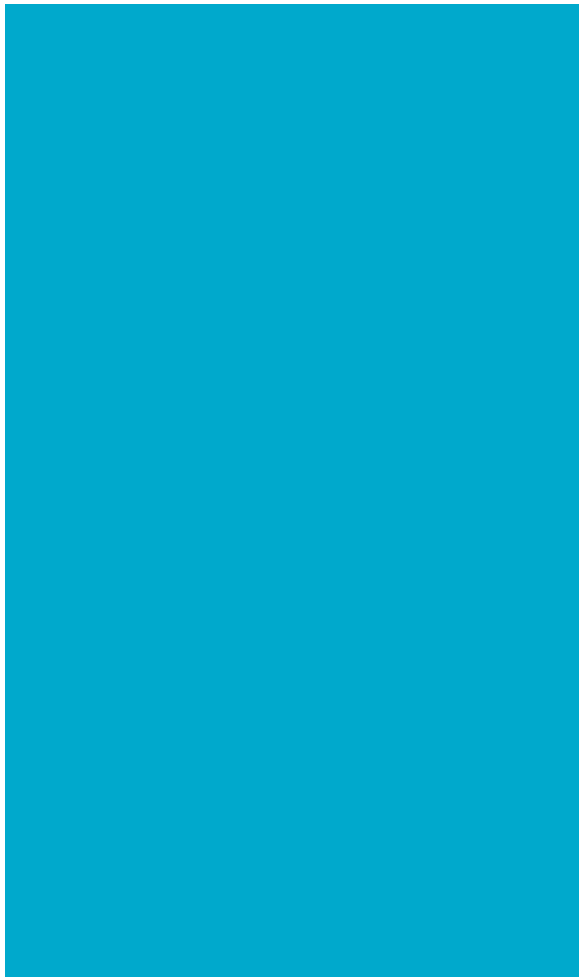
Powhatan County Superior Court of Law Minute Book, 1809–1817, viewed on June 15, 2016.

Last summer, Westmoreland County's circuit court clerk Gwynne Chatham contacted the Library of Virginia regarding some old marriage records that staff members had discovered in her office. After she read the title of one the records, it was clear that she had found the Westmoreland County Cohabitation Register. Chatham read the title of another group of records, which proved to be the Westmoreland County Register of Children of Colored Persons.

Cohabitation registers “are among the most important ge(o)3.5La.8 (a)EMC /Span LogicMC /1 (l r)1.7 (e)-19.6 (s)-12 (o)3.4 (u)6.9 (r)1.7 (c)1.7 (e)-19.6 (s f)9.8 (o)-7.2 (r)19 ()

past to their enslaved ancestors,” wrote

forar locMC /5 (l)0.5 (r)2.1 (e)-5.6 (c)0.6 (o)-6.8 (r)5.9 (d)4 (s)0.5 (a)-1.5 (r)2.1 (c)16.8 (h)23.5 (i)10.1 (v)9.2 (i)10.6 (s)-10.2 (t)0.5 (S)-5.3



MOLD VS. COURT RECORDS

Temperature and humidity control helps protect documents

Maintaining the proper temperature and humidity control in records rooms can be tricky. However they are regulated, these settings are bound to fluctuate as the room's environment interacts with other spaces in the building, for example, as doors are opened and closed. This proves doubly vexing if the HVAC system regulates not just that room, but the entire building. These factors make it nearly impossible to create and maintain a stable, climate-controlled environment with a constant desired temperature and humidity level in a records room. And few things are worse for records than wildly fluctuating temperature and humidity.

