

CIRCUIT COURT RECORDS ANALYST HIRED



Mark Walsh started at the Library of Virginia with the Records Analysis Section of the Records Management and Imaging Services Division in mid-May with responsibility for circuit court records.

Previously working as a consultant in Maryland and Ontario, Canada, Mark has extensive experience in writing and implementing records retention and disposal schedules. Past employment included positions in archives and records management at the provincial (equivalent to state) and local government levels in Canada. He was recently honored by the Archives Association of Ontario as the 2004 recipient of the James J. Talman Award for pioneering work in municipal records in that jurisdiction.

Records Officers for Circuit Courts are invited to contact Mark by email (mwalsh@lva.lib.va.us) or telephone (804-692-3650) with any records-related questions or concerns.

Chancery ... I would set aside these documents until I had quite a few of them and then get out my tacking iron to start the delicate work of uncurling edges and piecing together the jagged fragments. This particular aspect of the project called to mind one of my grandmother's favorite expressions: it's like "milking mice."

As fragile as these documents could be, I was just as likely to find thick sheets of legal-sized paper that can take on a strong, accordion-like quality when they are folded in four and left to sit for 100 years or more. These documents required a two to three day process to flatten them out. They would spend a night or so in my make-shift "humidification chamber" to make them damp and then spend a night or two pressed under full file boxes to flatten them out. Even though wrestling the "demon paper" day in and day out could prove to be quite frustrating, I learned so much about the history as well as the daily life of Williamsburg that it has been more than worth the struggle.

Before this opportunity, I never had much interest in American history. I think it just wasn't old enough for me. I guess it is no surprise that I was especially intrigued by the oldest cases and documents.

Most of the records for the county were removed to Richmond for safe-keeping during the Civil War, but were ultimately destroyed there by fire. However, I

have come across a few older cases or partial cases which survived probably because they were in the hands of counsel at the time of removal.

The processing of these records is now complete. I have read many cases starting from about 1866 and vicariously came to know the key players of that time including the prominent families and their descendents, the lawyers, the judges, and it seems the events did not take place all that long ago. Their families have become a part of my memory and I have to remind myself that they aren't my actual memories, but just pieces of information that have come together over the course of this grant.

I am certainly not the only one to benefit from this project. The grants program provides a service to the localities by supplying the funds and training to get these records in order, but also for people researching their family trees. I have no doubt that this database will prove to be invaluable. For myself, I have gained a new-found appreciation for Williamsburg's rich heritage and I will be forever grateful for having had this opportunity.

Kim Driscoll, the author, was the grant-funded processor for the chancery series. In the next issue of Recordatur there will be another article by Mrs. Driscoll that details some of the unique material she found in the Williamsburg/James City County Clerk's Office chancery papers.

RECORDATUR

Chancery Records in Williamsburg and James City County

ARCHIVES DISCOVERIES

I have been the Chancery Grant Clerk for Williamsburg and James City County for the last 16 months or so. Opening up the old chancery cases to flat file and index them has been one of the most interesting experiences of my life. Most people don't get the opportunity to hold in their hands some of the earliest court documents of their own town. It has proven to be both frustrating and exciting at the same time.



It is amazing how well-preserved some of these papers can be, and yet there are some that are in a horrible condition. As much as I marveled at and treasured the oldest discoveries, there were many days that I cursed paper as my mortal enemy, as

well as some of the clerks of olden days. Didn't these men know that 100 years later someone might come along and want to read these records?

Construction began on the Williamsburg Courthouse in 1770 and was completed in 1771. The building was stripped of fixtures during its days as a Civil War hospital, and gutted by fire in 1911. Through all that and many other changes, the building served the community for 160 years. Now a part of Colonial Williamsburg, the building has been restored to its original design, including the removal of the portico columns that were added after the 1911 fire.

I never knew what I would find when I opened up something from the 1800's. I might find the tattered mess of the most important document, the bill of complaint, which was usually used—and abused—to wrap up the rest of the documents. see *Chancery*, page 4

Summer 2004	
Vol. 8, No. 2	
Chancery Records	1
Administrator's Corner	2
List of Grant Awards	3
New Hire	4

RECORDATUR

“An entry made on record to prevent any alteration of Record”

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

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ADMINISTRATOR'S CORNER

In the world of budget cuts, as well as staff reductions and turnover, good news does emerge every once in a while. Due to new leadership and a high percentage of staff turnover, the Records and Information Analysis section has been reorganized. As a result, the decision was made to move all of the Circuit Court Clerks' offices under one analyst instead of dividing them among the analysts by locality. I'd like to extend a warm welcome to Mark Walsh, who is now the circuit court records analyst for all 120 offices. While Mark is new to the Library of Virginia, he is certainly not new to records. He brings to this job 24 years of experience in archives and records management. There is more information on Mark later in this newsletter. Mark will be speaking with me at the last session of LGOC in August. I hope you will think twice about cutting out early, and stay to meet your new records analyst.

For an update on the state contract to digitally image the historical ended chancery records, I'm sorry to say that it is still sitting over at VITA. Their procurement section has had several staff members on extended absence this year, and they have just not been able to give the pending contract the attention it needs. To those nineteen offices who have received funding for this type of project, we're working on getting VITA to move on it. To those offices that have completed

processing their chancery records and are awaiting the opportunity to apply for a reformatting grant, thank you for your patience. Just as soon as the contract is available, we will line up clerks' offices and vendors appropriately. The contracts officer has been pulled off to work on another project and will look at ours for the first time on June 28. The estimated time for the solicitations to hit the street is in mid-August.

To those offices wishing to pursue a grant application, the next deadline is 5:00 p.m. Wednesday, September 15, 2004. If you would like to apply for a grant, or have questions about how to do so, please contact me or Amy Judd, and we will be glad to assist you. Please know that we are always looking at how we can improve this preservation program and would gladly welcome your thoughts and suggestions.

Glenn Smith,
Grants Administrator

Circuit Court Records Preservation Program

Grant Applications due by 5:00 P.M. on

Wednesday,
September 15, 2004.

Contact Amy Judd (804/692-3601, ajudd@lva.lib.va.us) or Glenn Smith (804/692-3604, gsmith@lva.lib.va.us) before submitting an application.

THE CIRCUIT COURT RECORDS PRESERVATION PROGRAM HAS AWARDED

616 grants over 25 cycles from February 1992 to June 2004, totaling \$10,109,020

The project types and the number awarded are:

General Preservation	26	\$257,840
Item Conservation	157	991,856
Microfilm Reader/Printers	63	769,582
Records Processing	123	2,011,866
Reformatting	154	5,610,752
Security Systems	79	439,525

Awards for 2004-B Cycle

Locality	Project Type	Awarded
Cumberland County	Reformatting	40,334.00
King & Queen County	Reformatting	52,334.00
Petersburg, City of	Reformatting	114,334.00
Rockingham County	Reformatting	377,413.00
Shenandoah County	Reformatting	132,948.00
Tazewell County	Reformatting	117,203.00
James City County	Reformatting	106,258.00
Lee County	Reformatting	34,000.00
Loudoun County	Reformatting	10,125.00
Page County	Reformatting	86,204.00
Rappahannock County	Reformatting	5,700.60
Richmond, City of	Reformatting	544.00
Halifax County	Processing	9,234.00
Scott County	Processing	3,153.60
King William County	Reader/Printer	10,671.89
Campbell County	Item Conservation	7,500.00
Carroll County	Item Conservation	1,055.00
Loudoun County	Item Conservation	7,470.00
Nottoway County	Item Conservation	10,717.00
Greensville County	Preservation	19,330.00

Total: \$ 1,146,529.09