

MISSING HISTORIC COUNTY RECORDS RETURNED



If something is missing, you try to recover it. That is what we have been doing in the archives for the past year. Beginning in July 2018, we began the effort to recover Washington County records that were no longer in the county's custody. This has including seeking the return of county records that for whatever reason had gotten into private hands or various repositories. Under Tennessee law, public records always remain public records.

The bulk of these county records were in three different repositories in two different states. There were records at Special Collections at the University of Tennessee and the Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection of the Knox County Public Library in Knoxville and at Special Collections in the Belk Library at Appalachian State University in Boone, N. C.

In March 2019, the Washington County Public Records Commission authorized County Archivist Ned Irwin to recover any county records no longer in the county's possession. With the full support of County Mayor Joe Grandy, the archives worked closely with Allyson Wilkinson, county staff attorney, in the recovery of the records. And we have been very successful. Records were voluntarily returned from the University of Tennessee (approximately 1,000 documents) in May; from Appalachian State University (24 documents) in June and August; and from McClung (10,732 documents) in August. All together from these and other sources, the archives has returned 11,786 documents to the county in 2019, a rather remarkable figure.

These records are especially important for documenting the early history of Washington County and include records from the state of Franklin, slave documents,

early Superior Court and Circuit Court cases, the Civil War, etc. Many topics are covered in these records regarding the social, cultural, civic, economic, and political history of the county, the region, and Tennessee. And, as Irwin points out, “we are finding many of these documents join many related documents already in the collection.”

Having obtained the records from these public repositories, the archives is now focused on recovering any county records that remain in private hands. Anyone aware of such records is asked to contact Ned Irwin at (423)753-0393 or email him at nirwin@washingtoncountyttn.org. Records can be returned anonymously. No questions will be asked. “We just want the records back home where they belong,” Irwin said.

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