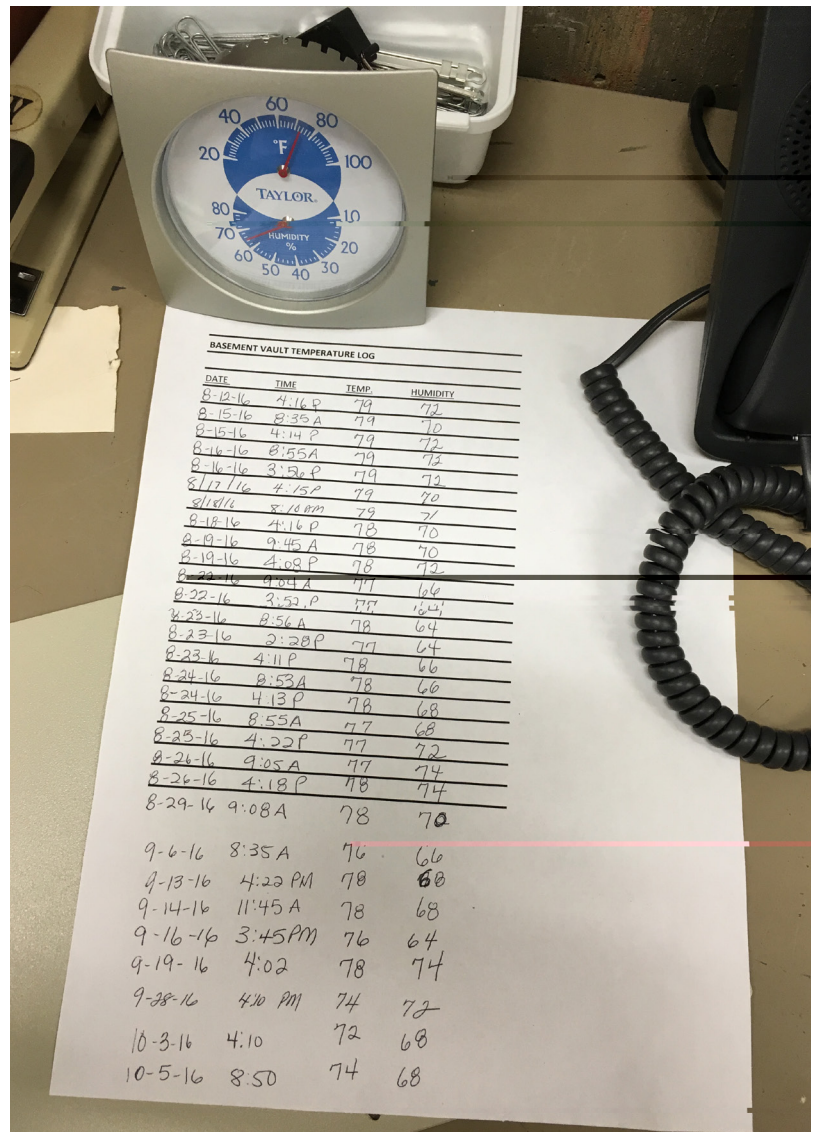
Combined with high temperatures, high humidity levels will ultimately cause mold and mildew, while low humidity levels will make records dry and brittle. Over a long period of time, inconsistent or fluctuating temperatures and humidity levels will turn documents to a soft, fine paper that falls apart when handled. When this happens, the records are probably not salvageable. The CCRP field archivists have seen these scenarios played out in various courthouse attics and basements across the commonwealth of Virginia.

Because the long-term consequences are so devastating, it is important to maintain and monitor the temperature in a records room to keep the space at (or as near as possible to) the optimal conditions for an archives or special collection. Generally speaking, these settings should be below 70° F with a relative humidity of 30–50 percent. If it is difficult to adhere to these standards, cool and dry is the best rule of thumb; the lower the temperature the better, with relative humidity at less than 65 percent to reduce the possibility of mold or the accelerated aging of documents. Research indicates that relative humidity at the lower end is preferred, because deterioration progresses at a slower rate.

Another benefit to maintaining proper temperature and humidity is the alleviation of health concerns. Lower humidity levels make records rooms less susceptible to mold, mildew, dust, and other allergens. This is important because the records room is a public space and these allergens might preclude researchers from using the collection.

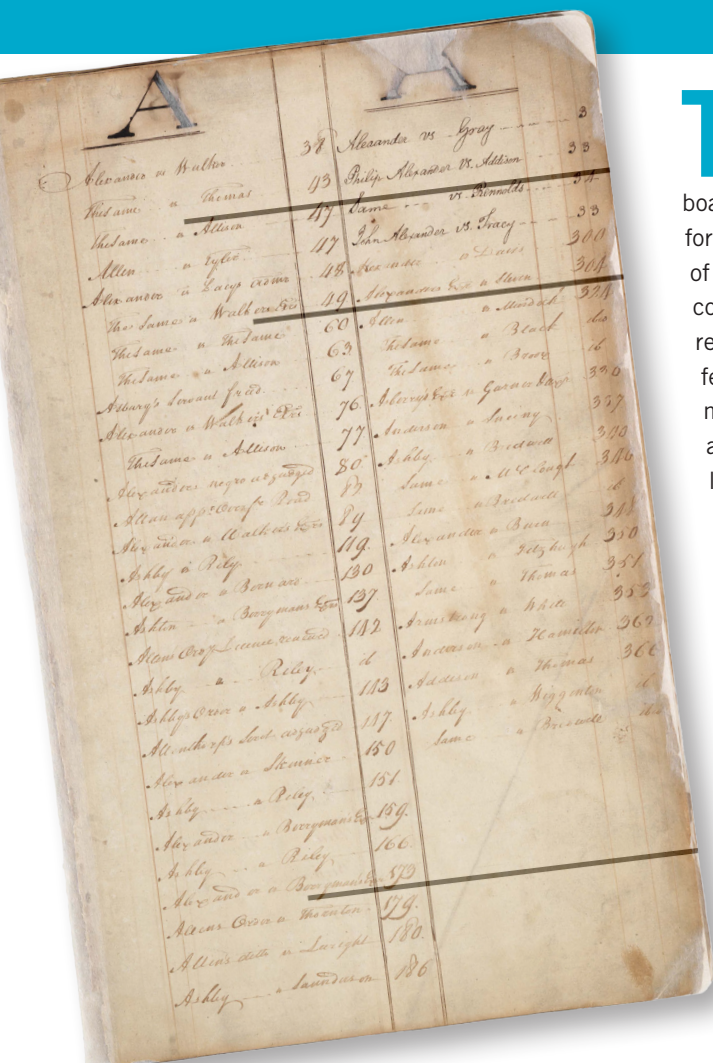
Once the temperature and humidity values are established, it is recommended that daily fluctuations not exceed 5° F and/or 5 percent relative humidity. To maintain these numbers, a dehumidifier is sometimes added to help stabilize or at least minimize the fluctuations

in humidity in a records room. For those susceptible to mold and mildew allergies, the addition of a dehumidifier can reduce irritation to the skin and respiratory system. The dust reduction helps with the overall cleanliness of a collection, and the dehumidifier will help to remove the musty odor that frequently accompanies mold and mildew, even if you don't see it. There is evidence to suggest that a dehumidifier can lower energy costs by helping the HVAC system run more efficiently. Without a dehumidifier, if the air in a records room is humid, the air conditioner must remove the moisture in addition to cooling the air, which means that it must work harder. ■



A temperature and humidity monitoring station keeps tabs on a closed storage area in the Fauquier County Courthouse in Warrenton on October 6, 2016.

Social History & Local Records



Page 1 of the index for the Stafford County Order Book, 1749-1755.

Masonic ceremony at the dedication of the Tazewell County Courthouse in 1913.
Courtesy of Tazewell County Public Library.



The materials in a circuit court records room, sometimes referred to as local records, are the building blocks for social history. As many are aware, before centralized local governmental entities such as city or county commissions or boards of supervisors were established, the justices of a locality were responsible for administering the affairs of the locality. The records generated in the course of their day-to-day business document the early official history of the city or county. In addition to their legal authority, the justices administered indentures; recorded legal transactions; ordered the building and maintenance of roads, ferries, and public buildings; looked after orphans and the poor; and in general managed the people and property of the locality. The records also include birth and death records, will books, land and personal property tax books, and the like. And, depending on the idiosyncrasies of the locality and its records and recordkeeping, they can offer much more. Coastal locality collections might contain oyster plats, while inland courthouses might have maps and plats associated with the construction of major highways. The records contain the names of the inhabitants of each locality and if a person lived in, married, owned property, and/or died in a city or county, the chances are likely that his or her name will turn up in these records. As a result, these local records serve as the foundation for social history and historiography.

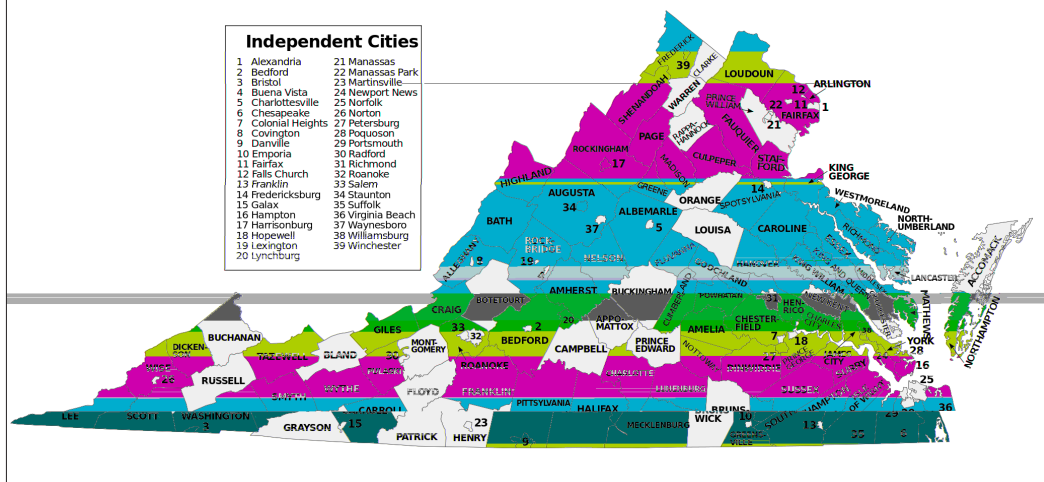
Developed in the 1960s, social history was a deliberate effort on the part of historians to try to tell the stories of the common and under-documented segments of the population. Generally speaking, until that time, history had traditionally been told from the perspective of privileged white men and typically documented politicians, war leaders, and the momentous events of history. To counteract this, and to create a bottom-up history, historians tried to find ways to tell the stories of the common people, who usually didn't keep diaries or correspondence and in all likelihood might not have been able to read and write. The only way to tell their stories is from *the outside in*—by determining how and where their names turn up in the official records of their locality. The trick is learning what kind of information each of these record types contains and then finding ways to make that information accessible.

Through these records, researchers such as genealogists can document the names of people and learn who they married, how many children they had, where they lived, what sorts of property they owned, and, of course, whether they were involved in lawsuits or charged with a crime. Social historians can use these records to tell the stories of people individually or as groups represented through statistical data. Some social historians use the information in the aggregate to understand trends in the population at a certain time. In this way they can determine things about the general quality of life and quantitative averages and percentages of the population, such as the average age, average age at death, percentage of male versus female, percentage married, sizes of farms, percentages in trades or professions, and on and on. Of all the records available to researchers, those in Virginia's circuit court clerks' offices are the best resources available for social history research. ■

2016 CCRP Program Highlights

- The digital images of Halifax County and Danville City chancery records were posted to the Chancery Records Index. These two highly requested collections were added to the 246,000 cases already indexed in the database, which includes 10 million digital images and covers 90 localities.
- The processing of Accomack County and Giles County chancery records is nearly complete.
- In the course of processing the CCRP collections, numerous stories and narratives were discovered that will be shared in the Library of Virginia's "Out of the Box" blog posts and in staff presentations.
- Hundreds of pre-Civil War African American names were added to the Chancery Records Index.
- Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative (www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan) went live early last year. The site features the Library of Virginia's historical collections that document the lives of African Americans in Virginia. This ambitious project will continue to grow in the coming years as more researchers discover it. Look for African American-related resources from state government and private papers to be added this year.
- A Charles City County record book was returned. Images from the volume are now available on the Library of Virginia's Making History: Transcribe website (www.virginiamemory.com/transcribe).
- Westmoreland County Cohabitation Registers were discovered. Images and indexing information are now online at Virginia Untold.
- The new CHARDES database, which will make the CCRP chancery collection more accessible to researchers, is nearly ready for its debut.
- The addition of a new CCRP grants database has made the grants process far more efficient.

CCRP Locality Visits - Summer 2016 (2017A)



CCRP Partners with Kofile Technologies for Conservation Excellence

The Circuit Court Records Preservation Program and Kofile Technologies work hand in hand in their efforts to bring to the circuit court offices across the commonwealth of Virginia the highest quality and most state-of-the-art conservation treatments available.

Every two or three months, CCRP staff members travel to the Kofile Technologies facility in Greensboro, North Carolina, to inspect the items that have been sent to them for conservation through CCRP item conservation grants. These photographs are from a visit on January 11, 2017.

